



# Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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## HELP GREEK LEFT DEFY THE BANKS



See pages 6 and 7



## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

### Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● [solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

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

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# Juror makes challenge

By Gemma Short

**Under the banner of "Black lives matter", protests against police racism and violence have continued across America over Christmas and in the new year.**

On Monday 5 January protesters gathered for a 24 hour vigil in New York's Grand Central Station, with placards carrying the names of those killed by police in the last decade. A rally outside Washington's Capitol Hill with families of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice and others attracted over 25,000 protestors on 13 December.

In Ferguson, one of the jurors from the Grand Jury into the shooting of Michael Brown has filed a lawsuit charging that the St Louis County prosecutor, Robert McCulloch, presented relevant legal information to jurors "in a muddled and untimely manner" and that "evidence was presented differently than in other cases" with and "insinuation that Brown, not Wilson, was the wrong doer."

The lawsuit seeks to gain permission for the juror to speak openly about the case, when usually jurors would be prohibited from speaking publicly; the juror felt the Grand Jury decision was

misrepresented by McCulloch.

Cleveland Mayor, Frank Jackson, has expressed a lack of trust in state prosecutors to investigate the killing of 12 year old Tamir Rice, shot two seconds after police arrived at the scene for holding a pellet gun. Jackson said "I don't have confidence that a [state Bureau of Criminal Investigation] probe into police use-of-force would be a transparent, due-process kind of investigation".

On 23 December an 18 year old black man, Antonio Martin, was shot and killed by a white police officer in the St Louis suburb of

Berkeley. The police officer was responding to a reported theft at a gas station and alleges that Antonio drew a hand gun. Antonio did not fire any shots, yet the police officer claimed he feared for his life and fired his gun three times. Just five minutes passed between the time the call was placed about a possible theft and the officer opening fire.

**These kind of events as well as the protests continue to cast a spotlight on how the routine arming of police officers, the escalation of policing minor incidents, and racism work together in a lethal way.**

# Italy: right surges as unions retreat

By Hugh Edwards

**Befitting his image as the man of action the Italian ruling class have been fantasising about for decades, Matteo Renzi didn't hang about after he delivered on the reactionary Jobs Act (which among other things weakens employment protection and is aimed at making the workforce more "flexible").**

Renzi, contemptuously indifferent to legal and constitutional niceties, has now announced that rather than new powers to dismiss workers being applied to individual workers in dispute with their employers, the draconian terms would now be extended to groups of workers and to the public sector.

The weak response of union leaders underlines the difference between the ruthless and predatory instincts of Renzi, as he nakedly champions the interests of Italy's rich and powerful,

and those who say they represent the country's working and suffering masses.

CGIL leader Camusso announced the "second round" of the fight had begun, and her readiness for more strike action. But this would be only after the various parliamentary Commissions have evaluated the latest developments. When it was pointed out to her that these would be "merely consultative, toothless and prolonged", she replied "one needs to have respect for the institutional procedures".

This is someone who six weeks ago, before tens of thousands in Rome, declared she "didn't give a toss about parliament or its procedures".

The hopes and prospect from last September of a "hot autumn", however hesitant and uncertain the call to action by the leaders of CGIL and FIOM might be, have been crushed. A working-class led front against the government might have

capital in Italy. Alas, another setback.

The sinister and poisonous consequences of stalemate and defeat become more evident everyday.

In November 70,000 racists marched in Milan behind the banner of the Northern League — now morphing itself into the National League. Then a conference of Europe's fascist and neo-fascist groups — including Golden Dawn — gathered in Milan just before Christmas. They were invited there by local leaders of the League.

The League's resurgence under its National Secretary Matteo Salvini has seen it grow across the country, largely relying for its success on an ever more active prosecution of racist hate.

**MILITANT THUGS In Rome, Milan, Padova, its militant thugs have been behind waves of attacks on immigrants and reception centres for newly arrived refugees.**

The latest scandal in Rome has revealed the criminal collaboration between some of the city's most violently murderous racists, in positions of local power thanks to their links with former Mayor and a private co-operative paid millions by the now left-centre council to organise and create immigrant reception centres.

Individual local councillors from the League are also involved. Nationally Salvini is now second only to Renzi in the opinion polls

and there can be little doubt that the League's fortunes will continue to prosper as the country slips further into recession. All the more so as, despite seeking off the unions, Renzi and his government are far from being secure.

The little man's meteoric rise to leadership has made him many enemies as he has trampled on one group after another, contemptuously dismissive of the relics of the former Stalinist nomenclatura, as of the babel of Catholic/liberal Christian Democratic centrists who defined the party's composition after 1989.

With the imminent retirement of Italy's President Napolitano, the figure who more than anyone else has successfully and cynically stopped bourgeois Italy from institutionally falling apart, the "secret" pact between Renzi and Berlusconi, secured by Napolitano at Renzi's accession to power, may unravel; that is, if a Renzi/Berlusconi presidential candidate fails to get elected, as at the moment seems probable.

Such agreements on electoral, constitutional and institutional reform signalled a move to further erode what remains of representative electoral and parliamentary democracy in Italy.

**They remain the goal that Renzi and Berlusconi need to guarantee not just their own political survival, but even the stability and survival of any kind of formal bourgeois order.**



Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi





# New Era housing victory

By Beth Redmond

**After months of campaigning, the New Era housing campaign in east London won its battle against eviction shortly before Christmas.**

Westbrook Partners, a US investment firm worth \$11bn, bought the entire estate in March 2014 from First LBS Holdings. It is a big part of a wider trend of investors using homes merely as catalysts for financial gain, with no consideration to those who need somewhere affordable to live.

93 families then faced tripling of rents, or eviction if they could not afford it.

Some would have been forced to move outside London, leaving family, friends, and schools behind. The previous owners of the estate are said to have kept rents reasonably priced, which allowed several generations of families to stay in the same place. A close-knit community was able to grow — which was no doubt instrumental to the victory of the campaign.

The increasing number of housing campaigns across London have been using the slogans “social housing not social cleansing!” on their demonstrations, conveying how the housing situation in the capital is now just a playground for the rich,

forcing anyone who cannot afford it to move away.

After months of pressure; mass petitioning, demonstrations, and arguably the help of Russell Brand, Westbrook was forced to abandon plans to triple rents, and sold the estate for an estimated £20mn to Dolphin Square Foundation. They say they are “committed to fixing rents relative to people’s incomes and not relative to market rents.” ... “We work to understand in detail the financial circumstances of our tenant group and we will then formulate a rent policy that is demonstrably fair”.

When asked whether anyone would likely be evicted

when rent increases come back into play in 2016, the chief executive of Dolphin stated “I wouldn’t like to see any circumstances where somebody would not be able to stay on the estate because they can’t afford to pay the rent.”

Many housing struggles are now being fought across London, and are coordinating for a March for Homes on 31 January. The march is calling for rent controls, secure tenancies for all, new council houses to be built, and better pay, conditions and housing services.

**Assemble 12 noon, St Mary’s Churchyard, Newington Butts, Elephant and Castle, SE1.**

## Free Shahrokh and Reza!

**Workers’ Liberty is campaigning for jailed Iranian trade unionists Shahrokh Zamani and Reza Shahabi. We have been collecting signatures and passing motions at trade union branches, student unions and Labour Party branches.**

So far we have collected over 2000 signatures towards our aim of 10,000. We urge activists to take petitions around the workplaces, lectures or campaigns they are involved in.

We are holding a fundraising spoken word evening with Attila the

Stockbroker and other poets and spoken word performers on Saturday 10 January, 7pm, Union Tavern, London WC1X 9AA. We will also be protesting outside the offices of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on 16 January, 5pm, Milbank Tower, London SW1P 4PQ. The ILO continues to allow Iran to be a signatory to many of its conventions, giving Iran cover for its continued actions against workers.

**We invite you to join us campaigning for the release of Shahrokh and Reza and for workers’ rights in Iran.**

# Nationalise City Link!

By Darren Bedford

**Union campaigners have called for bankrupt delivery firm City Link to be nationalised, after more than 2,400 workers were sacked on New Year’s Eve 2014.**

Around 60 activists demonstrated at the company’s headquarters in Coventry on 31 December, with smaller demonstrations taking place at delivery centres elsewhere in the country.

The firm owned by investment company “Better Capital”, headed by former Tory and current UKIP donor Jon Moulton. Moulton purchased City Link for £1 last year; having failed to make it profitable, he will walk away from the mess relatively unscathed, while City Link workers, many of them self-employed contractors reliant on the firm for jobs, face an uncertain 2015.

The ease with which capitalists like Moulton can toy with working-class people’s lives speaks to the inhumanity at the heart of capitalist market chaos. A mild inconvenience for Moulton and “Better Capital”

could mean poverty for workers and their families. But when the market rules, such chaos is inevitable.

Mick Cash, General Secretary of the RMT union, which organises some City Link drivers, said: “The confirmation from the administrators that they have just sacked 2,400 staff and are pulling the plug on any efforts to save City Link is a disgraceful and cynical betrayal that will wreck the lives of our members, many of whom are owed thousands of pounds.”

**The union has called for City Link to be taken in public ownership. More prominence needs to be given to such calls in union press statements, demonstrations, and other actions. City Link should be integrated into a renationalised public postal and delivery service, rather than run as a private enterprise.**



## University bans conference after far-right pressure

By Gerry Bates

**The cancellation by Birkbeck University management of room bookings for a 13 December conference on “Institutional Islamophobia” should be condemned.**

Following the bans on the Socialist Workers Party by Goldsmiths Students’ Union and Edinburgh University Students’ Association, and the attempt to ban the SWP in University of Sussex Student Union, this is another blow to freedom of speech and organisation on campuses.

It is particularly alarming because Birkbeck manage-

ment acted after threats from far-right racist groups Britain First and Casuals United that they would disrupt the event.

The conference seems to have been a reactionary undertaking, sponsored by organisations such as Stop the War but driven by Islamist groups including the “Islamic Human Rights Commission”, Shia Islamists posing as a human rights organisation.

**Such reactionary ideas should be countered by debate and protest, not by bans, and certainly not (as in this case) by bans imposed under pressure from the racist far right.**



**MARCH FOR EDUCATION IN YOUR CITY ON JANUARY 31**

**Keep up the momentum for the free education movement, organise a march in your city!**

**To see if your city already has a march planned, or to get help on organising, email [againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com](mailto:againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com)**



# A “trade union party”?

Jon Lansman, editor of the Left Futures blog, spoke to Martin Thomas shortly before the Scottish Labour leadership election result.

**MT: In 2010, several factors suggested the possibility of a new start in the Labour Party. A new leader was emphatic that he was not Tony Blair.**

The fact that we had that new leader came from the unions asserting themselves more. In July 2011 Unite announced a new political strategy, at least potentially more assertive again.

The Labour Party had an influx of new members, not large by historical standards but sizeable by recent standards. There was an apparent opening in the review of party structure. And in July 2011 the leadership choice for General Secretary was defeated and Iain McNicol won, indicating a promise of cleaner and more union-friendly administration. What went wrong?

**JL:** There is a space for debate and activity in the Labour Party which did not exist before. We were marginalised and excluded before to an extent that we aren't now. The control freakery of the Blair era has faded.

Ed Miliband has been a disappointment. I think that's partly because of his failure to consolidate his own base, a soft left, a centre-left, or even a centre. He's weak, and he has operated as a leader through negotiations with the main power base in the Parliamentary Labour Party, which is the right-wing faction Progress.

You can see that he recognises his weakness, and as a consequence you have had occasional forays which look a bit more promising, but they never come to much.

The bigger disappointment has been on the side of the trade union movement. Ed Miliband appears to have failed to understand the purpose and nature of trade unionism even to the extent that a right-wing social democrat should, but I think the response of the union leaders, and of Len McCluskey in Unite in particular, has been a real problem.

It's not that McCluskey is a rightwinger. But he has been wrong on tactics and strategy, for whatever reason. Now he wants to move Unite away from the Labour Party — to the left, in his conception — in a way which will weaken the left in the Labour Party and in general.

Things are bleak in Labour right now, but that doesn't mean that McCluskey's strategy isn't more bleak.

**MT: One thing there was the pensions debacle in 2011. The unions put all their anti-Tory eggs in the pensions basket, then that dispute collapsed in the end of 2011, and the left**

**unions let it collapse. Both the union leaders and much of the rank and file have been badly demoralised.**

**JL:** I am not from your political tradition, and I am not convinced that the industrial scene and the political scene are as linked as that. One can look at the union's political strategies — to some extent — independently of what is happening industrially.

In 2010 I saw in the unions a recognition of how bad Blairism had been for the movement. But the unions have since made serious errors.

This has led to what I would view as a capitulation over austerity. Even though the unions are formally still against austerity, they have in practice allowed Labour to commit to austerity.

And we have the consequence of the unions taking the wrong line over Collins. Two years ago I thought we were in a position to create a new left-wing organisation which would unite constituency activists with the left-led unions. It could pull the centrist unions along behind it, destabilise Progress and open things up.

## COLLINS

**In the end what stopped that from happening were the maverick tactical decisions made by Len McCluskey on the Collins Report.**

The rest of the union leaders instinctively opposed Collins. If Unite had opposed it, then the Collins Report wouldn't have happened in the form it did.

Then that led into the dreadful negotiations at the National Policy Forum in July 2014, which got no more results than in previous years. In the text there are some concessions here and there, but they are concessions which no-one will read again. If the union leaders had fought at the NPF, lots of things at conference would have gone our way in policy terms. But no.

Under Blair the control freakery was always uneven. There was toleration of dissident MPs, on the understanding that thanks to rigged selections, the number of dissident MPs would always go down. Officials intervened in Parliamentary selections a lot, and that has diminished.

But the Party membership now includes lots of people who have no ideological reason for being in the Party at all — they are managerialists, careerists and so on. That change in composition came in the Blair years, but we still recruit such people.

In that respect it's chicken and egg — if the left wins victories, we will recruit more left-wing people, and if we recruit more left-wing people, we will win more.

The process of centralisation of power in the Labour Party around the leader's office has, in practice, continued under Miliband. In part it's because they have let go of the National Executive Committee, where the left is now stronger, that they have continued the process of centralising power.

Next year, we will win more National Policy Forum seats in the constituency section — but if the unions are not prepared to fight in the NPF, then we need to fight to return to a resolution-based conference. I think we'd get support for that in the unions.

That doesn't necessarily have to be accompanied by getting rid of the NPF — but we need to return to a resolution-based conference, because it will give us more leverage.

In some ways the reality is worse than how I have painted it so far. Len McCluskey has said he wants to go into the election focussing on candidates who he thinks are good, some of whom I don't think are good.

I think that if we want to win, then we need to win overall, and back rightwing Labour candidates as well, because you need a majority.

Things could start unravelling sooner rather than later because of Scotland. In Scotland, we will lose twenty to thirty seats in the May 2015 general election. Even if Neil Findlay and Katy Clark [the left candidates] win the leadership, we will lose twenty seats because you can't turn things around as fast as that. If Jim Murphy [the right wing candidate] wins, then things will start unfolding straight away. There will be proposals from Scotland at the very least to permit Unite to disaffiliate from the Labour Party in Scotland.

Quite how the Party will react to that in England I don't know. That might be a time when we have to go back to the “trade union party” idea [the idea of setting up a new party sponsored by the unions, linked to the Labour Party and supporting it electorally but organisationally distinct, in the fashion of the Co-operative Party].

We have to find a way of keeping the trade union movement focussed on the Labour Party. I still think that there is a possibility of turning the Labour Party around. The depressing thing about the last four years is that the trade unions could have done so much better. And they still could do so much better.

We need to democratise conference. That can be done with the help of the trade union leaders. We've had some reversals, but we have won other things as well. We can now elect the constituency representatives in the NPF, we have pushed back the “three year rule” to block rule changes, and so on.

**That puts us in a better position to win democratic change if we can persuade the unions to step up.**

# Better irate than confused!

## Letter



**Colin Foster (Solidarity 347) professes to not understand why I was irate with Jon Lansman's article in (343).**

In the immediate aftermath of a discussion at Workers' Liberty's conference where I, alongside other comrades, argued for a more critical approach to Labour, we publish an article that argues simply that the current Labour leadership shouldn't be got rid of. Can Colin really not understand why I was irate? Colin characterises the column as bland, he might have added right wing! How else would you describe an article with no content except defend Miliband?

During the period between 1987 and 1992 the press rumoured that John Smith might challenge Kinnock for the leadership of the party, from the right. After 1992 until his death in 1994, there was some discussion, (not much, because Smith was new to the leadership and Labour was riding high

in the polls) that Blair or Brown might challenge Smith for the Party leadership. I don't think that during either of those times our press carried articles simply saying that the leader shouldn't be challenged. Nor should we have done!

Colin's final point is that it is possible to have left leader candidacies in today's Labour Party. Well, in that case, why are we arguing that there should not be a leadership election? If I thought that in a British Labour leadership election, a candidate of the genuine left, like Neil Findlay in the Scottish leadership election, could get over a third of the vote, I would be for organising to make a leadership election happen. Such a result would give the left something to organise around and would raise the debate about working-class political answers both in the Party and the country at large. I do not think such a thing is possible, Colin seemingly does.

**Which makes it more puzzling why he is so keen to support an article which has its whole purpose to argue there shouldn't be a leadership election.**

*Duncan Morrison, Deptford*

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**Order from [workersliberty.org/autocollants](http://workersliberty.org/autocollants)**





# What should socialists do in the general election?

**In the run up to the general election in May, Workers' Liberty will be supporting the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, which combines advocating a Labour government with using the election to boost working-class struggles and raise the profile of socialist ideas. We call on other socialists and labour movement militants, whatever your affiliation, to join the campaign.**

Any version of the Tories remaining in office — by themselves, in coalition with the Lib Dems or, worst of all, in coalition with UKIP — would be a disaster for the working class. Yet the only alternative government is Ed Miliband's Labour Party, officially committed to a softer version of cuts, austerity and anti-migrant politics. How should socialists respond to this problem?

A strong slate of class-struggle socialist candidates, to champion workers' interests, raise the profile of socialism and put pressure on Labour from the left, would be best. But that is not on the cards. Non-Labour left candidacies will be weak both organisationally and politically. In any case, even if you want to vote Green, TUSC or Left Unity here or there, that doesn't answer who will form the next government and what it will do. The left should not attempt to dodge this question.

For all its woeful inadequacies and shameful betrayals, and despite changes in its structure, Labour remains supported, funded and organisationally tied to workers' basic class organisations, the trade unions. In the election, the unions will back Labour and the vast majority of politically active trade unionists will do the same — but the official union campaign will accept and promote Labour as it is.

It will neither make the kind of demands — on cuts, the NHS, climate change, workers' rights and many other issues — necessary to serve working-class interests, nor will it work to develop workers' political consciousness. It will paint up Miliband as left-wing and, because this is obviously not the case, effectively promote voting Labour as a lesser evil. It will let the Labour leadership "get away with it".

Because Labour remains linked to the unions — because they could use their voice in the party to shift its course, if they chose to — we should support the election of a Labour government. But if we are going to avoid becoming footsoldiers for the Labour leadership, we need to do more than that.

We need to demand the unions stop covering politically for the Labour leadership, and start fighting for workers — in the first instance, by actually campaigning for union policies.

Beyond that, we need to fight to reinstate class as the basic axis of politics, and inject class-struggle socialist ideas into political debate. At a time when UKIP is using the crisis to drag politics to the right, and anything resembling socialism has been pushed out of political discourse, this could not be more urgent.

The Labour Party, with all its flaws and contradictions from the beginning, came into existence because socialist activists had succeeded in popularising socialist ideas among significant layers of the working class. The same kind of work needs to be done today, otherwise it will be impossible to effectively check the drift to the right.

## SOCIALIST IDEAS

**With the beginnings of an economic recovery, and developments like the possible election of Syriza in Greece, the political picture is dark, but not unrelievedly dark.**

There are openings for socialist activism, but we have to organise to take them. There are a variety of campaigns developing to change Labour's policies on particular issues — rail renationalisation, for instance, and student tuition fees. Left Labour MP John McDonnell is launching a "Left Platform" to bring together campaigners, trade unionists and Labour candidates around an agreed set of campaigning demands. The SCLV will support such initiatives, and attempt to advocate a political framework for them by foreground-

ing ideas like taxing the rich, expropriating the banks and a workers' government.

It will also make the case as loudly as possible for a wider goal of a different society, a socialist society which replaces the crises and exploitation of capitalism with collective ownership, equality and sustainable planning for people's needs.

One absolutely essential part of all this is using the election to fight for migrants' rights. We need to challenge Labour — and, in effect, the unions' — shameful capitulation to the right on immigration, and stand up for working-class unity and solidarity. That task alone justifies the kind of campaigning work we hope the SCLV will do.

**The campaign will be seeking support and publicising its message both in the organised labour movement, student movement, etc, and on the streets. We call on socialist organisations and individuals to get involved.**

•socialistcampaign@gmail.com


•www.facebook.com/SocialistCampaignLabourVictory

**KICK OUT THE TORIES,  
FIGHT FOR WORKING-CLASS POLICIES!**

**SCLV London launch meeting**

**7.30pm, Tuesday 20 January**  
Venue tbc

**Speakers: John McDonnell MP;  
Maria Exall (Communication  
Workers' Union); James McAsh  
(London Young Labour  
Committee)**



# Next steps for Labour in Scotland?

**By Dale Street**

**2014 closed with the election of Jim Murphy and Kezia Dugdale as leader and deputy leader of the Scottish Labour Party (SLP).**

Murphy won 56% of the total electoral college vote (split three ways between: MSPs and Scottish MPs and MEPs; individual Labour Party members; affiliated trade unions), against 35% for left-wing challenger Neil Findlay. The third candidate, Sarah Boyack, won 9%.

In the deputy leadership election Kezia Dugdale won 63%, against 37% for left-wing challenger Katy Clark.

Murphy and Dugdale both won clear majorities in the elected representatives' and individual members' sections of

the electoral college. But both lost in the trade union section of the college.

Given that the media had declared Murphy and Dugdale the 'front-runners' from the outset, picking up over a third of the vote was a more than credible result for both Neil Findlay and Katy Clark. This is true even though there had been an expectation that the high profile campaign they ran, backed up by hundreds of rank-and-file Labour Party and trade union activists, would have produced a closer result.

This expectation was shared by the Murphy camp. The weekend before the close of voting Murphy felt obliged to put out a statement promising "radical policies". On closer inspection, of course, the policies were not radical at all.

The same weekend Margaret Curran, Labour's Westminster spokesperson on Scotland, publicly endorsed Murphy — even though established protocol is that the Westminster spokesperson remains neutral in SLP leadership elections.

Murphy is a very right-wing and very Blairite career politician. His base of support consists of:

Fellow right-wing careerist Labour politicians at Westminster and Holyrood who look to Murphy to protect their careers by miraculously reversing the collapse in Labour's electoral support in Scotland.

Labour councillors who can rely on Murphy to excuse and justify their record of implementing cuts.

A small group of right-wing (as opposed to pretend-left) trade union bureaucrats, concentrated in the main in Community and USDAW.

The more depoliticised and less politically minded layers of the individual membership of the SLP.

A faction in Scottish Labour Youth whose natural political home is the Conservative Party but who have ended up in Labour because the low level of electoral support for the Tories in Scotland means that it is a not a viable mechanism for pursuing their careerist aspirations.

Murphy has nothing of political value to offer to the Labour Party in Scotland.

He thinks that the SLP's basic problem is that it has never been subject to a proper Blairite "modernisation" — despite the fact that the Blairite 'modernisation' of the Labour Party

cost it around 66% of its membership, two trade union affiliations, and five million voters.

He thinks that the SLP can beat the SNP by presenting itself as the real "patriotic party" of Scotland although posing politics as a matter of "who best represents Scotland's interests" plays into the SNP's hands.

He thinks that the SLP's constitution should be rewritten so that the SLP enjoys more autonomy from the Labour Party nationally. There is a case for this proposal. But in Murphy's hands it amounts to a proposal to transform the SLP into his personal fiefdom.

He thinks that the way to "overcome" the SLP's problems after the referendum is to argue that no-one should turn their back on the SLP because of a one-off vote one day in September, instead of mapping out a positive programme for social change on the back of the "no" vote.

He thinks that the way to rebuild the SLP's membership is by offering cut-price membership — £1 a year — rather than by offering some decent politics.

The left in the Labour Party and the trade unions in Scotland should follow up the leadership contest by organising a Scottish Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (SCLV) in preparation for May's general election.

The political basis of that SCLV would be along the lines of the policies advocated by the left candidates in the leadership contest. This would facilitate winning affiliations and support for the campaign from the Scottish CLPs and trade unions (and trade union branches) which backed Neil Findlay and Katy Clark.

Materials produced by the SCLV could be used in constituencies where the Labour candidate had signed up to the campaign, and SCLV individual supporters could target their election campaigning activities at those constituencies.

**This would maintain the momentum created by the leadership contest, provide a clear left-wing case for a vote for Labour, and consolidate a left bloc of individual SLP members, SLP candidates and elected representatives and sections of the trade unions.**





# Help Greek left defy the banks!

By Dora Polenta

**Greece will have new parliamentary elections early, on 25 January. According to all recent opinion polls, the left party Syriza, which lost the June 2012 election narrowly to the conservative New Democracy (ND) party, is now well ahead of ND. On all the poll figures, Syriza and the Greek Communist Party (KKE) between them will win a parliamentary majority on 25 January.**

The early elections followed the failure on 29 December of the ND-led government's third attempt to get Parliament to elect a new President.

A wave of celebration followed outside the parliament. The movements that have been in the frontline of the struggle against the cuts Memoranda imposed by the IMF-EU-European Central Bank "Troika" were once again in the vanguard.

The sacked media workers of ERT; the migrant workers of General Recycling, who earlier had gone to occupy their workplace; the cleaners at the ministry of economics and the school guards, who are both victims of "reserve employment" (partial lay-off), all made their way to Syntagma Square.

"The vote has just finished" said Tasos Anastasiadis, representative of the Coordination against Shut-Down and Reserve Employment. "The most hated government in recent years has been overthrown. Now begins the great struggle to ensure that the overthrow of the Samaras-Venizelos government will be translated into a victory of the working class people and popular strata who have been in the vanguard of struggles for so many years!"

"The regime of Samaras-Venizelos has finally been toppled" said ERT worker Nikos Kleatsas. "Today is a day that the working class have been awaiting for a long time. It is time for Samaras and Venizelos to decorate their helicopters and prepare to leave. Despite the wholesale attack and propaganda against us, ERT has been open for all these 19 months and we are confident that soon will be back in our physical space in Radiomegaro".

Foteini Nikitara, a sacked cleaner from the ministry of economics, said: "Today is a day of happiness for all us struggling cleaners who have been protesting for the last 17 months. The overthrow of the government is a first victory, but we should not lose sight of the fact that our final victory will come when we are given back our jobs".

School guard Babis Theodoropoulos added: "After one and a half year of struggle, the day has come. The school guards, the cleaners, the strikers of Coca Cola, the ERT workers, the cement workers from Halkida, the millions of unemployed and redundant workers, the immigrants, the Syrians and the Pakistanis, we are all happy and united for the government's overthrow. It's time to get our jobs back. The fight has just begun".

The outgoing government and the ruling class have already begun a campaign to terrorise voters. They focusing on the "risk of leaving the euro" and Greece descending into chaos.

They try convince people that if a Syriza government is formed all their hard work will be lost. We will be outside the European "family". We will lose all the benefits of the euro. We will "burn together in hell."

Let us not underestimate the fear that can be generated by this "campaign of terror", orchestrated by the political establishment and its media acolytes, the financial oligarchy, the shipowners, the bankers, the industrialists, and all the international political and financial forces which have supported the government of Samaras and Venizelos.

ND representative Maria Spiraki asked Greek people to "imagine" what life will be like in Greece after bankruptcy and exit from the euro. But already since the onset of the crisis:

- One million people have been made redundant
- Unemployment has increased 190.5%
- 30% of small business have shut down

- GDP has shrunk 25%
- Wages have been cut 38%
- Pensions have been cut 45%
- The number of people living at or below the poverty level has rises 98%
- Depression has increased 273%
- Child deaths have increased 43%.

The left — mainly Syriza, KKE, and the far-left alliance Antarsya — should enter this battle together, despite the political and ideological differences. A united front and an electoral alliance aiming at the formation of the government of the Left with Syriza at its centre would not mean uncritical support for Syriza's leadership, or sidelining political-ideological differences and each party's organisational independence.

A common electoral front would means a joint battle against the coalition government, but each component of the Left contributing to the battle with its own positions and proposals and through its own campaign.

If a united electoral front of Syriza with the KKE and Antarsya were formed. It would be a tremendous boost of confidence for the rank and file members of all three parties, and for the working class and social movements. The dynamic and political reference of this united front would have been much broader than the additive political and social influence of the three parties separately.

However, given sectarianism and fragmentation on the Greek Left, there is only one choice: Critical support, from a working class perspective, for the formation of a Syriza government as a first step towards the formation of a government of the Left.

## HIGHLIGHT

**The highlight of the speech by Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras to Syriza's congress at the start of January came when he saluted the cleaners from the ministry of economics, praising their 18 months of uncompromised class struggle and promising to reinstate their jobs and vindicate their struggle.**

Another highlight of his speech was a commitment to adhere to the "Thessaloniki programme" announced by Tsipras back in September 2014 as a first step to offer relief to the widespread poverty and destitution in Greek society.

Syriza is also committed to "suspend auctions of primary residences", that is, seizures by the banks of homes of people unable to keep up payments.

Yet Syriza has seriously watered down its earlier commitments to nationalise the banks under workers' and democratic control and to refuse to comply with the Memoranda.

Syriza's central slogan is vague: "The future has started: A Greece of Decency, Justice, and Democracy".

When activists at the Syriza congress interrupted Tsipras's speech to chant "The time has come for the Left to govern", Tsipras responded very cautiously, saying that this is the time for the whole of Greece to celebrate, independent of their historical and political affiliations.

Syriza's program includes the following four major axes:

- Address the humanitarian crisis
- Immediate steps to restart the economy
- A national plan for recovery and workers' rights, with emphasis on the re-instatement of collective bargaining agreements (removed under the Memoranda) and the re-instatement of the minimum wage at the pre-Memorandum level of 750 euros
- Institutional and democratic transformation of public administration.

But the united front of the ruling class and national and international Greek bond holders needs a robust generalised response. And that can be no different from the Syriza conference decision for the renationalisation of all large public enterprises and organisations that have been privatised, and with "public, democratic, workers' control".

The founding conference of Syriza also called for the nationalisation of all banks under social and workers' control is included, putting the issue of ownership and not merely, a "public control" of the banks.

But now Syriza's leaders are trying sidestep the "issue of issues" by giving the impression that a simple "tidying up" of the Greek economy, a fight against corruption, and smooth renegotiation of terms on the debt by Syriza's panel of experts, will give time and resources to finance the program.

The current agreement with the Troika requires the Greek government to pay for the next several years the colossal amount of 10 billion euros per year in interest payments. Compliance with this condition will lead to successive annual austerity programs and is not compatible with the government of the Left prioritising the needs of the working class and popular strata.

Defiance of the national and international Greek bond holders, along with the nationalisation of the banks under workers' control, should be the "hub" for the program of the Left. Those measures, along with reduction of military expenditure and taxation of church property, would yield the initial resources to support Syriza's social program.

A big issue in the Greek economy is the (non) taxation of business profits. Theoretically today profits are taxed at 26%, with Samaras promising a gradual reduction to 15%. Practically everyone knows that the actual tax paid ends up more like 5%.

However according to Syriza's leaders, there is no intention to increase (or decrease) the taxation of capital. That is outside Syriza's conference commitments. Syriza's leaders also promise to achieve "balanced budgets".

In his speech Tsipras stated: "We reject the logic of unrealistic primary surpluses, which is the other name of austerity. And we remain firm in pursuing primarily balanced budgets and the need to exclude from the calculation of the deficit the public investment budget".

## REVITALISE WORKING-CLASS POWER

**A government of the left will need to mobilise and revitalise or recreate forms of working class and popular power in order to enforce its program of socio-economic changes at the expense of the capitalist class.**

It is an illusion to think that it is possible to avoid these critical choices and confrontations and instead rely on vaguely-sketched "wider" alliances, without ruptures and overthrows. The only real allies of the Greek left are the Left and of the resistance movements in other countries.

Within Greece, the capitalists, bankers, ship owners and other financial oligarchs and members of the political establishment recognise that a government of the Left is objectively antagonistic to their needs and interests. They will battle for the victory of Samaras. If defeated, they will work to strangle a government of the Left and overthrow it.

The aim of Syriza should not be centred on the utopian search for a compromise with the national and international ruling class but on ruptures and overthrows.

Yet, in a negative development, on 3 January the central committee of Syriza voted to construct Syriza's ballot lists on the following principles and alliances. (The Left Platform withdrew its proposal and abstained in the final vote, and one representative of the Communist Tendency voted against).

1. Syriza will approach KKE and Antarsya. Tsipras asked both parties to "realise that the battle that we have to give exceeds the existing political differences within the Left".

2. Syriza will approach the Democratic Left (Dimar), which was previously in Samaras's coalition. Tsipras said: "even if we do not manage to form an agreement before the elections, the need for a broader coalition for social salvation and recovery of the country will remain after the election".

3. The Greens, and broadly any "social and political forces that agree with the principles of the Syriza's agenda and com-



plement it with their own individual priorities”.

4. “Forces and individuals from the broader social and political space of the Left and Ecology but also from movements developed in the period of the memorandum” and from all political forces and individuals that supported Tsipras's candidacy for the presidency of the European Commission.

Meanwhile, the leaders of the KKE (Communist Party) refuse to cooperate with anyone, because in their view those who do not agree with them are “traitors”. In that sense they have already predetermined the failure of the attempt to build a government of the Left. When the Syriza leaders constantly water down their policies, that in turn provides an excuse for the KKE leaders.

The Greek left must:

- Fight for a government of the Left — and not of “national salvation”
- Work to unite activists of different groups for the formation of a government of the Left, as a starting point of a pro-working-class narrative and journey
- Say no to the Syriza leaders' illusions of a way out through debt negotiations with the Troika
- Oppose calls for a National Responsibility Government or for “a government of all Greeks”.
- Revitalise Syriza's rank and file in every neighbourhood and fight the battle of the candidate lists in line with Syriza's conference programmatic agreements. No collaboration with the nationalists of Anel, no cooperation with the opportunist pro-Memorandum politicians of Dimar.

The collapse of the coalition ND-Pasok government under the pressures of the struggles of the working class and youth and the lengthy capitalist crisis justifies the persistence of the revolutionary left on an anti-capitalist road. The revolutionary left, inside and outside Syriza, played a big role in shifting the mass movement to the Left, and now must act as a force giving hope for thousands of activists that this momentum will not be halted by the compromises of the leadership of Syriza.

The need for a revolutionary left pole, politically autonomous, is confirmed every day. The revolutionary left must confront the attacks and extortion of the capitalists, the EU and IMF, which will intensify if Syriza wins the election and aim for towards the complete subjugation of a government centred on Syriza.

It must continue as the left and working-class opposition under a government of the Left, supporting the vanguard and the most class-conscious sections of the working class, demanding the escalation of struggles and leading every economic and political battle.

## FASCISTS

**The revolutionary left must lead a fight to smash the fascist gangs, to legalise all immigrants and grant citizenship to their children.**

As the slogan of the government of the Left comes close to being materialised, the return to softer reformism, or the search for a more “realistic solution”, is not the solution. It is an illusion that if the revolutionary left prunes down its anti-capitalism then it will gain massive influence. All it will achieve is to let down the most advanced sections of the working class and youth.

The government and the ruling class did not want these early elections, which threaten to destabilise the fragile situation of Greek capitalism. However, the government, pressed by the funding gap and the need to immediately close a new agreement with the Troika, took the risk of speeding up the elections for a new President.

Samaras hoped that a third Memorandum, with new harsh anti-working class measures, could be brought for ratification to Parliament after a triumph for the government over the Presidency.

The second Memorandum was due to expire on 31 December. The Samaras government made an agreement with the Troika for a two month extension period while the “fine details” of the next Memorandum — which certainly will not be called “Memorandum” — are agreed. Samaras had hoped to announce that Greece would leave the “bail-out”, but the extension was the best he could do, since the Troika was not prepared to accept the stories about “return to growth” and “return to the markets” with which the government had sat-



**Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras**

urated the Greek public for many months.

The duo of Samaras-Venizelos government has passed through parliament a hard and unpopular budget for 2015 (so much for overcoming the crisis, returning to growth, and being ready for the markets...). This budget includes new tax increases to the amount of 1.5 billion euros, disproportionately hitting disproportionately working-class people; a further reduction in social spending by 1 billion euros; reducing public investment program by 400 million euros, etc. Just one tax was to be reduced — the tax on the profits of business!

All that austerity was to allow the government to make the debt payments. Just for 2015 the interest the government is due to pay reaches 5.7 billion euros. In 2015, overall, Greece is due to pay 22.5 billion euros.

The government hoped for support in electing a new president from the now numerous “independent” careerists MPs, mostly people who have seceded from ND, Pasok, Anel, Dimar (and two from the fascist party Golden Dawn).

Before the final vote on 29 December final voting, scenarios were being unleashed where the 180 would be achieved via the help of the Golden Dawn MPs, who are mostly in jail. The government vehemently denied these rumours, stating that if the Golden Dawn MPs voted in favour of Stavros Dimas, who was nominated by the government for president of the republic, then the government would vote against in order to invalidate the process.

However, the government was happy to accept the two votes of the independent former Golden Dawn MPs (one of whom faces a pending court case).

The government managed to “persuade” some others by various above and below the table methods, but failed to collect the necessary number of 180.

An open political agreement with the prisoners of Golden Dawn leaders would have had a very big political cost, one the government did not dare take on. Scenarios for the formation of a “special purpose” government, which could bring in more votes from the parliamentary groups of Anel and Dimar did not go far, due to the lack of willing bourgeois politicians to head such a government. The idea of nominating a more neutral political personality for President, such as Dimar leader Fotis Kouvelis, fell because of internal political conflicts inside Dimar and objections ultra-right ex-fascist MPs now in ND (Voridis, Plevris, Georgiadis etc).

Five years on from when the crisis broke shortly after the October 2009 elections, four governments have fallen. The first was the Pasok government of George Papandreou, which lasted two years from its emphatic electoral victory and only one year from when it started seeking an IMF and EU debt “bail-out” in May 2010.

The second was the coalition government led by the banker

Lucas Papademos, which lasted for seven months, November 2011 to May 2012. The third was the caretaker government of Panagiotis Pikrammenos between the two parliamentary elections of May and of June 2012. The fourth is the outgoing Samaras-Venizelos coalition.

Now anxiety for the future of Greek capitalism is evident in the national and international ruling class, and reflected in the dramatic drop in the stock market, the new rise of the “spread” in interest rate on Greek debt, and the escalation of hysterical statements against Syriza.

The traditional two party system, under which Pasok and ND got 85% of the vote, has collapsed. Pasok, and other political parties such as Dimar and Laos, have fragmented and lost their links with society with unprecedented speed.

A model for an approach to Syriza by the revolutionary left now is suggested by Trotsky's proposal for the tasks of Belgian Marxists in relation to the reformist programme of Belgian social-democracy in the mid-30s.

“First, to explain to the advanced workers the political meaning of the 'plan', that is, decipher the manoeuvres of the social-democracy at all stages; secondly, to show in practice to possibly wider circles of workers that insofar as the bourgeoisie tries to put obstacles to the realisation of the plan we fight hand in hand with the workers to help them make this experiment.

“We share the difficulties of the struggle but not the illusions. Our criticism of the illusions must, however, not increase the passivity of the workers and give it a pseudo-theoretic justification but on the contrary push the workers forward. Under these conditions, the inevitable disappointment with the 'Labor Plan' will not spell the deepening of passivity but, on the contrary, the going over of the workers to the revolutionary road”.

“If we had to present a plan to the Belgian proletariat, this plan would have had an altogether different aspect. Unfortunately, the Belgian proletariat gave this mandate not to us but to the Belgian Labor Party [POB], and the plan reflects two facts: the pressure of the proletariat on the POB and the conservative character of this party...”

“When we say to the masses that to realise this imperfect plan it is necessary to struggle to the end, we are far from covering up the deception; on the contrary, we are helping the masses to expose it by their own experience...”

**“The leaders of the POB do not want a struggle. But they are caught in the wheels of the crisis of capitalism and of reformism. They were forced to proclaim the plan and even to make of it the platform of the Belgian proletariat. It is a fact. What is our task? To help the workers to turn the wheels into which the opportunist leaders have been forced to thrust their hands”.**



# Britain's neo-liberal carboot sale

John Cunningham reviews *Private Island: Why Britain Now Belongs to Someone Else*, by James Meek (Verso Press) and *How To Speak To Money* by John Lanchester (Faber and Faber).

**Both these books perform a valuable service to those concerned with mounting a sustained critical analysis of how capitalism in its present day forms actually works. Although neither author draws any radical conclusions from his analysis, there is rich material in these pages to learn from.**

Much of what James Meek has to say about the state of the British economy will probably come as no surprise to readers of *Solidarity*. He relates in some detail the now familiar and sordid tale of how whole swathes of British industry were flogged off, often at rock-bottom prices, to a cabal of free-market carpetbaggers who were then bailed out by the taxpayer (me and you) when the shit hit the fan in 2008.

What is much more interesting, I think, are the details of what this neo-liberal car boot sale entailed.

Thatcher's policy of dismantling state-owned industries was, at the time, often described by her political opponents as "madness", although this ignores the fact that, to neo-liberals, it was logical (remember, "There is no alternative") and undebatable.

As a political project it was, undoubtedly successful (depending of course on which side of the barricades you are standing) and, indeed, much of it came to be accepted as "common-sense", as the bedrock of the economic terrain of the UK. Certainly Tony Blair and Gordon Brown accepted it as such and embraced it with enthusiasm; this was possibly Thatcher's most enduring legacy. Yet, when the dust has settled the epithet of "madness" sticks and this is what shines out in much of Meek's book.

I will draw the attention of the reader to the chapter on the railways, "Signal Failure". Here fantasy and the quite frankly bizarre congeal to provide a narrative which at times reads like a marriage of Franz Kafka and The Mad Hatter's Tea Party.

Meek centres his account on the attempt to construct HS1 "...the single most expensive non-military task ever undertaken by Britain alone" — the modernisation of the West Coast Mainline railway between Glasgow and London. Starting in 1997 and finally abandoned in 2005. HS1 was originally budgeted at £1.5 billion but finally cost £9 billion, much of it from the taxpayer.

After much huffing and puffing all there was to show for this huge expenditure was some upgrading of the track be-

tween Rugby and Crewe. It is worth noting, as Meek points out, that the title West Coast Main Line (WCML) is a misnomer and is actually a complex network of railway lines connecting numerous cities and towns between Glasgow and London. It is the oldest inter-city railway in the world and had not been updated since the mid-1960s. By the time of privatisation (1993) it was falling apart.

How exactly do you throw away £9 billion on a project that was, by any standards, an utter failure? Your first step into the rabbit hole is to sack all or most of your technical experts, planners and engineers and contract out all the specialised work.

You then let your "team" be led up the garden path by accountants and people who often had no experience in the railway industry. People like Robert Horton, chairman of the newly privatised railways, who had established his reputation at BP (until he was sacked in 1992) or Rod Muttram, the new director of electrical engineering who had been "head-hunted" from the arms industry.

## CONSULTANTS

**As Meek points out "Of the eventual core team of eight consultants [on HS1], only two had experience of British mainline railways, one a very junior level. Four of them were American or normally based in the USA".**

Most importantly, none of the consultants had any experience of the proposed new technology around which HS1 was to be built — moving block signalling. In fact very few people in the world had any experience of moving block signalling, for the very good reason that it did not exist. This is simply mind-boggling: an entire, extremely complex, railway network was to be modernised and rebuilt using a technology that was not tried and tested.

Some preliminary research was underway in mainland Europe and a version of the technology is used on the Docklands Light Railway and on the Shanghai metro. An attempt to implement the technology on the Jubilee Line was an unmitigated disaster. Today, twenty years on, the picture remains the same — "there is not a single main-line railway anywhere in the world, no matter how sophisticated, that uses moving block".

The technical details of moving block signalling need not concern us here. What is important is that the privatisation of the railways, driven as it was by the desire to make a fast buck and equally driven by the suspicion and irrational distrust of any state enterprise, meant that advice from the people who actually did know what they were talking about was ignored.

The outsourcing to numerous contractors coupled with the sacking of its many in-house specialists meant that Railtrack (British Rail's privatised successor) had few if any staff to oversee the project and it ran out of control. All that was compounded by awarding a contract to Richard Branson's Virgin Rail, putting further pressure on Railtrack to deliver on its fairytale, while its two consortia for developing a signalling system failed to work together, making disaster look even more certain. Railtrack went into receivership in 2001. Meek doesn't mention the new proposals for HS2 currently being energetically pushed by both the government and the Labour opposition.

If, as I suggest, the HS1 fiasco looks like a chapter from Lewis Carroll, then the language used by neo-liberals, financiers and "global economists" can appear equally bizarre, though mercifully Meek spares us this extra pain and his book is extremely readable.

This linguistic zone, where the world of big money encounters the English language, is where John Lanchester steps in. How many of us have scratched our heads, when listening to the inevitable "something in the city" grey suit on TV and wondered what the hell is he talking about? What on earth is a "hedge fund", what's the difference between "shares" and "bonds" ... and so on. Lanchester does a sterling job explaining these terms and in the process revealing that, for example, "Quantitative Easing" does not, as commonly thought, mean printing money — it is in fact money that is generated electronically and then sold as government bonds.

One aspect that I found interesting was the way that financiers and speculators will actually try and invent new ways of making money. So, to take one example, someone somewhere had the bright idea that if there was nothing currently to speculate on, then why not gamble on "futures", where the proceeds from, say, next year's groundnut harvest (or the year after) in Ghana are sold on many times over? Even the proceeds from David Bowie's future royalties can be treated in this way.

Lanchester is also very good at explaining the way that property and mortgages (even dud mortgages) are now central to financial strategy as the opportunities for exploiting new areas of the planet (e.g. mineral resources) become harder to find.

**These are two useful books to have on your shelf, to learn from and refer to when some Blair-clone on TV starts jabbering on about "GDP per capita" or "credit default swap". They will also be good to have around when the WCML finally conks out and you're stuck in Crewe.**

## The demand for a radically different society

The second edition of *Class against Class, the miners' strike 1984-5* is now available. New items include a review of "The Battle for Orgreave" by the late Rob Dawber, an account of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, and retrospective analysis of the importance of the strike.

### From the introduction:

Between March 1984 and March 1985, British miners fought one of the great epics of working-class history. In scope, intensity and duration their strike is unique in the history of the British labour movement.

At issue in that strike was the fate of the "social democratic" welfare-state "compromise" between the ruling class and the working class that had held since the Second World War.

When the Tories launched their offensive, the miners responded with a head-on challenge to Thatcher and Thatcherism. Implicitly, they challenged capitalism itself.

The miners' rallying cry, "no economic pit closures", was the demand for a radically different society. It implied a society whose mainspring is not profit but need. It implied socialism.

The miners fought for the whole working class; the tragedy was that the working class movement did not rally to ensure the victory of the embattled miners.

...The miners' strike came very late in the Thatcherite day. The miners faced a government that was militant, class-war-making, relentless, intent on using the state to break the working class and, immediately, the National Union of Mineworkers.

...The miners were divided: striking miners had to appeal for solidarity from other workers while they were denied solidarity by strike-breaking "working miners", mainly in Nottinghamshire.

...When NUM leader Arthur Scargill told the truth about the Tories' intention to close many coal mines, the Tories denied it, and their press echoed and reinforced their lies. The striking miners and their families were the victims of police violence, but the press, the Tory

politicians, and — too often — Labour politicians, succeeded in making miners' violence on picket lines a major propaganda weapon against the miners.

...The idea of class allegiance and class solidarity was sharpened for those who already had it, or a half-petrified residue of it; and it shone like a searchlight into the activities, the purposes, the understanding, and the lives of new thousands and tens of thousands. ...Whole layers of the working class felt themselves profoundly alienated from the way the British economy and British politics were organised. The women of the mining communities were roused to action and self-assertion as never before.

... Around the embattled miners, many groups and individuals rallied and clustered, mobilised and threw what they could into the struggle.

...The miners were defeated. After the defeat the working-class movement would experience decades of destruction and decline. ... Those who fought and led the miners' strike will yet be recognised in working-class history as the labour movement champions and heroes they were and remain. Those who led that strike, the glaring political faults of Arthur Scargill — a good man fallen among Stalinists — and the NUM leaders notwithstanding, will be recognised as the farsighted and principled labour movement leaders they surely were.

The strike will be the greatest of the sources from which the British working class draws "historical experience, understanding, power and idealism".



**Copies of the book can be bought for £8.99 at [workersliberty.com/books](http://workersliberty.com/books)**



# Finance and the “other exploitation”

Martin Thomas reviews *Profiting without producing*, by Costas Lapavistas (Verso 2013)

**Capitalist exploitation is not just by the boss extracting from the worker, in return for a meagre more-or-less “living wage”, an expensible value-added which may be something like three times what’s paid out in wages.**

It also comes from making working-class households pay interest on debts which they run up, often on disadvantageous terms, because of their relative poverty and relative lack of power in the markets.

This “other” exploitation is not a new idea. Costas Lapavistas quotes references to it from Marx’s *Theories of Surplus Value*, and Marx also wrote about it in the *Communist Manifesto*:

“No sooner is the exploitation of the labourer by the manufacturer, so far, at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.”

It is, Lapavistas suggests, a bigger factor now because of the “financialisation” of capitalism.

He attempts no numerical estimate of the size of the “other” exploitation. US figures show that in recent times debt service payments have taken up to 13% of household disposable income, easing after the 2007-8 crash to about 10%: [bit.ly/otherex1](http://bit.ly/otherex1), [bit.ly/otherex2](http://bit.ly/otherex2).

These are figures for payments both of “principal” (the actual amount borrowed for a mortgage or on a credit card) and of interest, so overestimate the exploitation. According to J W Mason ([bit.ly/jwmas](http://bit.ly/jwmas)) interest payments were about 8% of household disposable income from the late 1980s to the crash.

That is a noticeable exploitation, though still much smaller than exploitation-in-production, which has been estimated by Fred Moseley and others at about 300%.

By far the bulk of the stock of household debt, Lapavistas shows, is mortgage debt rather than credit card debt or other forms of consumer credit. Indeed, and surprisingly, in the USA (the only country for which a good long run of statistics is available), consumer credit ballooned from 1945 to the early 1960s, but has been fairly static as a percentage of GDP since then. Mortgage debt has expanded much more than consumer credit.

Since interest rates on credit cards, payday loans, and the like are much higher than on mortgages, it may be that consumer-credit interest payments are a much bigger propor-



**Mortgage debt is the biggest proportion of household debt**

tion of household interest payments than consumer-credit debt is of household debt. US figures show that monthly debt-service payment on consumer credit totals about the same as monthly debt-service payment on mortgage debt.

It is commonly said that household financialisation has been a means for capital to keep consumer demand buoyant while wages stagnate.

Capitalists selling to working-class consumers of course benefit here and there from people buying things on credit. But Lapavistas’s figures show that the outstanding total of consumer credit has not risen markedly faster than GDP in recent decades. Most of the increased household debt is mortgage debt. That has been rising steadily for decades, even before “financialisation”. It rose in eras of faster-increasing wages, too.

The reason why is that it has become more and more advantageous for workers to buy houses if they can (because they themselves can pocket a bit of the “other exploitation”, by way of capital gains on their houses, instead of paying “other exploitation” tribute to landlords); more and more workers stretch their budgets, sometimes grotesquely, to do that; and, from decade to decade though not year to year, more workers can afford to. They squeeze their consumption of consumer goods in order to “get on the housing ladder”.

Some older people then cash in their gains from “other exploitation”, by remortgaging, to buy consumer goods; but the net effect on day-to-day consumer spending of more people paying bigger mortgages is downward rather than upward.

On the other hand, if a lot of working-class consumers become crippled by consumer debt, then they spend less on day-to-day consumption, not more. The capitalists to whom

they pay interest benefit, but not (longer-term) the capitalists whose consumer products they might buy.

J W Mason finds: “The rise in [household] debt [in the USA] in the 1980s is explained by a rise in non-demand expenditures [i.e. expenditures which do not generate consumer demand]. Specifically, it is entirely due to the rise in interest payments, which doubled from 3-4 percent of household income in the 1950s and 1960s to over 8 percent in the late 1980s. Interest payments continued around this level up to the Great Recession, falling somewhat only in the past few years” — [bit.ly/jwmas](http://bit.ly/jwmas).

Currently 34% of US households are carrying forward credit-card debt from month to month, and it was 44% in 2009. About 15% roll over \$2,500 or more in credit card debt each month. Average credit card debt per borrower is \$5,234, so many of that 15% must have way over \$2,500 outstanding. In the USA, people seeking credit counselling in 2013 had nearly six cards, on average, and average unsecured debt of over \$17,500, equivalent to half their average yearly income.

This is a big thing, though maybe not more “other” exploitation than in the heyday of the pawnbroker. In England, in 1870 a parliamentary enquiry found that over 200 million items had been pawned the previous year (an average of 40 per household). The ordinary legal rate of interest for pawnbrokers was 27%, and they were legally entitled to charge rates up to 1014% for small loans for short periods. Pawnbroking reached its peak just before World War One in England, and just after that in the USA.

Lapavistas calls on the left to campaign for publicly-owned banks, operating as public services; public controls on financial trading; and a reconstruction of public services and welfare.

I think he is right. As Trotsky put it: “The socialist program of expropriation, i.e., of political overthrow of the bourgeoisie and liquidation of its economic domination, should in no ... hinder us from advancing, when the occasion warrants, the demand for the expropriation of several key branches of industry vital for national existence or of the most parasitic group of the bourgeoisie...”

**“We reject indemnification... we call upon the masses to rely only upon their own revolutionary strength... we link up the question of expropriation with that of seizure of power by the workers and farmers”.**

• Longer review at [www.workersliberty.org/node/24442](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/24442)

## “Trotskyism” in Wonderland: Workers Power and Ukraine

The left  
By Dale Street

workers  
power 5

**Events in Ukraine in 2014 divided the left in Britain, just as they divided the left internationally.**

In Britain one of the organisations most vociferous in arguing that the Maidan protests were dominated by fascists, culminated in a fascist-led coup, and then triggered a genocidal civil war against the forces of the anti-fascist resistance was Workers Power (WP).

WP opened the year with an article which ignored the nature of the Maidan as a mass protest movement of the disaffected. Instead, it reduced it to a plaything of rival imperialist powers and their allies in Ukraine.

An article published in March wrongly claimed that fascists had been the dominant force in the Maidan and that a “neo-liberal-fascist government” was now in power — backing up the claim by sticking the label “fascist” on a host of non-fascist government ministers.

In June WP performed a somersault over Russia’s annexation of the Crimea. Previously, WP had argued for self-determination for the Crimea “exercised free of any occupying forces, whether from Kiev or Moscow.”

But now it argued that the control of the peninsula by Russian forces was irrelevant to the outcome of the “referendum”: “If there were a referendum with no Russian or Ukrainian troops present, would the result have been any different?”

Imagine the scene: May, 2015; the Tories are ahead in the

opinion polls; the Tories cancel the general election and proclaim themselves the government for another five years; WP responds: If the general election had gone ahead, would the result have been any different?

Summer saw WP produce a special supplement on Ukraine. An article covering the killings of 2 May in the Trade Union House in Odessa relied on articles by a 9/11 truther, a conspiracy-theory website, and a website run by Major Alan Astudillo of the 1st Earth Battalion of the New Earth Army, as reliable sources of information.

Another article claimed that “300 CIA and FBI operatives plus hundreds of US mercenaries” were fighting in Ukraine, and that the Kiev government was planning “a genocidal war to cleanse the country of Russophones, Russians, Jews and other minorities.”

The supplement also argued that the separatist forces in the south-east constituted the “anti-fascist resistance” — a feat achieved only by ignoring the actual politics of the top-down and heavily controlled “movement”, one which enjoyed the support of the Russian and European far right and fascists.

Following Russia’s invasion of late September WP performed another somersault.

In the past WP had condemned “any overt or covert military invasion of any part of Ukraine by Russia.” But now a WP article published in October could not mutter a word of condemnation.

The same article which could not see Russian troops and tanks defined the leadership of the breakaway “people’s republics” as “an unstable constellation of separatists, oppor-

tunists, workers’ representatives, and agents of Russian imperialism and Ukrainian oligarchs.”

The article did not explain what “workers’ representatives” were doing in such a coalition. Nor did the article explain WP’s new characterisation of the leadership — which was no different politically now from what it had been from the outset.

WP’s final article of the year dealt with the elections for the Ukrainian parliament and the elections held in the “people’s republics”.

The former were given a clean bill of health by 2,321 observers, including representatives from 21 states and 20 international organisations. This did not prevent WP from claiming that the elections “hardly satisfied even the most basic requirements of ‘European democracy’.”

The latter elections, despite most would-be candidates and organisations having been barred from standing, were greeted by WP as evidence that the inhabitants of the “people’s republics” remained loyal to the breakaway rump states.

Throughout the year WP had relied heavily on the Ukrainian Stalinist sect Borotba as a source of “information” about events in Ukraine and the “people’s republics”.

The last week in December saw WP campaigning for the release of four Borotba members from detention — by the authorities in the Donetsk “People’s Republic”!

**It was a fitting end to a year of factual inaccuracy and political incoherence.**

• Full analysis of WP’s politics on the Ukraine, see: [www.workersliberty.org/node/24444](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/24444)



# Back to basics in the unions!

By Ira Berkovic

**The most explosive and inspiring flashes of class struggle in Britain in the three years since the defeat of the public sector pensions dispute have not been national-level pitched battles between large employers and/or the government, and one or several big unions, but local-scale struggles, usually over pay.**

Outsourced cleaners at the University of London and SOAS have won significant victories, bringing the workers nearer to parity with their directly employed colleagues' sick pay, holiday entitlement, and pension arrangements.

Members of BECTU at the Ritzy Cinema in south London struck repeatedly to win significant wage increases, and then fended off a job-cuts plan proposed by management as retribution for the strike campaign.

Unison members at Care UK in Doncaster struck for 90 days (non-consecutively) against pay cuts of 35% (although eventually settling by a large majority for a deal that ameliorated those cuts only slightly).

Lambeth College workers have staged all-out strikes against the imposition of new contracts.

Charity workers at St. Mungo's Broadway forced a reversal of a management decision to cut pay and attack terms and conditions after a week-long strike.

The context here is the squeeze on wages, and simultaneous much-trumpeted "recovery". The combination is a catalyst for working-class resistance.

How can revolutionary socialists in the labour movement help such struggles, spread them, catalyse new ones, give them a political perspective? We need to refocus on, and step up basic organisation at workplace level. We need to discuss how to make our workplace targeted socialist political propaganda more effective.

## WORKPLACE BULLETINS

**Socialist workplace bulletins have many functions.**

They are mirrors, in which workers see our own experiences reflected back at us, helping us understand them better and sometimes see as contestable what before we saw as inevitable. They are news sheets, telling us information about our workplaces and industries we might not otherwise know. And they are propaganda, making political arguments about the connections between our experiences and struggles at work and the way our society is organised.

It is no coincidence that one of the most significant (and, indeed, one of the only) recent rank-and-file movements in Britain, the construction workers' network which has won victories against pay cuts and deskilling in incredibly adverse conditions, had the *Siteworker* bulletin at its heart.

While it was not a socialist *workplace* bulletin as such, the role *Siteworker* has played, particularly in the successful 2011 dispute against the attempt by construction bosses to unilaterally impose worse agreements, shows the importance of bulletins as tools for organising, discussing, and building workers' self-confidence and self-awareness.

Of Workers' Liberty's own bulletins, the best-established is *Tubeworker*, which has been published by socialists working on London Underground since 1991. The bulletin is acknowledged as a valuable news source, as well as allowing Workers' Liberty Tube workers to argue for socialist politics among their colleagues.

## ORGANISING

**"Back to basics" organising in workplaces is also needed to drag the labour movement out of the slump it finds itself in.**

Now half the size it was at its height in the late 70s, and with nearly 40% of all union members over 50 (a percentage which has nearly doubled since 1995), the labour movement is completely unfamiliar to many workers.

An emphasis on regular communication between the union and its members, accessible and participatory meetings, and visible union campaigning on issues that matter to members in workplaces can rebuild forums inside unions from which the confidence to launch new struggles can be developed.

There is a risk that socialists attempt to substitute for unions, taking on all of the fundamental but often time-consuming and draining tasks of producing basic literature and organising and facilitating meetings. Without a vibrant and



Inspiring class struggle in 2014: Ritzy cinema strike

well-organised labour movement to intervene in, sometimes there is no way around doing those things ourselves. But it is essential that we remain anchored to a wider project of socialist transformation of the labour movement. Producing bulletins, selling socialist papers and conducting socialist campaign activity as openly as possible in the workplace is as important in rebuilding the movement. As is linking up with other socialists in our workplaces, industries, and cities, to discuss politics.

## STRIKE SOLIDARITY

**An emphasis on basic organising, within an orientation to the potential of local strikes and struggles over pay and other "cost-of-living" issues, also means stepping up strike solidarity.**

Every strike should have a strike fund, levied by the union body organising the strike, which appeals for public donations. Is the job of socialists to argue for that. As well as material solidarity, socialists can aid strikes by turning them into wider campaigns.

Local workers' struggles are relatively "normal". Moments of all-out class warfare, with the more-or-less all the forces of labour visibly arrayed against the forces of capital and its state are rarer, and we have not seen one in Britain since the miners' strike of 1984-5. However less dramatic, national-level strikes are possible. Acting against that potential is the utterly abject experience of the labour movement's recent attempts to confront the Tory government head on.

Those attempts, the 2011 pensions dispute and the 2014 public sector pay dispute, were sabotaged in the most craven way imaginable by surrender-prone union leaderships, including some which claim, variously, to be "fighting" leaderships, "left" leaderships, or even Marxists.

In 2011, union leaders talked a good fight, before leading members into a series of disconnected one-day strikes which failed to exert any significant pressure on the government, and then signing up to a shoddy deal.

Last year, our leaders decided to bypass the one-day-strikes stage of the process and jumped straight from the fighting talk to the shoddy deal: the leaders of Unite, Unison, and GMB all recommended that their members accept a deal which hardly improved on the initially-offered 1% pay increase. With no significant counter-pressure inside any of the unions, the members duly agreed, voting to endorse the deal by majorities of 81%, 65%, and 96% respectively.

The NHS pay dispute continues, with two four-hour strikes staged so far, most recently on 24 November 2014. Members of the smaller professional associations and unions have tended to be more solid and better-organised on strike days; Unison, the largest union in the NHS, has handed out enough exemptions to ensure that any of its members who somehow remained galvanised by the non-campaign the union has run would probably not have to strike anyway.

For much of the period since early 2011, socialists in the labour movement, Workers' Liberty included, have focused on advocating strategies for national disputes. Those national disputes have been comprehensively undermined. To continue to orient solely, or even principally, at that level would be to miss the potential for struggles at workplace level.

However, an increase in workplace-focused activity does not mean struggles at a national level will not take place.

The Fire Brigades Union has continued its fight against attacks on firefighters' pensions, striking dozens of times. The University and College Union is still in dispute, just, over attacks on university workers' pensions. In national strikes, socialist arguments for militant and creative strategies, and public, political campaigns to accompany industrial action, remain essential.

## RANK-AND-FILE

**Ultimately, the force capable of transforming the labour movement will have both a local/workplace and national-union dimension. The missing element that could've prevented the sabotage of recent disputes was a well-organised, independent rank-and-file, that could've exerted pressure on the union leaderships and acted independently of them if necessary.**

Building rank-and-file power requires "back to basics" organising and socialist politics at workplace level, and caucuses and networks within unions at regional and national level that can fight for democratic reform and radical transformation within unions.

In the wake of 2011 pensions sell-out in the National Union of Teachers, Workers' Liberty members helped create the Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC), a rank-and-file network based on the NUT's structures, but independent of them. LANAC is only three years old and still needs to be built up, but it is a glimmer of hope and glimpse of what's possible.

Activists are discussing something similar in the local government sector of Unison. A larger-than-expected minority voted to reject the pay deal, and a special conference to review the decision will take place on 24 March.

So far, the Unison left's response has been inadequate, focusing on calls for a united left candidate for next year's General Secretary election. This tired model of broad left electoralism cannot be a basis for transformative struggles we need to revolutionise our unions. Workers' Liberty members and others have set up the "Local Government Workers" blog, and will be organising fringe events at the special conference to explore the possibility for a new rank-and-file network in Unison.

## HISTORIC

**In the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, branches opposed to the leadership's suspension of union democracy in the wake of a financial crisis and the Tories ending "payroll checkoff" (the automatic deduction of union members' dues from their wages), have called a conference on 17 January.**

Historical and contemporary experiences can inform our activity over the coming period. Heroic rank-and-file movements like the World War One-era shop stewards' movement, the National Minority Movement of the early 1920s, the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation in Australia in the 1970s, Teamsters for a Democratic Union in America, and others show the potential for movements which combine orientations to workplace-level struggle with national-level reform struggles within and across unions.

Workers' Liberty cannot bring movements like that into being at will. But we can use our resources to make the most meaningful impact we can — by producing effective socialist workplace bulletins, advocating (and, where possible, practising) an emphasis on "back to basics" workplace organising, and seeking opportunities for the development of rank-and-file networks within unions. Our project, to revolutionise the labour movement so that it can become a force capable of conquering power, is a huge one, and we're a long way off from realising it. But it begins with all of us doing as much as we can, wherever we are.

**Continuing austerity will continue to generate struggles in the year ahead. Whether those struggles spread, succeed, and can be elevated beyond workplace level, and whether our unions can be transformed in the process, depends on what we do.**



# Attack on union democracy

By a PCS member

**In an unprecedented attack on democracy, the leadership of the PCS civil service union has announced the suspension of National and Group elections for possibly up to 12 months.**

The National Executive's (NEC's) decision — by the controlling faction, the Democracy Alliance (made up of the Socialist Party, SWP, Communist Party and old-school centrists) — was made by a mere 15-3 vote (there are 35 members and officers of the NEC). It came without consultation with members and in complete secrecy. There was not even a prior warning to branches that an emergency NEC had been called to take this decision.

This move is being spun by the leadership as a necessary defence against the To-

ries rather than explained for what it is — an attempt to avoid an election while they try to cope with the financial and organisational crumbling of the Union in the face of Government attacks.

It is true that the union is in financial dire straits. AWL activists in PCS are well aware of the motives for the government's attacks on the union and are at the forefront of defending against those attacks. We understand that the blame for these attacks lie with a hostile government. However, our leadership is responsible for our response to them and has failed.

Union democracy isn't a line on a balance sheet to be prioritised or de-prioritised as an "expense" to be pushed through an efficiency saving exercise. For decades our comrades have called for "savings" in the union: we call for our full-

time officers (FTOs) and General Secretary to be elected and on wages commensurate with our membership's. If the General Secretary and his Assistant (a member of the Socialist Party) were to halve their salaries — leaving them with more than double the average wage of our membership — we'd save over £100k annually. If every one of the 120 FTO's in PCS — many of the Socialist Party members — were to donate a grand each. If we held workplace ballots rather than postal for Group elections... the list goes on.

Despite all this, it is a matter of principle that members have the ability to elect their representatives and those who negotiate on their behalf. It is a fundamental cornerstone of trade unionism — a democratic leadership (let alone a Marxist one!) does not have the right to unilaterally extend its

own term of office.

To us, the treatment of elections in PCS by the leadership betrays the final degeneration of a left grouping that once rightfully pursued a right-wing leadership making similar decisions.

Workers' Liberty comrades within PCS are central to organising a branch-led campaign to overturn this decision.

**Activists from across the left in the union such as the Independent Left and the Your Voice group within HMRC, and unaligned activists, are calling on branches to sign a statement and send delegates to an inaugural campaign meeting in Manchester on the 17 January.**

• More: [pcsdemocracy.blogspot.com](http://pcsdemocracy.blogspot.com)  
[pcsindependentleft.com](http://pcsindependentleft.com)

# Health workers increase strikes

By Charlotte Zalens

**Health workers in Unison, Unite and GMB will strike for 12 hours on Thursday 29 January, with a planned follow up of 24 hours on Wednesday 25 February.**

This follows a series of 4 hour strikes in October and November over NHS pay. Unions are also calling on members to "work to rule" for the days between the two strikes.

Health unions are calling for an immediate 1% consolidated pay rise for all NHS staff, with a further consolidated award for 2015-16 and future increases that they



Health workers picketing Guys Hospital, London, in November

hope will restore the value of NHS pay.

However pay in the NHS has been frozen for four years, resulting in a 12-15

percent drop in wages for health workers. A 1% increase will not remedy this and unions should be fighting for a much higher pay

increase.

Since 2010 the NHS has been starved of £20 billion. By 2020 the gap between funding and necessary expenditure will be around £50 billion. Last month the new Chief Executive of the NHS, Simon Stevens, made a spurious claim that with an extra £8 billion investment he could redesign the service and make £22 billion savings by 2020.

**Winning a decent pay settlement and building a union movement capable of defending health workers will be vital in the fight to save the NHS for staff and patients.**

# Bus drivers vote for strikes

By Rhodri Evans

**London bus drivers have voted for strikes over pay disparities between the city's 18 bus operators.**

The ballot returned 85% in favour averaged across the companies, and union Unite says strikes may be called in January.

There is not one collective pay agreement for bus driv-

ers across the capital, meaning pay is negotiated on a company by company basis. This has led to pay disparities of over £3 an hour for new starters.

**Unite London regional officer Wayne King said "it is simply not fair to have drivers doing the same work, driving the same routes at the same time of day, but being paid different rates."**

# Cleaners' strike suspended

By Gemma Short

**As Solidarity goes to press cleaners at Waterloo rail station have suspended their 6 January strike after management offered talks.**

The cleaners were due to strike again on Monday 12 January in the dispute over victimisation of RMT union members, underpayment of wages, and bullying and harassment of staff.

RMT has written to Network Rail, who outsource cleaning services at Waterloo to Interserve, with examples of racism in the workplace. One included a manager who was heard to say "we shouldn't employ black people."

**Cleaners have been on strike three times in a dispute which has attracted solidarity from across the labour movement.**

# Vote Patrick Murphy in NUT election

**Workers' Liberty member Patrick Murphy is standing for Deputy General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, in a ballot running from 6-26 January.**

Patrick is standing for a radically different vision of how the union should be run, one where the union is controlled from the workplace. He is calling for workplace branches to form part of the NUT structure, and for one union for all school workers.

Teachers are facing the worst attacks in a generation, and the leadership of the NUT has not led a campaign that was serious in making the government back down. Patrick calls for positive demands, such as an immediate £2000 increase for all teachers, a national contract to apply to all state funded schools (including academies), and a limit on classroom hours



with at least 20% planning and preparation time.

Patrick is also part of the Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC), a delegate based organisation which argues for a different strategy in the union and organises for it on the ground.

**Vote Patrick #1 and Kevin Courtney #2.**

# Mental health workers strike

By Gemma Short

**Mental health workers in Brighton have been on strike since 31 October in a dispute over night shifts.**

25 approved mental health professionals have been on strike between 10pm and 8am every night for two months.

Staff had an agreement to work day shifts with a voluntary standby rota to cover nights. However council

bosses imposed new working patterns on 1 November that saw staff being forced to work consecutive night and day shifts.

Brighton and Hove Unison says letters have been sent to members threatening "suspension, disciplinary action and possible dismissal".

**In response Unison has agreed to ballot all council employees for strikes if members are victimised.**

# Hands off London Transport!

**Hands Off London Transport is kicking off 2015 with two actions, at Shepherd's Bush on Thursday 8 January, and at Leytonstone on Monday 12 January.**

**We'll gather at Shepherd's Bush at 5pm, where London Underground is considering filling the ticket office space with a Tesco retail unit, to tell LU "we want a ticket office, not a Tesco!"**

**Then, on Monday 12 January, we'll leaflet and petition morning commuters at Leytonstone station, beginning at 7.30am, in conjunction with RMT Central Line East and local MP John Cryer.**





## Uniting to defend Muslims and Roma in Sweden

By Gustav Sternhamner

**In Sweden, as across Europe, far-right and racist ideas are increasingly popular. Last autumn's general election saw the anti-immigrant, far-right Sweden Democrats win almost 13 percent of the vote and 49 MPs.**

Parallel to this has been a rise of direct violence and threats against minority groups, in particular Muslims and Roma. During the Christmas holidays three mosques around the country were attacked by arsonists. Five people were injured and many Muslims say they feel unsafe at home and at mosque. Anti-racists have organised rallies in opposition to the far-right and in solidarity with victims of their violence. Under the slogan of "Don't touch my mosque", 600 people gathered on Fri-

day 2 January outside Parliament in Stockholm to support the Muslim community and condemn the Islamophobic attacks. The rally – coordinated with other large meetings in other cities and publicised almost entirely on Facebook – was addressed by representatives from Muslim organisations, parliamentary parties and civil society groups. It was jointly organised by several organisations.

December 2013 also saw Sweden's largest anti-racist rally in years as 16,000 people assembled in Stockholm following a Nazi attack. Last summer demonstrators frequently gathered to blockade marches by marginal, albeit vocal, Nazi organisations. Sweden Democrat election rallies were often met by spontaneous acts of protest from members of the public.

Anti-racist groups exist,



**Crowd assembled for a solidarity rally between the Riksdag and the Royal Palace in central Stockholm on 2 January**

yet the emerging popular resistance to racism has often been reactive and leaderless in character.

**Although political parties on the left, in particular the Left Party, have been influential in shaping the language of anti-**

**racism, there's a sense that this movement is emerging from the grassroots and is being shaped by combating everyday norms and casual racism as well as on the streets and in protests against racist parties.**

## Cologne rally squashes Pegida

By Colin Foster

**On 5 January 20,000 people demonstrated in Cologne, Germany, against a planned assembly by the "patriotic" anti-Muslim group Pegida. Pegida mobilised few people and decided to cancel its rally.**

Pegida, "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West", a movement with some parallels to the English Defence League, nevertheless mobilised 18,000 on the same day in Dresden, where the counterdemonstration was only 4,000 strong.

Pegida had its first demonstration on 20 October in Dresden, organised by a small group of people round one Lutz Bachmann,

owner of a PR agency, a butcher's son, with a criminal record for burglary, drunk-driving, and cocaine dealing, but no known political past.

Bachmann has said that he was spurred to it by his anger at seeing a demonstration in Dresden by supporters of the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party.

The PKK is anti-Islamist, and was appealing for support in its battle in Syria against Daesh (ISIS, or "Islamic state"). There are few Muslims, and fewer Islamists, in Dresden; but one of Pegida's early slogans was "Against religious wars on German soil".

A group called "Hooligans against Salafists" also fed into Pegida, as have older right-wing groups. Pegida has been backed by

some leaders of the new conservative anti-euro party Alternative für Deutschland, although it is described by Nigel Farage as "a bit academic".

The demonstrations are always organised on Mondays, to evoke the memory of the Monday demonstrations in East Germany in 1989 which brought down the Stalinist regime. Unlike many EDL rallies, they are non-violent. In some cities they attract a wider range of people than EDL events ever have done.

Pegida slogans have included protection of "the identity of our Judeo-Christian Western culture", and that it should be "normal" to "express love of our fatherland openly".

A "position paper" of 19 demands published on 10

December (but, not apparently, discussed at any meeting) shows a wish to moderate Pegida's profile, putting as its first demand "for the admission of refugees from wars and from political or religious persecution".

Many conservative and mainstream figures have come out against Pegida.

The Cologne counterdemonstration was supported by the city's Catholic cathedral turning off its floodlights. The Volkswagen factory in Dresden has made the same gesture against Pegida.

**The conservative newspaper Bild-Zeitung has published a display of 80 celebrities stating their opposition to Pegida.**

## Abandoned people

By Rachael Barnes

**At the end of December, and in the space of four days, two ships, both carrying hundreds of migrants, were abandoned by their crew in rough Italian seas, in an effort to force the Italian authorities to rescue the passengers.**

800 migrants were rescued from the Blue Sky M, a ship registered in Moldova was sailing with no crew five miles from the Italian coast. And 450 people, mostly Syrian refugees, were rescued later in the week from the Sierra Leone-registered Ezadeen. A passenger said they had been at sea for ten days, half of which without food or drink.

Traffickers buy old ships ("rust buckets at the end of their life") for \$100,000 - \$150,000, and collect up to \$6,000 per passenger for the "trip". The profit to be gained is so huge that there are no second thoughts about abandoning the vessel.

These two incidents follow last October's cancellation of the rescue scheme run by Italian authorities, Operation Mare Nostrum, accused by the EU of being a prominent factor in why migrants were risking everything to get to Europe.

Despite refugee groups warning that the cancellation of Mare Nostrum could result in the most disastrous year yet for migrants in the Mediterranean, it has been replaced with "Triton", led by EU border force Frontex, and covers only 30 miles off the coast of Italy, compared with Mare Nostrum's coverage of 70,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the sea. It will use a budget less than one third of Mare Nostrum's cost, and will have around 84% less manpower.

Often people making policies and laws speak as though these migrants are leaving their homes for a laugh, or are doing so out of anything other than desperation.

**These catastrophes prove that whether or not Mare Nostrum was acting as a "pull factor" in bringing migrants into Europe, there will still be families fleeing horrific situations of war and political repression on their doorstep.**



**Rescued from Blue Sky M**