

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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Tories and Labour are competing with each other over who can be “tougher” on benefit claimants. Socialists, trade unionists, and community activists can force them to retreat. See page 5

Who speaks for the worst off?

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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Drawbacks in press row

By Colin Foster

On 30 October the Privy Council — an appointed committee of medieval origins — is due to announce a decision on press regulation.

The big political parties have agreed a scheme between them but are re-working it to try to make it acceptable to the press lords.

Police protect EDL in Bradford

By Gerry Bates

On Saturday 12 October around 250 people demonstrated with the English Defence League in Bradford.

Heavy policing ensured large parts of the city were shut down.

The EDL had previously targeted the city in 2010. That was one of the few occasions when they were clearly routed by the anti-fascist opposition.

On 12 October up to 200 anti-fascists and locals turned out against the racists of the EDL. Although the poor weather and a union-backed anti fascist march in Liverpool at the same time probably had an effect, this was dis-

The Privy Council has already rejected a full-scale alternative drafted by the newspaper bosses.

The differences between the newspaper bosses' scheme and the government's are relatively slight. Both would establish a souped-up version of the present Press Complaints Commission, and a panel to check up on how the souped-up commission is operating.

Both have the drawback for the dissident and minority press — like *Solidarity* — that publications outside the scope of the new commission would be subject to exemplary punitive damages in libel cases.

Socialists prefer even bourgeois freedom of the press to government control, and we are for a drastic reform of Britain's current libel laws, which offer people rich enough to

go to court large protection from criticism. But we also support legal entitlements to replies and corrections.

Real freedom of the press will be won only by establishing social control over the essential means of production — printing presses, distribution systems, and so on — and guarantees of access to those means by all schools of thought.

Hand-out for mail share-buyers

Well-off people who bought Royal Mail shares in the government's sell-off were able to reap an instant profit of more than £300 as soon as the shares started trading on 15 October and the shares rose from the 330p sell-off price to 490p.

Big banks who bought larger slabs of shares have made bigger gains.

The hand-out here to the rich and the well-off is not a mistake or misjudgement by the government. All the big privatisations by the Thatcher government had the same thing: share prices rose as soon as the shares began trading, and those who had bought in got immediate gains.

This government and the Thatcher government, keen to cut social spending, are also keen to spend taxpayers' money to provide those gains for the share-traders.

Doing so ensures that the sell-off is a "success" — the demand for shares is bigger than the supply. It avoids the risk of the government being embarrassed by some shares remaining unsold. And it consolidates enthusiasm for the government among a significant layer of its habitual supporters.

Remember that next time the government says that social cuts are necessary.

US shutdown hurts the poor

As *Solidarity* went to press, negotiations over the US government shutdown were ongoing. This article, by Nicole Colson, is from *Socialist Worker*, the paper of the International Socialist Organization.

As the federal government shutdown enters a third week, cutting off funds for so-called "non-essential" government services, it's more and more clear that what those in power consider "non-essential" is very different from what we do.

Educational programs like Head Start, nutrition assistance to women and children, national parks, some medical services at the National Institutes of Health — all are among the many services closed down outright or facing the threat of their funding running out during the shutdown.

But at the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) employees and Customs and Border Protection agents are "still...around to enforce immigration law because the operations are 'necessary for safety of life and protection of property,'" according to *Alternet's* Esther Yu-Hsi Lee. ICE agents are still arresting and deporting some 1,120 immigrants per day.

So the federal shutdown won't stop the Obama administration from passing a terrible milestone in the next few weeks: two million immigrants deported in the five years since Barack Obama took office — more than any other president.

This contrast shows the twisted priorities of the federal government, evident even when that government is shut down.

Unaffected by shut-down

The shutdown has affected public health — perhaps most obviously in a multi-state salmonella outbreak in chicken that caused hundreds to fall ill and dozens to be hospitalised.

Dr Chris Braden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) division of food-borne, waterborne and environmental diseases, told *Wired.com's* Maryn McKenna that his division normally totals 300 work-

ers, but he was left with 40 people determined to be "essential." The CDC eventually got 30 more people deemed "essential," but only 10 of them went to work in Braden's division, and not all of them were working on the PulseNet program that investigates foodborne illnesses.

It wasn't until after 278 people across 18 states had been sickened by an antibiotic-resistant outbreak of salmonella that the CDC's outbreak-tracking team was finally re-designated as an "essential" service.

This salmonella outbreak didn't become a massive public health crisis, but it's obvious that already understaffed and underfunded U.S. public health agencies are being stretched to their limits — with the potential for a worse crisis down the road.

• Full article: bit.ly/iso-gs

2018 World Cup built on exploitation

By Anne Field

The International Trade Union Confederation, with 315 national affiliates, representing 175 million workers, announced its support last week for campaigning by Russian trade unions against new laws attacking workers' rights in the run-up to the 2018 World Cup.

Five construction workers employed on building new football stadiums in Kazan and St. Petersburg have been killed in recent months as a direct result of inadequate health and safety protection.

An inspection of the Kazan construction site found that half of the subcontractors working on building the stadium had failed to provide proper health and safety equipment and training for their employees.

Most workers employed on building projects for the 2018 World Cup are migrant labourers from Central Asia and the Caucasus. They face a host of other problems in addition to a lack of health and safety protection.

Outside of the workplace these migrant workers are confronted by racism, including police brutality and physical attacks by right-wing extremists, encouraged by the scapegoat-

ing and stigmatising of foreigners by the Russian media and politicians.

All this will be made even worse by new laws – popularly known as the “2018 World Cup Law” or “FZ-108” (Federal Law Number 108 of 2013) – passed by the Russian Parliament in June but not fully publicised until September.

The law came into immediate effect and will remain in force until the end of 2018. It makes special provision for anyone employed in connection with the 2018 World Cup. It targets the rights of workers in general, and of foreign workers in particular.

Article nine of FZ-108 concerns “foreign citizens and stateless individuals on the territory of the Russian Federation” whose “work activities are connected to measures” which relate to the “preparation and staging” of the 2018 World Cup.

Where foreigners and stateless persons are employed on World Cup work, their employers do not need to obtain permission to employ them, inform the authorities of the start and termination of their contracts, nor inform the authorities of the dates of their arrival in and departure from Russia.

Quotas for the number of visas and work permits to be issued for such foreign

labour are also scrapped by FZ-108, as too is the requirement to make social security and national insurance deductions from salaries paid to foreigners employed on World Cup work.

Migrant workers themselves do not need to obtain work permits if their work falls within the definition contained in article nine. Nor do they need to register with the authorities.

At first sight, such measures might appear to make life easier for foreign labour, at least temporarily: no restriction on the numbers who can be employed; no requirement to register with the authorities; and, if they obtain World Cup work, regularisation of those currently in the country illegally.

CONTEXT

But the picture changes radically once such provisions are placed within the context of article 11 of the law, which applies to anyone – Russian and non-Russian alike – employed in the preparation and staging of the World Cup.

Article 11 scraps a succession of legally guaranteed workers' rights from the time of the passing of the law until the end of 2018.

Restrictions on the length

of the working day which employers can impose are scrapped. The various requirements of the Russian Labour Code concerning rates of pay for night work, weekend working and working on public holidays are likewise scrapped.

In further breaches of the Russian Labour Code overtime payments are scrapped and replaced by time off in lieu, and when workers take paid annual leave is to be unilaterally determined by the employer.

Although article 11 refers to the possibility of such terms and conditions of employment being subject to collective agreement, it also allows employers to unilaterally include them in contracts of employment, just as it allows local authorities to impose them through regulations.

In other articles of FZ-108, the list of employers who will benefit from this abolition of workers' rights is drawn particularly widely.

It includes not just FIFA itself, national football associations and the Russia 2018 Organising Committee, but also FIFA's commercial and business partners and licensees, plus all subsidiaries of these bodies, and all contractors and sub-contractors engaged by these organisations.

Anyone working for these employers on work connected, however tenuously, with the preparation and staging of the 2018 World Cup will be denied the rights otherwise guaranteed by the Russian Labour Code.

And the workers who will suffer first and fore-

most will be foreign workers. And should any of the migrant workers die at work – as many of them undoubtedly will – then the chances of any penalty being imposed on an employer are effectively zero.

As a result of FZ-108, there will be no record that they even existed.

Foreign and stateless workers already in Russia are the first victims of FZ-108.

A sharp crackdown by police on illegal migrant labourers in recent months has seen mass round-ups of migrants and their imprisonment in special camps in and around Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Volgograd, Samara, Rostov-on-Don and Kaliningrad.

But to secure at least a temporary legal status, and thereby their release from the camps, the imprisoned migrant workers need only sign up for work connected to the 2018 World Cup. The prison camps are therefore a guaranteed source of defenceless labour for employers.

PRISON CAMPS
Hardly by chance, all of the migrant prison camps listed above are located in the immediate vicinity of cities which will be hosting games in the World Cup.

Campaigners are already demanding that FIFA should ensure that the 2018 World Cup is free from systematic labour abuses. Although FIFA is a legitimate target for such campaigning, little or no reliance should be placed upon it to take effective action.

Speaking at a World Cup symposium in April of this year, FIFA General Secretary Jerome Valcke said: “Less democracy is sometimes better for organising a World Cup. When you have a strong head of state who can decide, as maybe Putin can do in 2018, that is easier for us organisers.”

Trade union activists – and politically aware football fans – should focus their efforts on supporting the Russian trade unions and NGOs who are organising on the ground against the draconian consequences of FZ-108 for World Cup labour.

Bob Carnegie facing court again

By Martin Thomas

Australian trade unionist and Workers' Liberty activist Bob Carnegie is likely to be hauled into court again on 21 October, for a 20-day hearing of a civil-law claim for damages over the QCH dispute against the unions on the QCH site – CFMEU, the CEPU, and the BLF.

A mediation hearing between union and company lawyers produced no result. Abigroup is pursuing the case aggressively, claiming many millions of dollars in damages.

It is possible that a legal move by the CEPU may result in the hearing being postponed, and in that case the postponement will be for some months.

As of now, though, we have to reckon on the hearing coming soon.

Earlier this year Bob faced contempt-of-court charges over the dispute, in which, as a community activist, he helped workers on the Queensland Children's Hospital construction site win their demand for a union-negotiated site agreement after a nine-week stoppage in August-October 2012.

He was acquitted on the contempt charges. But in the civil case the test of evidence is “balance of probability”, not “beyond reasonable doubt”.

Unless we organise a strong campaign to alert the labour movement and public opinion to the issues, Bob could face crushing fines and damages.

• bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com

RMT Executive member and AWL activist Janine Booth addresses a demonstration outside the Qatari embassy in London on Saturday 12 October. The demonstration was called by Nepalese activists to highlight the struggles of Nepalese migrant workers employed on World Cup 2022 construction projects in Qatar.

Clash in the Socialist Party

The Left



As the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) moves towards its December conference with hot dispute between its Central Committee and a large opposition faction, the Socialist Party (SP) is also immersed in conflict.

The SWP dispute originates with discontent over the handling by the leadership of charges by SWP women members of sexual harassment and rape.

The opposition has moved on to broader questions of SWP regime, but not yet to SWP public politics. A new article by SWP leaders Alex Callinicos and Charlie Kimber responds by claiming that the roots of the dispute lie in the opposition's lack of confidence in the working class and trend towards "movementism".

We must hope this spurs the opposition to widen its sights further to the public political questions.

The SP generally has an even more controlled regime than the SWP. Concerns over the SP's response to charges of sexist bullying made against one of its prominent trade unionists have not spread far.

The opposition in the SP is different. Bruce Wallace, an SPer in Scotland, has challenged the SP's economic analyses; the debate seems more factionalised than you might expect on such theoretical issues. On 24 September the SP website highlighted a full-dress reply by SP leaders Lynn Walsh and

Peter Taaffe; on 25 September Wallace, on an oppositional blog which he has run since March 2013, published a response co-signed by a number of others.

Wallace draws on the writings of the US writer Andrew Kliman. Kliman, in contrast to most other Marxist analysts of the statistics (including us), argues that the rate of profit has been falling in the USA consistently since 1947; that the real wages of the US working class have been rising; and that the rate of exploitation has not been rising.

The debate over his claims involves complicated arguments about statistical classification and adjustments.

The main idea Wallace draws from Kliman is that the current crisis originates from large and constant trends of capitalism, and that a political answer can be nothing less than the full nationalisation of all the main means of production.

He criticises the SP leadership for having its prominent trade-union activists, in the PCS, endorse weak Keynesian economics, and for itself proposing more limited demands, such as the nationalisation of the banks.

Actually, week to week, the SP today scarcely even mentions nationalising the banks, but focuses instead on the negative claim "no cuts" and, to add militancy, the call for a 24 hour general strike.

Wallace, according to his blog, joined the Militant tendency (forerunner of SP) in 1974. He was out of activity between 2003 and 2012 and spent time studying Marxist economics.

The reply by Walsh and Taaffe attacks Kliman more than Wallace, and Kliman more for his view that the Stalinist

USSR was state-capitalist and for his aversion to party-building than on his statistical analysis.

Kliman is a member of the Marxist-Humanist Initiative. The MHI was formed by a split in 2009 from the News and Letters group, which upholds the ideas of the late Raya Dunayevskaya.

• AWL comment on the "tendency of the rate of profit to fall": bit.ly/ltrpf

SWP crisis continues

Alex Callinicos and Charlie Kimber have written a long defence of the SWP's recent past in the latest issue of *International Socialism* (The Politics of the SWP Crisis, bit.ly/cal-kimb).

It starts with the following "[The deep division in the party] has not stopped us acting as a revolutionary organisation. We have had successes and recruited hundreds of new members." And goes on in the same delusional way.

Dave Renton has produced a forensic analysis of the article and the sorry sequence of events inside the SWP over the last year. bit.ly/renton-swp.

But Renton's article does not deal with the latest testimony and allegation of a rape and botched internal investigation inside the SWP. You can read about that on internationalsocialistnetwork.org

Socialists and press advertising

Letter



Solidarity 299 reprinted an interesting article from 1917 in which Lenin argued for public control over advertising in the press as a main means to win a "freedom of the press" accessible to the working class and not just to the rich.

Another classic text of Marxism argues *against* public control over press advertising. Eduard Bernstein's *Ferdinand Lassalle as Social Reformer* was written under the direct guidance of Frederick Engels, while Bernstein was still a revolutionary Marxist. It was a key text in making the German Social-Democratic Party in its great days "Marxist" rather than "Lassallean".

In it Bernstein dissects a demand made by Lassalle that newspapers be banned from printing advertisements. "Then the press would cease to be a lucrative business speculation, and only such men [and women] would write for the newspapers as were fighting for the well-being and intellectual interests of the people".

Bernstein retorts that "the absence of advertisements" in the French press (because of special taxes) made it easier for the authoritarian government of the Second Empire (1852-70) "to corrupt the press to its own ends", whereas the wider range of newspaper revenues through advertising in Britain had allowed the British press to become more critical.

Lassalle's botched half-measure towards democratic social control over the means of communication would make things worse, not better.

Was Lenin wrong? Or Bernstein? Neither, I think. Lenin was talking about control over press advertising by a government based on workers' councils (soviets). Lassalle's agitation referred to control over press advertising and income by a German government which was a monarchical despotism with only thin democratic coverings.

In evaluating any slogan as Marxists, we have to look not only to the literal content, but at who is being called on to carry out the slogan, and how.

Martin Thomas, Islington

Debating the Israel-Palestine conflict

By Tom Harris

On Sunday 13 October, Independent Jewish Voices held a conference in London on the ongoing impasse in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

IJV was set up in 2007 as an organisation of left-wing British Jews opposed to the occupation and oppression of the Palestinians. It conceives of itself as a "counter-balance" to the official communal leadership of the conservative and staunchly Zionist Board of Deputies.

The conference was held in Birkbeck, University of London, and attracted around a hundred people. The keynote speaker was Dr Mustafa Barghouti, a Palestinian physician and politician from the relatively secular and left-wing Palestinian National Initiative. He spoke on the future prospects for peace and Palestinian self-determination, twenty years on from the Oslo accords to which he was a signatory.

Barghouti is highly critical of both the cronyism and corruption of Fatah and the fascistic Islamism of Hamas. He is also scathing about the complicity of the US and UK in the ongoing occupation and annexation of Palestinian territory by the Israeli state.

While his politics are a long distance from the revolutionary socialism of Workers' Liberty, he is at least a fairly sincere social-democrat, and his secular, critical analysis was far more lucid and humane than a lot of the rhetoric that characterises the debate around Israel-Palestine.

Before Barghouti's address, there was a panel discussion on "forms of intervention". The panel, which featured a mixture of British, Palestinian and Israeli human rights activists and journalists, discussed a wide range of issues from boycotts, to International Courts of Justice, to Oxford scholarships for Gazan students.

Two panellists stood out as having particularly interesting things to say. The first was Miri Weingarten, an Israeli peace activist now living in the UK. She said that she feared that co-operation and solidarity between Palestinian and Israeli activists was entering a tragic decline. She argued that this was largely due to increasing Palestinian frustration with the inconsistency of the Israeli left, and the rightward turn in Israeli popular opinion. The popular protests that erupted in Israel against the decline in living standards had the opportunity to link the working-class mass of Israelis to the ques-

tion of ending the occupation, she said, but the defeat of the movement had closed off the opportunity.

I asked a question from the floor: If such a movement were to spring up again, what bearing would that have on the British left and its flirtation with the idea of boycotting Israeli academic institutions and trade unions? Would a boycott not cordon us off from a dialogue with those people? Weingarten, who is in favour of the boycott, said that it might, but added (rather elusively) that "this is a matter for British unions."

Another interesting contribution came from Jayyab Abusafia, a Palestinian from Gaza now working as a journalist in the UK. He stressed that life in Gaza was not only being made hellish by the Israeli occupation, but by the day-to-day oppression of the Islamist Hamas government. Women, he said, were constantly forced into covering their head, though many were now beginning to rebel.

I asked what British activists could do to make solidarity with Palestinians against oppression from both Israel and Hamas. He said that the first thing to do was to speak out against human rights abuses by Hamas, and not to turn a blind eye, because "to be oppressed by your own government is just as bad as being oppressed by a foreign one."

The British left should take this lesson on board.

The left and women's rights: why the case of Steve Hedley is as serious as the case of Martin Smith

The SWP's handling of charges of sexual harassment and rape made against Martin Smith has caused massive controversy inside and outside the organisation. Less well known, but equally significant in terms of the left's attitude to women's rights and democratic accountability, is the case of Steve Hedley, Assistant General Secretary of the RMT union, who until recently was a member of the Socialist Party.

Hedley has been accused of domestic violence and of more general sexist behaviour.

• An AWL briefing on the case can be found here: womensfightback.wordpress.com/2013/10/13/hedley/

Who will speak for the worst-off?

inequality which, on another day, the Labour leaders piously deplore.

Labour's leaders want to reverse, or at least limit, that inequality spiral? But at the same time be "tougher than the Tories" in pushing major policies which increase inequality?

Against the "tougher-than-thou" consensus among mainstream politicians, who will speak up for the worst-off?

Who will dispute the myths about "scroungers"? Who will tell the truth about the escalating increase in child poverty, which goes on despite legislation in March 2010, supported even by the Tories, which theoretically commits the government to reduce child poverty to low percentages by 2020-1?

Who will stop people forgetting the findings of a study by the conservative Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) in May this year: "Tax and benefit reforms introduced since April 2010 can account for almost all of the increase in child poverty projected over the next few years"?

Who will help the low-waged, the insecurely-employed, and jobless organise and fight back?

In the first place, the socialists must do that. If ever we think that "it's all hopeless" or "nothing we do makes a difference", we should remember that the first step in every great movement of change is the action of those who tell things as they really are, who denounce the crimes and abuses which others gloss over or dismiss.

In the second place, we must transform and mobilise our trade unions, the fallback organisations of the working class, to speak up for the worst off and help them organise.

Too often trade unions get hunkered down in defending the terms and conditions only of the (usually slightly better-paid, slightly more securely-employed) workers where their organisation is strongest.

That is wrong, and anyway short-sighted. Trade unions must be made to speak up for and organise the whole working class. If we do that, we can win. We can win some gains even now.

At the Labour conference at the end of September, Labour leaders promised to abolish the bedroom tax, to repeal the Health and Social Care Act, to freeze energy prices, to give councils power to take building land left idle by developers, to create job offers for all those unemployed a long time, and to do something (they wouldn't quite say what) to promote the Living Wage.

BALANCE

The Tory press responded with volleys denouncing Ed Miliband as "red", "Bolshevik", and set on pursuing the Marxist vision of his father, "the man who hated Britain".

That has made the Labour leaders so nervous that they are anxious to "balance" things with promises to be "tough" about benefits and "on the side" of Tory-style "free schools".

The Labour leaders are also, no doubt, worried that if they promise anything much, then working-class people will "get ideas" and start demanding more. The promises made at Labour conference, feeble though they were, were the first time since 1996-7 that mainstream politicians had offered anything noticeably to the left of the government of the day.

In 1996-7 it was Tony Blair promising things like the minimum wage. He was anxious at the time to balance that by insisting that he would rid Labour of any taint of not being entirely "pro-business" and that he would keep "the most restrictive [laws] on trade unions in the western world".

Nevertheless, even the minimal promises of things different from the Tories created a new wave of hope and a somewhat higher level of confidence in the working class. Blair had made quite sure he could stamp on it, but it was there.

Campaigning by socialists and unions has forced the Labour leaders to shift on issues like the bedroom tax. We do not rely on their promises, but we do fight to force them to account. More campaigning can force more shifts. The duty of socialists is to lead the way.

New Shadow Cabinet members Rachel Reeves, left, and Tristram Hunt, right, have rushed to assure the world that they would be just as tough as the Tories on the unemployed (if not tougher!), and almost as supportive of free schools. The labour movement must help the worst-off members of our class fight for themselves.

Just don't get any ideas! That is the message from Labour's new people appointed to front-bench positions.

Rachel Reeves, the new work and pensions front-bencher, who in another life spouted about "challenging neo-liberalism", told the *Observer* that on welfare benefits:

"We would be tougher [than the Conservatives]. If they [unemployed people] don't take it [the offer of a job] they will forfeit their benefit".

She claimed that "there will also be the opportunities there under a Labour government", and Labour would "get tough on the causes of unemployment and rising benefit bills: low pay, lack of economic opportunity, shortage of affordable housing", but all that was vague.

Tristram Hunt, the new shadow education secretary, who wearing another hat wrote a sympathetic biography of Frederick Engels, started by apologising for his previous criticisms of the Tories' "free schools" and saying:

"If you are a group of parents, social entrepreneurs and teachers interested in setting up a school in areas where you need new school places, then the Labour government will be on your side".

Remember the facts.

School spending is squeezed, and regular community schools are losing out because money is transferred to Academies and free schools. Teachers' and other school workers' wages are being cut in real terms.

By 2014-5 the average household will have lost £760 a year through the Tories' benefit cuts. The cuts are not about a mythical army of "scroungers" who choose to luxuriate on the dole even though they could get jobs.

The majority of those who lose through the benefit cuts are working, but on low pay. The unemployed are unemployed because there aren't jobs, and the government is furiously axing even more jobs in the public sector.

The benefit cuts hit the worse-off harder, and the disabled hardest of all. They are a major engine of the spiralling social

Organise against evictions!

The campaign to commit the Labour Party to abolish the bedroom tax has succeeded! Under pressure from a campaign by tenants, community, trade union and Labour left activists, Ed Miliband has said he "wants to be known as the Prime Minister who abolishes the Bedroom Tax".

However this is not much relief for hundreds of thousands of tenants who have been deemed to have vacant bedrooms, have had their benefit cuts and now have rent arrears.

The majority of Labour-led councils, along with other councils that still control their own council housing and Housing Associations, are implementing the bedroom tax. Some are already threatening tenants in arrears with eviction. Their expressions of sympathy look hollow to tenants facing eviction.

Councils and housing associations should follow Renfrewshire council's lead and adopt a firm no-eviction policy.

Councillors Against the Cuts has put out a statement for Labour councillors to sign calling for no evictions

Another foul coalition policy, which could also force hundreds of thousands of people into rent arrears and into the courts, is the cut in council tax benefit. There has been a 10% cut in central government funding for council tax benefit. Councils have been left to decide for themselves how they chose to "manage" this. With few exceptions councils have chosen to pass these cuts on to households.

Labour Party-commissioned research estimates around 450,000 individuals have been summoned to court over council tax arrears. Some anti-bedroom tax activists — "Hands Off Our Homes" in Leeds for instance — have been campaigning around this issue as well.

As we get nearer a general election it is increasingly unlikely that the government will change tack on these two policies. The Tories' electoral strategy is going to rely heavily on stoking up hatred and fear against benefit claimants and the poor. Disgracefully, Labour, apart from on the issue of the bedroom tax, has chosen to compete with Tory for "being tough" on the poor.

Action by the Scottish and Welsh governments, by councils, by housing associations, in support of the victims of the bedroom tax and council tax changes, could make them a dead letter. We need to keep up the pressure.

Socialists, activists, trade unionists, and tenants need to organise now to defend people from the threat of eviction.

In Manchester, Renfrewshire, Birmingham, and elsewhere evictions have been stopped by militant campaigns — sometimes even stopping bailiffs at the garden gate or on the doorstep.



The boat people of the 1940s

By Dale Street

What the Somali and other refugees drowned in the Mediterranean are now, Jews were in the 1940s.

A British government White Paper published in May of 1939 restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine to 75,000 for the following five years. It would then cease completely unless the Arabs in the independent Palestine envisaged by the White Paper agreed to further Jewish immigration.

The figure of 75,000 was broken down into: 10,000 per year (but "subject to the criterion of economic absorptive capacity"), plus another 25,000 over the entire five years for "refugee emergencies" (but "subject to adequate provision for their maintenance").

By this time Hitler had been in power for six years, the Second World War would begin in less than six months, and the "Final Solution" would commence in less than two years.

The Guardian described the White Paper as "a death sentence on tens of thousands of European Jews."

But there was nothing new about the imposition of such restrictions.

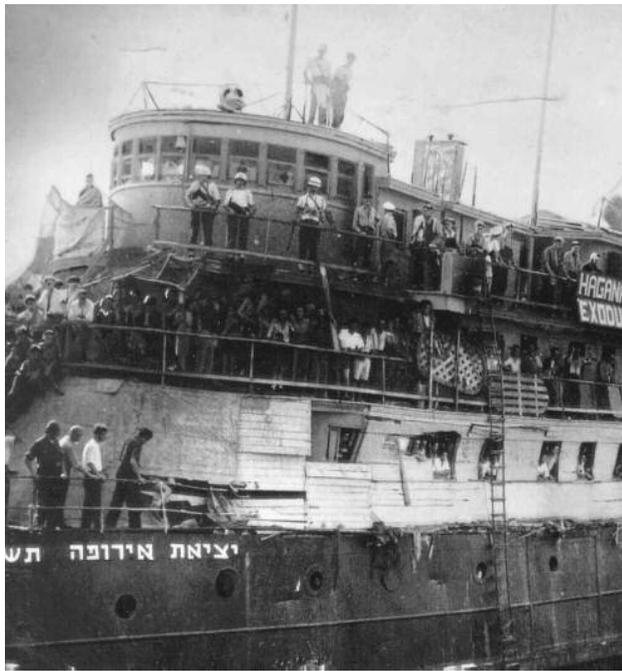
RESTRICTED

The first British High Commissioner of Palestine had restricted Jewish immigration "in the interests of the present population" and the "absorptive capacity of the country."

The Churchill White Paper of 1922 and a 1925 government report to the League of Nations both emphasised that immigration was regulated by "the economic capacity of the country to absorb new settlers."

In 1930 the Simpson Report and the Passfield White Paper (subsequently abandoned) recommended sharp reductions in the level of Jewish immigration, on the basis of a lack of cultivatable land and the high levels of Palestinian unemployment.

After a jump in the number of Jewish immigrants in 1935, due to the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany, the British authorities informed the Jewish Agency (which had assisted many of the immigrants) that less than one third of



Britain consistently blocked the immigration of Jewish refugees from Nazism to Palestine. The Exodus, above, was commandeered by British troops in 1947 and the Holocaust survivors aboard were removed and sent to detention camps.

the quota it had asked for would be approved in 1936.

As a result, immigration slumped from over 65,000 in 1935 to less than 30,000 in 1936.

In 1937 a government statement proposed that Jewish immigration be limited to 8,000 for the period August 1937 to March 1938 "provided that the economic absorptive capacity of the country is not exceeded."

And two months after the publication of the 1939 White Paper the British government announced a complete suspension of Jewish immigration into Palestine until July of 1940, on the basis that there had been an increase in the level of illegal immigration.

The number of Jewish immigrants fell to around 10,500 in 1940, and to just over 4,500 in 1941.

By the end of 1942, when the Nazis' "Final Solution" was already known to the Allies, 34,000 of the 75,000 immigration certificates allowed for by the 1939 White Paper were still available. By the end of the war there were still 3,000 certificates left.

Hundreds of Jews died at sea during the war years as they fled Nazi persecution and attempted to reach Palestine with the assistance of Zionist organisations.

On 1 September, the first day of World War Two, a vessel carrying a thousand immigrants was fired on by a Royal Navy destroyer as it tried to sail into Tel Aviv, albeit without causing casualties.

Over 200 died when the "Salvador" sank in the Sea of Marmara in 1940. Nearly 300 died when the paramilitary Haganah organisation planted a bomb on the "Patria" in Haifa harbour to prevent it being towed away by the British. They miscalculated the effect of the explosion and the ship sank in sixteen minutes.

Nearly 800 people on the "Struma" were killed in 1942 when a Soviet submarine torpedoed it after it had been towed out of Istanbul by the Turkish authorities and cast adrift. Some 300 died when a Soviet submarine sank the "Mefkure" in 1944.

HOLOCAUST

Even after the horrors of the Holocaust the British government continued with its policy of restricting Jewish immigration, using diplomatic pressure and naval blockades to prevent Holocaust survivors from reaching Palestine.

According to the British Chief of General Staff in September of 1945: "First and foremost ships must be stopped from sailing from various ports. At the same time, the coast of Palestine must be guarded more vigilantly."

Zionist organisations continued to challenge the British blockade. But many who set out on such voyages did not reach their destination, or reached it only years later.

Between August 1945 and May 1948 around 120 vessels made nearly 150 voyages to bring Jewish refugees to Palestine, over half of which were intercepted by British vessels.

An estimated 1,600 Jews drowned at sea. Others were killed when the British military boarded their ships. Some 50,000 Jews ended up in British detention camps in Cyprus, Mauritius and Atlit (in Palestine). 28,000 of them were still imprisoned by the time Israel declared independence.

In 1947 the "Exodus", carrying 4,515 Holocaust survivors, was commandeered by the British off the coast of Palestine. Its passengers were transferred to three other ships — and taken to Hamburg in Germany, where they were forcibly removed from the ships and held in detention camps.

Only with the declaration of the state of Israel in May of 1948 did the British government finally abandon attempts to block Jewish immigration.

But by that time the policy had already directly cost the lives of thousands of would-be immigrants and, indirectly, the lives of many more.

Open Eu

By Anne Field

"The risk of illegal border-crossing across the Central Mediterranean area was assessed as amongst the highest, due to the continued volatile situation in countries of departure in North Africa."

That's how the latest annual report by Frontex — the European Union's border agency — assessed the risk of attempting to enter the European Union by sailing from North Africa to Italian territories.

But when Frontex talked about "risk", it did not mean the risk to migrants themselves. It meant the "risk" to the security of the borders of the European Union.

The recent deaths of over 300 people, when a boat carrying refugees from Libya to the Italian island of Lampedusa capsized, has highlighted not only the desperate conditions from which the refugees were fleeing but also the 'reception' which awaits them in the European Union.

Libya is now the main point of departure on the North African coast for refugees fleeing to EU countries. This is a result of the collapse of central state authority as competing factions vie for control of the country, or at least for control of their own patch of territory.

(One of Qaddafi's complaints about the unfairness of Western support for the rebels who eventually overthrew him was that he had effectively eliminated the use of Libyan ports as departure points for migrants crossing the Mediterranean to EU countries.)

In the first nine of months of this year the main nationalities of refugees who set sail from Libya in an attempt to reach Italian territories — the island of Lampedusa is closer to North Africa than it is to the Italian mainland — were Somali (3,000), Eritrean (7,500) and Syrian (7,500).

According to Italian authorities and refugee agencies, this was also the composition of passengers on the ship which sank on 2 October.

RISKS

Despite the risks of the Central Mediterranean crossing — since 1988 over 19,000 people are estimated to have died attempting it — it is easy to understand the desperate circumstances which drives people to run such a risk.

According to the latest Human Rights Watch report on Somalia:

"Somalia's long-running armed conflict continued to leave civilians dead, wounded and displaced in large numbers."

"Both the Islamist armed group al-Shabaab and the government-affiliated forces committed abuses, including indiscriminate attacks harming civilians and arbitrary arrests and detentions."

"Targeted killings of civilians, notably journalists, increased in areas controlled by the Somali authorities. Al-Shabaab committed serious abuses, such as targeted killings, beheadings and executions, and forcibly recruited adults and children."

The organisation's report on Eritrea makes for similar reading:

"Torture, arbitrary detention, and severe restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and religious freedom remain routine in Eritrea. Elections have not been held since Eritrea gained independence in 1993. Political parties are not allowed."

"The constitution has never been implemented, and political parties are not allowed. Forced labour and indefinite military service prompt thousands of Eritreans to flee the country every year."

In Syria more than 100,000 people have been killed since the uprising against President Assad began in March 2011,

Europe's borders!

Lampedusa's racist horror

By Hugh Edwards

The indescribable horror of what happened off the island of Lampedusa on 6 October, and the subsequent grotesquely cynic parade of public grief by a political class wholly culpable for the conditions that led to it, speak eloquently of the morally putrid fabric of bourgeois Italy.

As the bodies of the 50 or so other migrants drowned within a week of those at Lampedusa are still being searched for, no one should fool themselves that the declarations of "never again" from President Napolitano and the coalition government of Letta/Alfano, or the background chorus of other European states, signal any fundamental change to the criminally racist and repressive regimes that have been responsible for so many deaths.

Notwithstanding some shifts in opinion polls towards ending the criminalising Bossi/Fini law at the heart of the murderous expulsion of migrants, there is little evidence that bedrock racist assumptions among Italians about migrants have modified over the last 20 years. In conditions of mounting economic despair and suffering, they have worsened!

The proof of it has come not only from the predictably forked tongue of the Italian "right" in government and the poisonous filth of the Northern League. It has also come from the leaders of the Five Star movement of Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio.

Taken by surprise by a move (by two Five Star parliamentarians) to force through an amendment to abolish the Bossi/Fini law in the Justice Commission of the Senate, these self-proclaimed avatars of the "new politics" first condemned the initiative as "not in the movement's program". They later admitted the real reason, was no less than squalid opportunism of the "old" politics — such a position would have been a kiss of death in future elections.

Despite wide support from their colleagues the two parliamentarians were summarily expelled. The issue remains unresolved, threatening to blow wide open the evermore tenuous unity of the outfit.

Grillo is undoubtedly right when he points to the reality of widespread racism, especially in the north where a lot of his support has come from people moving away from the League of Bossi and Maroni. "We vote the League to protect us from the immigrant, we are trade unionists to protect us from the boss", was the refrain among militants of the metalworkers' union FIOM.

The silence, inactivity, and impotence of the bulk of the Italian trade union movement (and it should be said, underneath the rhetoric, the radical left) is a failure of principle.

Right now, in Reggio Calabria, where three years ago thousands of migrant orange picking workers rebelled against the subhuman conditions imposed upon them, the same illegal conditions flourish even more transparently and widely!

When will the left begin to challenge this state of affairs? Until it does the prospects for building a serious working class led movement of opposition to a society mired in continual crisis is, sadly, more and more distant.



Bodies of refugees

Demonstration for migrants' right by Chadians in Paris

all parties to the conflict have committed atrocities and war crimes to one degree or another, over five million Syrians are internally displaced, and over two million have fled the country.

When Somalis, Eritreans, and Syrians flee to neighbouring countries, Western politicians and media unhesitatingly describe them as refugees in need of support.

But if they get to the European Union, they become economic migrants, a problem that needs to be controlled, preferably by preventing them from even reaching the shores of the European Union in the first place.

In August of this year, for example, a boatload of refugees which had set sail from Libya was stranded off the coast of Malta while the Maltese and Italian authorities argued about whose responsibility they were. Eventually, the Italian authorities backed down.

REFUSED

But in March of 2011 authorities refused to come to the assistance of a boat which had been spotted drifting in the Mediterranean.

It was carrying over 70 refugees from the fighting in Libya. 61 passengers died as the boat drifted back to Libya, where the survivors were promptly arrested and detained by Gaddafi's forces.

To the west, a similar approach has been adopted by other EU states: Spain has constructed six-meter-high walls around the towns of Ceuta and Melilla, located on Moroccan soil but Spanish territory in terms of international law. Refugees attempting to scale the walls have been killed by the use of live ammunition.

To the east, it is the same story: Despite being in the grip of an economic crisis, Greece spent €5.5 million last year on building a 12.6 kilometres-long fence, topped with razor-wire, along its border with Turkey. The government claimed that the fence had "practical and symbolic value."

Refugees who manage to overcome such hurdles and reach EU territory face, at best, a bureaucratic, inefficient, unjust and slow-moving system for processing their asylum claims. Barred from working and denied adequate accommodation, their everyday experiences are ones of physical and emotional hardship.

Local authorities in Switzerland have introduced what amounts to a system of apartheid under which asylum-seekers are banned from libraries, swimming pools, playing fields and the vicinity of schools. Curfews have also been imposed on asylum-seekers, banning them from going out after 5pm.

Conditions for asylum-seekers in Greece — which arrested 8,000 Syrian asylum-seekers in 2012 but granted asylum to just two of them — are so bad that some European countries have a policy of not returning asylum-seekers there as it would be a breach of their human rights to do so.

In Italy most asylum-seekers end up living on the streets or in abandoned railway yards and condemned houses after the temporary accommodation they receive from the authorities, which may be nothing more than a tent, comes to an end.

And even survivors from the capsizing earlier this month were provided with nothing better than accommodation in the "migrant holding centre" on Lampedusa, where entire families found themselves living in the open in the rain for three days in a row.

While EU governments implement policies designed to deter asylum-seekers from coming to the territory of the EU in general and to their country in particular, they simultaneously all claim that they are taking more than their "fair share" of asylum-seekers.

Italy claims it is overloaded because it is the initial country of entry into the EU for many asylum-seekers. Germany claims it is overloaded because of the total number of applications it receives. Switzerland claims it is overloaded because of the ratio of asylum-seekers to the total population.

Greece claims it is overloaded in the light of its financial crisis. Austria claims it is overloaded because of its small size. And the UK claims it is overloaded because the rest of the EU allow 'their' failed asylum-seekers to travel on to the UK.

Despite the growing death toll in the Mediterranean, EU governments are intent on continuing as before. They condemn the death toll as a tragedy. But they maintain the policies which produced that tragedy.

At both a national and an EU level, their policies are not about opening their borders to refugees but about continuing to focus on steps which would confine refugees to countries which immediately neighbour the country from which they have fled.

Greek uni workers' five-week strike

By Theodora Polenta

After closing the state broadcaster ERT, laying off thousands of workers, putting the padlock in hospitals and other public services, the Greek government now plans to sack about 1,700 university administrators.

The government faces a budget gap in higher education. They want to find a 33% cut and have decided workers must pay. The workers will all be sacked if they cannot first be re-deployed (which, given the extent of the cuts, looks unlikely).

Administrative workers at eight Greek universities in all the main cities have been on strike for five consecutive weeks. The government plans are part of broader attacks on the Greek public sector, which aim at redeploying or sacking 25,000 public sector workers by the end of December. By the end of 2014, the government wants to have eliminated 150,000 jobs in the public sector.

These measures will render Greece's universities effectively dysfunctional. According to the newspaper *Eleftherotypia*, layoffs at the University of Athens the layoffs will amount to 37.2% of non-teaching staff, making the number of students per non-teaching staff member more than six times higher than that of an equivalent British university.

The last four weeks have also seen university senates voting to shut down operations. In response, the Minister of Education filed a suit with Greece's Supreme Court, charging the rectors of those universities with misconduct. The Ministry has also filed suits with local prosecutors to force university authorities to comply with government policy by submitting the lists of staff that are to go into redeployment. So far, university authorities have refused to do so, and rectors have launched a legal challenge.

CONTINUOUS

The strike shows that, in principle, continuous and lengthy strikes can be done. This strike was in fact the only way to prevent the announcement of the staff lined up to be sacked. Without that list the government cannot proceed.

In response to a government request to identify surplus staff, university authorities identified a lack of human resources (even with today's degraded operation of universities and based on the criteria proposed by the Ministry). The government then proceeded to "re-establish an evaluation commission", which, unsurprisingly, identified the need for thousands of redundancies from all universities.

Hence the admin workers in the universities of Athens, Patras, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Crete, Thessaly and the National Technical University of Athens, with the support of the majority of lecturers and students, continue to protect public, free higher education. Rectors have had to suspend the operation of these universities, as it is obvious that they will not be able to function without the administrative and support staff. For example, the National Technical University of Athens is set to lose 45 % of its admin staff.

The sacking of admin staff will pave the way for the privatisation of university education, further orientation to business, and commercialisation.

Whole sectors are to be dismantled, with the abolition of all positions in every university. For example, all night guards and caretakers are to be pushed out. This will open the door to private security companies. This follows the subcontracting of university cleaning services during the last few years, leading to dramatic reductions in wages and worsening conditions for cleaners, an increase in the cleaning budget of the universities, and a substandard service.

Libraries have been hard hit at two major universities — University of Athens and Aristotle of Thessaloniki. Private companies are ready to take over the running of libraries but will cherry-pick those where they can make a profit.

Neither the use of private companies nor subcontracting are "news" for the higher education sector. They have both been invading universities establishments since 1997. But now we will see the transfer of almost all the work and services of universities to private companies and outsourcing.

Sacked university admin workers will try to be re-hired by the private, subsidised sub-contractors. Their salary will not exceed €500, their jobs will be non-unionised their rights non-existent.

The University of Athens, in quieter times.

Cuts will also mean hikes in undergraduate tuition fees. The business-orientated university, where the right to study is directly linked to the parent's income, will be a reality.

The Education Minister announced this week that he will provide interest-free loans to students!

During the memorandum years, funding for higher education has been reduced by 52.5 % which is more than twice the shrinking of the Greek economy (25%). The crisis is pushing through the disappearance of public education.

The "symbolic" shutdown of the universities by the rectors was really a way to apply pressure on the government to distribute already-approved resources from the EU Funds for Cohesion (EPSA), money they wanted to spend on restructuring the universities. €1 million for the Panteion and €1.5 million for the University of Crete had been allocated. This would enable the state to withdraw from its obligation to fund universities and public education, reduce budgets by up to 40%, make irrelevant Article 16 of the constitution (which prohibits private universities) and impose tuition fees. In effect the privatised, entrepreneurial university is already here!

By the end of the year the government will reveal new structures for the 36 universities and polytechnics which will involve merging or closing down whole university departments. Former Education Minister Anna Diamantopoulou has said there should be one university per region and a reduction in student admissions by 30% by 2015.

This is connected with high school reforms and the imposition of further exams and greater competition to get to university. New barriers to working-class youth, fewer students, less lecturers and administrative staff — this is the memorandum vision of education. An undereducated workforce which will be compliant and prepared to oscillate between unemployment and absolute destitution and zero contracts with zero rights jobs — that is what they want.

In most universities, striking admin workers have coordinated well with the rest of the university community (students and lecturers' unions) as well as rank-and-file trade unions from the wider public sector. They have elected a strike committee to take charge of the organisation of the strike, its defence, and transmitting information.

In the last meeting of the admin workers in the University of Athens it was decided to create a strike fund, to issue an invitation for coordination of the struggle to all public sector workers, organise the closing of roads, organise a welcome and information event at students' fresher fairs, organise an anti-fascist demo, a rally, and a concert.

The attitude of the rectors and the university authorities is hypocritical; they are issuing vague statements of support for the admin workers' struggle while declaring that the university's duty "is to remain open and running."

The striking workers and the student movement must rely on their own strength, putting every possible pressure on senates of universities to support their struggle. On the other hand, the student movement is not in the best condition. Despite some of the student assemblies' decisions for occupations and attempts to coordinate struggles with the admin workers, the majority of assemblies and demonstrations are relatively small.

Greek teachers and public sector workers have taken action but have now retreated. In this situation it is vital university admin workers maintain their forces. The strike must be directed politically and demand the overthrow of the government and its politics. A decisive answer can be given only by the coordination of struggle by the admin workers, lecturers, university students — throughout the university community. But it is essential for the high school teachers and the primary school teachers as well as the council workers and the health workers to review the suspension of their recent strikes and add their valuable forces to avoid losing public services altogether.

The resurgence of a combative working-class movement in both the public and private sector could initiate a general lasting strike in opposition to the inertia of the unions. After dozens of general strikes and militant sectorial struggles from the beginning of the crisis, a large chunk of workers have reached the correct conclusion that under the conditions of deep crisis of capitalism, where the living conditions of the working class are challenged hard, sectorial strikes (no matter how militant or heroic) are unlikely to have significant effects. Any gains will be fragile, and there is no guarantee that they will last even for months.

LASTING VICTORIES

Lasting victories can only be won in the political field. The slogan for a general political strike has recently won significant support in the labour movement.

But the impact of successive defeats makes it extremely unlikely workers will spontaneously start a general strike. The left and the rank-and-file trade unions have an even more important role to play.

The vast majority of workers and the unemployed are looking to Syriza as their political leadership, and expect an action plan and a program of workers' power. The leadership of Syriza should openly acknowledge the need for a continuous general political strike and organise for it, starting with the federations and unions where the left has the majority. The members and supporters of Syriza should put resolutions to their workplaces, calling for a serious preparation of such mobilisation. In each neighbourhood, a committee of struggle should be formed in order to rally youth and the unemployed.

At the same time there needs to be the necessary criticism of the Syriza leadership. Their passive support of the protests has proven hopeless; Syriza should now be determined to launch a truly "uncompromised" struggle both in the political and in the trade union community field until the fall of this hated government.

One image of the future of higher education in Greece comes from the School of Fine Arts in Florina, where no student has been able to enrol this semester. Not because of mobilisations and a university shutdown, but because there is a shortage of university lecturers and therefore courses cannot be run. The militancy of the mobilisations of the administrative university workers provide us with a golden opportunity: to link the struggles of all the affected areas of the public and the private sector. Then we will have a serious chance of success.

The realities that concern us — that define the lives of the many, the working class, the poor popular strata, the youth, the migrants — are constantly getting worse.

The political leaders of the left need to prepare together with the militant rank and file unions a well-organised general strike to overthrow the government and establish a government of the left with a clear socialist program.

40 years ago: the “Shrewsbury 24”

By Tom Harris

1972 saw a major wave of industrial action in Britain. There were more work days lost to strike action in that year than in any since the General Strike of 1926.

Big strikes by dockers, car workers, steel workers and miners won major concessions from the bosses and rocked the Tory government. Key to the success of working-class struggle was the high level of union organisation in big industries, and a militant, democratic culture of solidarity that had developed in the rank-and-file. An important tool had been “secondary” picketing and solidarity action, where one group of workers would come to the aid of another. When striking miners tried to close the gates of the Saltley coke depot in Birmingham, thousands of local engineering workers came out to support them, and the gates were successfully shut.

Panicked by this industrial revolt, the Conservative government tried to use the law to break the unions’ strength. States of Emergency were declared during both the miners’ and the dockers’ strikes, and the Tories tried to use the Industrial Relations Act of 1971 to undermine the position of trade unions. However, since most of the unions disregarded the Act, this legal challenge was largely unsuccessful. Frustrated, the government set its mind to picking a legal battle it thought it might win. It found such a battle in the construction industry.

Traditionally, construction workers had been far worse organised than others. The nature of the building industry made it more difficult for workers to organise collectively than it was for workers in large, stationary factories or offices. The workplace would shift from one building site to another as each job was completed, and many construction workers were only contracted for the duration of one job. This meant that a new group of workers might be thrown together randomly every few months, and new negotiations over pay and conditions would start all over again.

The situation was not helped by the narrow, “craft” orientation of the existing construction unions. Any given building site might have different workers in all sorts of different, small-scale unions, representing them as painters, as electricians, as scaffolders, or as some other specialism. Rather than being faced with a solid, united workforce, the employers had been able to make different deals with different trades and balance one group of workers off against the others.

WEAKNESS

As a consequence of the workers’ organisational weakness, conditions in construction were dangerous and unpleasant. Toilets, washbasins and canteens were often not provided on site, and injuries and deaths at work were very high.

In a bid to cut corners and squeeze out extra profits, the bosses would often ignore health and safety regulations. Only coal mines were a more dangerous British workplace!

But all this was beginning to change. A merger of smaller unions created the new Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT) which, together with large industrial unions like the TGWU and the NUMGW, created a far more unified and powerful union force in the industry. By 1972, there were 262,610 members of UCATT alone.

The newly strengthened building unions formed a National Joint Council to better co-ordinate their activity. They agreed to make a demand for £30 a week, and shorter week of 35 hours. The construction employers’ federation refused. In response, the unions called a strike.

The strength of construction unions, though greatly increased, was very uneven. In big cities like London, Liverpool and Birmingham, the workers were well organised and the strike held up well. The workplaces there were large and the unions had established deep roots. More difficult was the situation in small, isolated towns in more remote parts of the country. When a strike committee met in Chester, they received a request from union members in Shrewsbury, Telford and Shropshire for support. The strike had been slow off the ground in these relatively isolated areas — many workers weren’t familiar with the union and knew little about the dispute. A decision was taken by the strike committee to send “flying pickets” to the area, groups of strikers to visit the local building sites, bolster the picket lines and argue the case for striking.

Des Warren (left), Ricky Tomlinson (right) and supporters

Pickets arrived in the area on 6 September 1972. They met up with local trade unionists and set out to visit building sites not yet on strike. The pickets would arrive at each site, ask the manager if they could have a meeting with the workers about the dispute, and make speeches in support of the strike. Police officers were present throughout, and no arrests or even cautions or complaints were brought against the trade unionists by the police. It was regarded by those who took part as fairly routine picketing in the course of a national dispute.

Indeed, the nearest to anything that could be construed as violence or intimidation on the day seems to have come from management itself! At the Kingswood site, the son of the contractor, presumably swept up in the excitement of the times, met the pickets brandishing a shotgun and threatening to use it. Miraculously, a picket was able to grab the gun off of him and put it out of use before anyone was hurt. The pickets reported the incident to the police — one of the few incidents to be reported all day.

Though the picketing took place peacefully and with little incident, this was small consolation for the bosses. The picketing may have been peaceful, but it was also effective — mobile militants were succeeding in spreading the dispute far beyond the metropolitan centres. Towards the end of the strike, the federation of construction bosses, the NFBTE, sent round a letter to its members asking for information on incidences of “intimidation” and “violence” which could then be compiled and sent to the Home Secretary, the Conservative Robert Carr.

A document was cobbled together and sent off to Carr. The “intimidation dossier”, as it was called, was met with smirks and raised eyebrows even by some thoroughly Establishment bodies. The *Financial Times* dismissed it as a “politically motivated” document that alleged “a sinister plot” while only being able to give evidence of “the ordinary spontaneous angry behaviour that might be expected on a building site at any time.”

Nevertheless, the Tory government was determined to use the law to smash the unions as best it could. The Home Secretary announced an investigation into picketing at a McAlpine site in Shrewsbury, and a team of detectives were dispatched to a hotel in North Wales from which they would conduct their investigation. They collected 800 statements (of which the vast majority were subsequently discarded) and began to piece together a case against the pickets.

The idea of a team of detectives roaming the quiet, autumn countryside of Shropshire in order to investigate the events of a fairly uneventful day might seem a surreal one. Why go to so much bother over a picket line in Shrewsbury? One factor will have been the great influence and power of the big capitalists of the construction industry. The McAlpine family which ran the site in question was very well-connected on both a local and national scale. In Denbighshire, North Wales, the last nine High Sheriffs (responsible for local law and order) had all been McAlpine family members. When Sir Robert McAlpine hosted a private Christmas dinner in 1970, so many Government politicians were in attendance that the industry press claimed it was “virtually impossible to get a cabinet quorum.” The *Construction News* proudly asked its

readers “...in what other industry can any person boast of such a wide and diverse circle of acquaintances? None.”

24 pickets were accused of a long and varied list of crimes. Most charges were dropped for lack of evidence as the prosecution developed its line of attack. At the first trial at Mold Crown Court, all but the most insubstantial charges resulted in conviction, and only relatively small fines were imposed. A second trial took place at Mold in July 1973, and all three defendants were found not guilty.

An important part of the defence at Mold had been the use of pre-emptive challenges to jury members. Time and time again, the defence was able to weed out candidates for the jury who were building contractors, construction businessmen or those who had some reason to be sympathetic with the bosses. However, at later trials, this was no longer an option — the Tory Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, removed the right to challenge jurors on the basis of occupation only weeks before pickets went on trial again at Shrewsbury.

The prosecution had learnt from their mistakes at Mold. They abandoned many of their earlier charges, and dropped any pretence that the picketers had been guilty of assault or intimidation. The pickets were brought to trial in separate groups. Nine pickets were charged with unlawful assembly and affray — general offences which had the advantage of the prosecution of not requiring evidence of damage to individual pieces of property or assault on individual people. Another six were charged with “conspiracy to intimidate”, a legal relic from an 1875 conspiracy law, and one which, perversely, carried a greater potential sentence than intimidation itself.

After an extremely lengthy and expensive legal process, Des Warren, then a Communist Party member, got three years in jail, and Ricky Tomlinson, now a famous actor, got two.

AFTERMATH

Throughout the trials, and in the aftermath of the sentencing, many construction workers took part in protests and demonstrations for the release of the jailed pickets and exoneration for the others convicted of crimes.

This was not just a tokenistic gesture — in 1972, tens of thousands had taken marched and taken industrial action for the release “Pentonville Five”, a group of dockers who had been imprisoned under the Industrial Relations Act. The campaign had been a success! If a similar mass campaign could have been launched for the Shrewsbury pickets, a similar victory might have been won.

However, despite all the militancy and determination of the period, and despite the great political and organisational strides forward by building workers, the movement to defend the pickets was held back and undermined by the leadership of the labour movement. It had long been the government’s strategy to divide support for workers in struggle by introducing the issue of illegality, making the cautious and conservative trade union apparatus reluctant to support radical action by breaking the law.

The leadership of UCATT withdrew official support for the pickets on 10 March. Though many construction workers took it upon themselves to fight to defend the pickets, this was opposed rather than facilitated by the union leadership. In a letter to a branch secretary, UCATT general secretary George Smith stated that due to the “lengthy nature of the charges”, it would be doing the trade union movement “a great disservice to demonstrate or call a national stoppage in regard to these matters.”

The conservative impulse of the trade union bureaucracy was strengthened when the Labour Party took power in 1974. Reluctant to cause an irritation to their friends in the Labour government, the union leaderships became even more hostile to the prospect of direct action in defence of the pickets.

To this day, there has been no exoneration for the Shrewsbury pickets. They bravely faced imprisonment, fines and stigmatisation, punishment hurled at them by a panicked and vengeful ruling class.

That their cause was stymied and betrayed by cowardly bureaucrats in the upper reaches of the labour movement should not detract from their example, nor from the relevance of the militant, collective tactics of solidarity that they practiced.

Ralph Miliband and Israel-Palestine

By Martin Thomas

Ed Miliband's father Ralph Miliband, a Marxist writer denounced by the *Daily Mail* as "the man who hated Britain", left behind him two well-known books, *Parliamentary Socialism* and *The State In Capitalist Society*.

Less-known, but also valuable today, is a thin volume of letters in 1967 about Israel-Palestine between Ralph Miliband and his friend Marcel Liebman, who was then a contributor to the semi-Trotskyist Belgian weekly *La Gauche*.

The letters were translated from French by Peter Drucker and published in 2006 with an introduction by the Lebanese-French Marxist writer Gilbert Achcar.

Partly the letters are valuable in the same way that a view on any issue from a divergent and unfamiliar angle can be. In 1967, many assumptions on Israel-Palestine which currently go almost unquestioned on the left (in Britain, at least) were not assumed at all. And partly the letters are valuable because in them Miliband is exceptionally lucid.

The correspondence spans a few weeks around the June 1967 war between Israel and the Arab states.

The temper of the left on the Israel-Palestine question then was different from now. No-one on the left advocated wiping Israel off the map. Arab governments, and the leaders at the time of the PLO (then an annexe of the Egyptian government, without the autonomy it gained after 1968-9), openly advocate wiping Israel off the map, and everyone on the left dis-sented.

IS/SWP

Inside IS (forerunner of the SWP), a small but substantial minority opposed SWP leader Tony Cliff's line in June 1967 of backing the Arab states. There was a debate inconceivable today in the SWP or the SWP diaspora. (For the record: the forerunners of AWL backed Cliff's line in 1967. We have learned since).

At the beginning of the debate recorded in the volume, Liebman is about as anti-Israeli as any socialist got those days. He expresses disgust that "the whole French left is basically for Israel... from [Jean-Paul] Sartre to [Socialist Party leader] Guy Mollet", and says he wants to move to England where anti-Israeli sentiment is stronger.

In the first letter he denounces Miliband as "pro-Israeli" and "reacting as a European and a Jew rather than as a socialist".

Miliband actually has a slightly rose-tinted picture of Israeli policy. He considers it "nonsense" to suppose there are "serious Israeli plans to conquer and subjugate Arab people outside its territory".

Miliband is remonstrating with an indignant Liebman who suggests that Israel is about to invade and conquer Syria. He is right to do so: but in fact Israel would "conquer and subjugate Arab people outside its territory" in the West Bank and Gaza in 1967.

Miliband is critical of Israel's foreign policy, of its attitude to the Palestinians who fled or were driven out in 1948, and of its bad treatment of Arabs within Israel itself. The criticism needed calibration. According to Achcar's afterword, Miliband's hostility to Israeli policy did indeed become steadily sharper (and rightly so, in line with events) after 1967.

But on basics, through the debate, Liebman moves closer to the axis of Miliband's position: two nations, two states.

In his afterword, Achcar cites Miliband from 1973: "the idea I've always subscribed to [is of] creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel... a state, an institutional foundation on the basis of which more could be built in time to come, hypothetically with federalism, etc...."

"[The] secular democratic state [combining all pre-1948 Palestinian territory, Jewish and Arab, which the PLO had advocated from 1969]... never was a solution, at the present time and for a long time to come; whereas my solution is possible, puts the Palestinians back in the historical and geographical swing of things and opens up new vistas".

Liebman eventually concurred. In 1983 he commented on the murder of a Palestinian diplomat by Palestinian "ultras". "Neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians will find the way to compromise and reconciliation if the world continues to close its ears to the undeniable truths that [Issam] Sartawi never tired of repeating: peace is impossible unless the Palestini-

Ralph Miliband argued that the Hebrew-speaking Jews and Palestinian Arabs represent two distinct nations, both of which should have self-determination.

ans... are granted the right to self-determination; it is just as indispensable for the Arabs to accept Israel's right to exist".

Even in 1967, Liebman emphatically affirms the right to exist of the Israeli-Jewish nation. But in 1967 he says it would be wrong to demand of the Arab states that they immediately recognise the right of the Israeli state to exist. That recognition can come only after time and after Israeli concessions.

Why? Because, so Liebman expounds at length, Israel is "in the imperialist camp", is a serious enemy for Arab revolutions which are underway, and is founded on crimes against Arabs.

PARADOX

In his introduction to the volume, Achcar writes that "the paradox", and "a rather common one", was that Liebman's anti-Israelism was rooted in him being more immersed in Jewishness, and having lost closer family members in the Holocaust, than Miliband.

That intense Jewish feeling generated in Liebman a revulsion against the Jewish state which turned out to be a commonplace bourgeois state, as mean-spirited, as chauvinistic, and as cynical in its alliances as any other. Miliband, who wore his Jewishness more lightly, was more detached.

Another influence on Liebman was his hope, common at the time, of "the Arab revolution". Liebman concedes to Miliband that he had over-enthused about the claimed leftism of early 1960s Algeria, but claims that Syria's "leftward shift" is "more convincing". That was the Syrian regime of today in its early days, when the current dictator's father was coming to the fore.

Miliband accepts Liebman's term, "the imperialist camp". Miliband was a "Deutscherite" on the USSR, seeing the USSR and its allies as more progressive and "imperialism" as meaning only the USA and its allies.

But, Miliband says, nothing else can be expected from a small bourgeois state like Israel surrounded by hostile neighbours than that it should seek allies where it can. Israel neither is, nor can be, a serious threat to what (little) "Arab revolution" is actually happening in 1967, or to future more serious Arab revolutions.

Miliband shows that all Liebman's arguments evade a central point. "Although I would have preferred the creation of a Jewish-Arab or Arab-Jewish state at the time [of the formation of Israel, 1948], I've been forced to realise that everything — the history and evolution of the peoples in question, politics, sociology, etc. — made this solution entirely impossible and unacceptable for the forces on the ground.

"We can certainly discuss Israel's borders, the refugees, anything you like, but... the existence of this state... can only be changed by force, that is by the liquidation of the nation (in one way or another, expulsion and/or liquidation) as the

practical result of the liquidation of the state".

"I posit the existence of the Israeli state, not out of Zionism etc. (all that is very much out of date now that the state of Israel exists, which makes what the great thinkers of the Second International said [about Zionism] of little relevance), but simply out of recognition of a reality whose disappearance would be a terrible catastrophe, given the only current conditions in which it could disappear".

Miliband criticises the equivocation in "the unctuous statements in [the French Communist Party press] that a settlement 'should not put in question [Israel's existence]... How can anyone support the Arab leaders' avowed positions without accepting their desire to liquidate Israel?' The Communist Parties backed the Arab states for reasons of Russian foreign policy, while still formally recognising Israel's right to exist.

After 1969 the PLO came out with the formula of a "secular democratic state" (covering all pre-1948 Palestine) in place of the old line of "driving the Jews into the sea". For a long while the forerunners of the AWL, like much of the left, accepted that formula. Miliband never accepted it, and Liebman only for a short time.

Achcar's afterword quotes informatively from an article by Palestinian writer Elias Sanbar: the "secular democratic state" formula was concocted, on the PLO leaders' request, by Palestinian professors at the American University of Beirut, and published in *English* and then in *French*... but not in Arabic!

It was a diplomatic formula, not a guide to action. From 1973 Palestinian leftists began to develop the "two states" idea, which Miliband and Liebman came to support, and which the AWL advocates today.

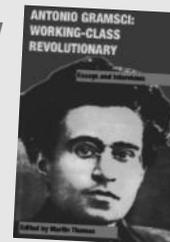
• *The Israeli dilemma: letters between Ralph Miliband and Marcel Liebman*, edited by Gilbert Achcar. Merlin Press 2006.

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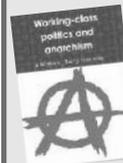
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Grangemouth workers set for strike

By Dale Street

Workers at the Ineos oil refinery and petrochemical plant in Grangemouth will be staging a 48-hour strike on 20-21 October in defence of site convenor Stevie Deans.

A work-to-rule and a ban on overtime have already been underway since the beginning of October, following an 81% vote for strikes and a 91% vote for action short of strikes in a ballot with an 86% turnout. The workers are members of Unite.

The strike action is the latest stage in the defence of Stevie, who has faced a sustained campaign of harassment by senior Ineos management since the summer of this year.

Stevie, who is also chair of the local Labour Party, was suspended by party officials in July on the basis of what are now known to be totally unfounded allegations of bogus membership recruitment in an attempt to rig the parliamentary selection ballot. Ineos bosses used the Falkirk Labour "scandal"

to launch their own victimisation of Stevie.

In a statement the plant's shop stewards committee denounced management's attack on Stevie as part of a strategy of union-busting at Grangemouth:

"We believe Jim Ratcliffe is motivated by wanting to break the union and strike fear into the workforce. The victimising of Stevie Deans is, we believe, part of a plan to go to 'war' with the union — whatever the cost."

The attacks on Stevie coincide with an offensive against the Grangemouth workforce's terms and conditions of employment.

Earlier this month Ineos wrote down the value of its petrochemical assets at Grangemouth from £400 million to nothing. It has

said that unless it can secure increased investments and reduced running costs, it will shut down the plant by 2017 at the latest.

Ineos' threat to close the plant is being used to put pressure on the Scottish and UK governments to cough up £150 millions in grants and loans. This demand by Ineos for a massive public subsidy is nothing short of shameful.

There is no available evidence to show that Ineos has paid any tax in the UK since 2008. Ineos moved its global headquarters from the UK to Switzerland in 2010 to save £100 million in tax. And Ineos now operates in five tax havens: Switzerland, Luxemburg, Jersey, Bermuda and Singapore.

Although Ineos is claim-

ing that Grangemouth lost £150 millions over the past four years, the company's own accounts show that Ineos Grangemouth Chemicals made a profit of £31 million in 2011, and £49 million in 2012.

Perhaps this explains why Ineos has rejected a proposal from Unite for an independent financial survey of the site, paid for by Unite itself.

CUTS

Ineos is also demanding cuts in labour costs in the form of: scrapping the final salary pension scheme, job cuts, worse pay and conditions for new employees, and a reduced scope for collective bargaining.

Unless the company backs down, the strike will have a major impact in terms of lost production at the plant and its broader knock-on economic effect.

A two-day strike at Grangemouth in 2008 shut down the North Sea Forties pipeline and cost the UK economy up to £600 million. In terms of costs per hour it was the costliest

dispute in UK history. Five days after the end of the strike, Grangemouth still was not back at full capacity.

And given the background to this strike, it will also have a major political significance.

Had it not been for the Labour Party's witch-hunt of Stevie Deans, Ineos would not have had a pretext for launching its own witch-hunt. Scottish Labour Party MSPs and MPs should therefore be visible on the picket lines.

Unite in the West of Scotland is already staging various actions targeted at other companies which deal with Ineos, as part of a "leverage" strategy. And at a recent local Area Activists meeting, Unite officials promised transport to take Unite members from Glasgow to support picket lines in the event of strike action.

To make sure the union wins in Grangemouth, Unite should be mobilising support for the dispute throughout Scotland.

• Abridged from bit.ly/grangemouth

FBU back in action

By Darren Bedford

Firefighters in England and Wales will take further strike action for five hours on Saturday 19 October, in the ongoing FBU dispute over pensions.

The action takes place after firefighters in Scotland voted not to strike for the time being, after the Scottish government offered some concessions. The ballot result is a blow to united action in the face of a common attack and a significant fault line for future negotiations on other matters.

The Scotland result will be used by the SNP to promote its line of partnership working with unions in an independent Scotland — a deliberate attempt to cut across class lines.

The FBU has organised a demonstration in central London on Wednesday 16 October on pensions and against the ongoing cuts to the fire and rescue service. The FBU says 3,600 jobs have been cuts since this government came to power and with more cuts on the way, the service faces devastation.

As well as 10 fire stations in the capital due for closure next year, there are other threats. In Derby, all three fire stations are threatened, which would leave a city of a quarter of a million people with only threadbare fire cover.

The FBU has to fight on the cuts front. It needs to work for solidarity with the rest of the labour movement and forge public support through local activist groups and socialists, who are willing and able to defend fire stations with direct action if necessary.



Relaunch teachers' workload fight

The teachers' dispute on workload, currently being run jointly with a campaign on pay and pensions, needs re-launching on a wholly new basis.

If NUT and NASUWT are serious about using school-based action to frustrate Gove's reforms, win real gains for teachers across the board and build strength and confidence for the national strike action then some basics would need to be put in place:

• Encourage the building of joint action commit-

tees in every school

• Publicise every dispute and pour resources into winning

• Highlight every victory in national publications, school bulletins and circulars

• Move to strike action in any school where the union reps are threatened with any form of victimisation, intimidation or pressure after the escalation of action

• Build combine committees across the major academy chains to co-ordinate action in those

schools.

• Co-ordinate action across schools where the issue is the same, especially where the local authority or academy chain is refusing to agree a compliant pay policy.

None of this guarantees success but the difference is that it is serious and ambitious.

That approach can enthuse people, engage the new activists emerging from the recent strikes, and shake up the caution and timidity at the top.



Win for Tyne and Wear Metro cleaners

Cleaners on the Tyne and Wear Metro have ended their long-running dispute over low pay.

The dispute began nearly two years ago, and has seen workers strike 19 times, most recently for two weeks in July 2013.

The RMT's Executive has agreed a deal which will secure a 5% pay rise over four years, with an extra day's leave per year from January 2014.

The settlement falls short of the strike's initial demands for living wages and travel pass equality between directly-employed and contracted staff, but is still a significant concession won from intransigent bosses after months of hard fighting.

Uni workers' strike

By a UCU activist

University staff are preparing for strike action over pay this autumn after the three biggest campus unions backed campaigns to force up the employers' offer of just 1%.

Lecturers' union UCU voted for strikes by 61.5 to 38.5% and action short (generally seen as a more effective tactic in the sector) by 77 to 33%. 64% of Unite members backed strikes, and Unison members also did so by a slim margin.

Pay has slumped by 13% in real terms since 2009. The higher education sector has an operating surplus of over £1 billion and can well afford to pay up. As a percentage of university budgets pay has fallen from 58% in 2001-2 to 55.5% in 2011-12, but at the same time for those at the top salaries have risen. Over 2,500 people working in higher education earn more than £100,000 a year, but almost two-thirds of manual workers in the sector are paid less than £17,329. Even among managerial, profes-

sional and technical staff, generally seen as a well-paid

group, 39% earn less than £31,020 a year. The marketisation of education is making the university a less and less equal place to work.

Students have a vital role to play in building solidarity with this struggles. Not just to support the fight for pay, but because universities are bound to try and play off the interests of students and workers. We should be clear from the start: decent pay for staff must not mean higher tuition fees for students.

These strikes are important not just in universities and colleges but because of their potential to revive struggles across the public sector and beyond. The confidence of many workers has been shaken by the failures of leadership in the fight over pensions.

A victory in this dispute will demonstrate the power of industrial action.



Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Support the teachers' strike!

**By Patrick Murphy,
NUT Executive (pc)**

On 17 October teachers in London, the South East, and South West will strike as part of a campaign of opposition to a whole series of attacks on our pay and conditions.

This is the third and final part of a calendar of regional strikes, each one covering a bigger area than the last. A national strike is

planned in November. If the previous strikes in the North West on 27 and Yorkshire, the Midlands, and the East on 1 October are anything to go by, then 17 October will be well-supported, will feature large marches and rallies, and will help build union organisation in schools.

But if the joint NUT-NASUWT dispute is to force Michael Gove to shift, then it needs significant escalation. The leadership of the campaign from both unions so far does not suggest that

is very likely. The failure to respond to the final pensions offer in December 2011 for more than a year, the decision to withdraw Wales from the current regional action, and the refusal to name the date for national action later this term all reflect the same uncertain, directionless tone. The action short of strikes at school level has led to some important successes in some individual schools — fewer observations, less punitive appraisal policies,

union-agreed calendars. The best it can achieve, however, is to manage and mitigate the effects of anti-teacher “reforms” in a few schools.

And if they are not rolled back at a national level, then even in those strong schools the unlimited pressures and powers of heads will eventually come to dominate. Members can see this and, worse still, so can Gove.

NATIONAL STRIKE

After 17 October, the national strike should be called as soon as possible and the National Executives of both NUT and NASUWT should meet in full to agree the programme of action for next term.

Another two years of occasional one-day strikes, with no indication of the next steps and no opportunity for members to influence the direction, will not only fail to shift Gove but will exhaust and demoralise members. Turning one-day strikes into two day-strikes is only a slightly more disguised version of the same strategy. Continuing this action has to mean deciding on a clear and intense programme of action over a relatively short period of time.

There is no reason why it should not combine national with regional, local, and other selective action as long as it is part of a planned, coherent programme which involves and engages members, reaches out consistently to parents and makes the link between these attacks on teachers and the systematic break-up of state education.

- More on NUT-NASUWT strike: page 11
- Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC): nutlan.org.uk

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Brazilian teachers face state repression

By Charlotte Zeleus

The ongoing struggle of teachers in Brazil faces increasing state repression.

Teachers have been involved in continuing struggle over the past few years. In 2010 teachers in Sao Paulo were involved in strikes over pay, demonstrations every Friday were repressed by police.

Starting in 2012, the union called strikes to make the government implement a minimum wage for teachers that had been voted through the parliament five years ago.

This was to involve rolling action across regions of Brazil but the union pulled the action. Teachers in Sao Paulo were unhappy with the strike being pulled without its demands being met and protested against their union leadership.

The current strike action has been going on since mid August and has seen impressive support from union members, the wider labour movement and the public.

The strike is partly to demand a 19% pay rise, as opposed to the government offer of 15%. However, members of the union are saying that the action is about more than that.

Teachers in Rio de Janeiro are typically hired on temporary contracts and the union is demanding an end to this practice.

However a running thread through the struggles of the last few years in Brazil, as in so many cases across the world, is that teachers are fighting against neo-liberal reform of education.

Teachers say that education in Brazil has not been funded properly for years but that the state has been able to find money to fund projects like the World Cup and Olympic games, evicting whole communities in the process.

Teachers in Sao Paulo raised the demand that 100% of the compensation

paid to states for oil extraction should be put into education.

Whilst in 2012 one of the strike demands was for 10% of GDP to be spent on education, currently it is about 6%.

In addition to lack of funding, teachers claim that the government is pursuing increasing privatisation of education as well as high stakes testing.

An academic who is supporting the strike, Professor Adilson Filho, said: “We would like society to understand that our struggle is not just salary... But against this policy that has transformed classrooms into production lines, dehumanizes education and promotes a climate of competition that only harms the young students.”¹

STORMED

In mid-October teachers in Rio stormed the City Hall to demand an end to the repression of their protests.

Some 300 gained entry and occupied the hall whilst thousands protested outside.

Protests have been attacked by police using tear gas and rubber bullets. The Rio administration has been threatening to have the strike made illegal, docking pay of striking teachers or sacking probationary teachers who take part in the action.²

In one video of the action in Rio a teacher says that she considers that she is not only fighting for her own rights but setting an example to her students of the imperative to do so.

Teachers across Latin America have been engaged in similar struggles and one common slogan has been: “Teachers in struggle are also teaching!”

¹. bit.ly/1ghCvgx

². bit.ly/19PelXf

• Please send messages of solidarity to Rio teachers at teachersriodejaneiro@outlook.com