



# Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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## VOTE LABOUR



## TURN TO FIGHT THE CUTS

A 12 April opinion poll put Labour ahead of the Tories, 34/31, for only the second time since the 2015 general election. Among people aged 18 to 24, it showed a Labour lead of 51/20.

If Labour councils defy the government and refuse to make those cuts, the government will have to back down as it did on disabled benefits and tax credits. If even one or two councils defy, they can win as Clay Cross and Poplar did in their day.

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**Junior doctors  
not  
giving  
up  
fight!**



Solidarity reports on the all-out strike by junior doctors.

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### The life and politics of James Connolly

Part one in  
a series  
looking at  
the life and  
politics of  
James  
Connolly.



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### The debate on free speech



Solidarity discusses how to tackle issues of free speech in universities.

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### Join Labour!

**Why Heidi  
Alexander is  
wrong on "trial"  
junior contract**

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# NUS: left advances, but we need better politics!

By Michael Elms

**The annual conference of the National Union of Students (NUS), which took place in Brighton 19-21 April, saw a further advance for the left in the student movement.**

Left-wing officers were elected and left-wing policy passed. The conference resolved to join with the junior doctors and other groups of workers fighting the Tory government.

It voted to sabotage the National Student Survey, as a means of disrupting the government's Teaching Excellence Framework, and marketisation of higher education. Conference demanded living grants for all students, funded by taxing the rich, and to support Labour councils in defying Tory cuts.

All good, but overall, the advances made were for a disorganised and inconsistent left: the task for socialists will be to increase the political cohesion and clarity of that left, and to organise it around a rational programme and to instil in it a democratic spirit.

Conference voted overwhelmingly to re-assert its support for

Holocaust Memorial Day; but worryingly, two speeches against the motion (arguing that "all lives matter" and that HMD was exclusivist and Eurocentric) drew applause from the floor.

Leftwingers were elected to Full Time Officer positions, including Malia Bouattia for President, Shelly Asquith as Welfare Officer and NCAFC supporters Sahaya James, Ana Oppenheim and Omar Raii to the NEC. But the majorities for some leftwing officers did not translate into success across the board: Blairite ultra Robbie Young took one Vice-Presidential post and boorish Richard Brooks another, both against leftwing challengers.

The conference decided on an important structural change: it voted to create and fund a full-time Trans officer, to run an autonomous organisation of transgender students. This is to be welcomed, and is a result of the march of the left.

At the same time, the dominant left in NUS is timid about moves to restore democracy to the union by making conference longer and larger, and restoring the NUS Areas which were abolished by the right, and helped develop organisation in colleges.

The left, though now dominant,



is not organised. It represents the "common sense" of the activist student movement: a common sense within which the organised left, through the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, has won several key arguments. But many ideological battles remain to be won, and a great work of organisation lies ahead, before the NUS left is sufficiently self-conscious, politically worked-out and organised to make good on its progress.

## MALIA BOUATTIA

**The election of Malia Bouattia as President marked a departure in many respects.**

The overturn of an incumbent NUS President has not been seen since 1968; Bouattia is the first Muslim-background woman to lead NUS; and the first person from the "left" of the union to take President for many years.

The election of Bouattia caused an outcry, on the basis of statements she has made (and refused to

retract) to the effect that "Zionist lobbies" were the authors of the government's Prevent policy, and that a part of the UK media was "Zionist-led".

In our view, these remarks were not those of a worked-out anti-Jewish racist, but unusually candid expressions of a set of (bad) politics common on the UK far left. This considers Zionism to be a uniformly and uniquely racist form of nationalism, and ascribes conspiratorial explanations to government policy and world events, linking them to Zionism. This set of ideas is sadly common currency for many on the far left, and has an anti-semitic logic.

Workers' Liberty called for a vote for Bouattia, while harshly and publicly criticising her for her bad politics on this and other issues. We disagreed with those who saw her comments as representing a poor choice of words to express a left-wing position. The issue is not so much the words as the underlying

politics, and we want to expose and change those politics.

However, Bouattia's election has removed the road-block to the left represented by successive Blairite leaderships in NUS, and opens the way for some of the left-wing policy passed at conference to be implemented.

In addition to a justified outcry against anti-semitism, Bouattia's election saw an outbreak of right-wing media hysteria, carrying slanderous headlines to the effect that she supports ISIS. We reject these attacks against her, and defend the NUS against such right-wing libels.

By the same token, many rightwingers who oppose the existence of a broadly left-wing national union like NUS have opportunistically seized the moment to launch campaigns to disaffiliate local Students' Unions from the NUS.

The only antidote to a rightwing disaffiliation campaign is for the NUS to show its value as a union by fighting against the government and university managements; and at the same time, for the left within the union to sharply distance itself from, and struggle against, any and all forms of anti-semitic politics in NUS.

**To achieve both, the student left needs to organise, clarify its ideas, and assert democracy within its ranks and the NUS.**

• Statement on Malia Bouattia's election [bit.ly/1SHFfnM](http://bit.ly/1SHFfnM)

## Gove's Albania model

By Colin Foster

**Economic issues if Britain quits the EU? No problem, says the anti-EU Tory Michael Gove. We could be just like Albania.**

Bosnia, Albania, and Ukraine, as Gove said, have free trade with the EU without having to comply with EU rules.

The Albanian trade unions, who in their May Day message ask the Albanian government for measures "in terms of rights and freedoms of association, labour relations and labour legislation, closer to that of the European Union", have difficulty getting traction with the demand.

Gove wants British unions to face the same prospect. The description that Albanian socialists, interviewed for *Solidarity* in 2013, gave of their country since the collapse of Stalinism there would also please Gove: "Some of the nomenklatura, or of their children, have got rich in the new order [i.e. through privatisations] but mostly it is 'Wild West' capitalism".

However, EU leaders pointed out that Bosnia, Albania, and Ukraine have been given special trade concessions as a first stage towards future EU membership.

Nothing similar would apply to Britain. The EU would have no motive to give special trade freedoms to a Britain which was blocking the entry of thousands of EU citizens wanting to work in this country.

Gove's "Albania" speech is significant not because it is realistic, but because it shows us his model for Britain: a low-wage, low-rights offshore production site for global capital, with workers cajoled into submission by promises to keep out migrants.

Meanwhile, the Labour Party's Compliance Unit, a bastion of the pre-Corbyn party machine, has taken a break from issuing expulsion letters to send local Labour Parties an instruction that "CLPs must not enter into any campaign arrangement with another Referendum campaigner. CLPs may only use the Party's money and resources for the Labour In for Britain campaign. CLPs must not make donations (cash or non-cash) to other Referendum campaigns".

The "Labour In" campaign is a token effort, with a budget of £75,000, less than one-fifth of what it takes to run a single MP's office. In any case its materials differ only by a shade from the big-business "Britain Stronger in Europe" rubbish.

This instruction is, in effect, an attempt to stop CLPs campaigning effectively on the issue by working with groups like Another Europe Is Possible and Workers' Europe.

**We can't afford that. CLPs should find ways round the Compliance Unit instructions and push an effective message of: "stay in and fight for workers' rights".**

## Unions must fight for a workers' Europe!

**Maria Exall of the Communication Workers' Union explains why unions must campaign for a vote to remain**

**At CWU conference (24-28 April) we voted overwhelmingly to campaign with other unions for a distinctive workers voice in the debate on the EU referendum.**

This decision was not based on any defence of the indefensible about the EU but because a "remain vote" is in CWU members' interests.

The EU is in many ways a capitalist club with a neoliberal agenda, but so is this UK Conservative government.

The EU certainly needs democratic reform so that our voice in the elections of our representatives to the European Parliament is more meaningful.

And there is no excuse for the failure of the EU and governments throughout Europe to deal humanely with the migrant crisis.

Yet the best way to address all these issues is to remain and fight for a workers' Europe. It is vital that trade unions take a positive stance for a remain vote on the basis of fighting for workers' rights across the EU. Another Europe is possible.

It is a real myth that it is the EU itself that is the main problem for workers in the UK. Our experience in the communications sector is that our problems with European legislation, the loopholes in European Directives on agency working which promote second-class terms and conditions in the telecoms sector, and the expansion of liberalisation in the post and telecoms sectors, were promoted by UK governments, not by the EU.

The main barriers to future renationalisation of UK post and telecoms industry lie within our own national politics not that of the EU.

In the communications sector, our employers are organised on a multinational basis. They organise internationally and in the EU. To be effective as trade unionists we need to organise across Europe as well. Union members working for communications firms based in the UK also work in Europe. The CWU is already involved in the organisations for social dialogue in the sectors where we have members.

The argument for a remain vote is that it allows the UK working class that possibility, of fighting back with the working class of other European countries against a neoliberal agenda. As we know capitalism creates its own grave diggers. The response of UK trade unions must be to reach out and

link up with workers' organisations in Europe to create the biggest and strongest grave-diggers' union possible.

A leave vote will lead to chaos and reaction and give a massive boost to the proto-fascists in UKIP. It will distract working-class people in the UK from fighting our real enemies — the casual racist Boris Johnson or whoever takes over the Conservative Party if Cameron is forced to resign.

**A leave vote will also separate us from working with our real friends — workers and trade unions throughout Europe. We need to remember the basic socialist principle that workers of the world must unite.**

## Campaign for a workers' Europe!

**Now that campaigning for the European referendum is underway, we need to get out on the streets and make the case for staying in the EU and fighting for a workers' Europe.**

**Workers' Europe have published some leaflets for use on street stalls, in workplaces and meetings. Order today!**

[campaign.workerseurope.net](http://campaign.workerseurope.net)



# Support junior doctors!

By Gerry Bates

As *Solidarity* goes to press on Tuesday 26 April junior doctors are starting a two-day, all-out strike with no emergency-cover.

The strike is an escalation from previous strikes by junior doctors where they have provided emergency-cover. In these strikes it will be up to hospital managements to ensure that hospitals are safe and move consultants from other duties into emergency-care roles. This will cause delays to elective procedures that consultants would otherwise have been carrying out.

The government has given its clearest sign yet that it sees this dispute as a fight over the future of their austerity plans. They have decided they cannot afford to lose against the doctors.

On Monday 25 April a government source told the press that the BMA was trying to "topple the government"; that the dispute had "radicalised a generation of junior doctors"; and that if the government backed down it would face similar industrial action by other unions, which were watching this dispute "like a hawk".

Junior doctors have been staging a permanent sit-in outside the Department of Health since 13 April; by the sit in is an empty chair with Health Secretary Hunt's name on it. But Hunt is still refusing to discuss the main objections to the doctors' new contracts.



Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell joined the thousands-strong joint doctors and teachers march in London on 26 April

Junior doctors in Leeds have copied the action in London with a sit-in outside of the DoH offices in the city.

The BMA junior doctors' committee will meet in mid May to discuss the next steps in the campaign. Proposals by left-wing activists in the BMA will include: calling a national demonstration and escalating the number and tempo of local protests; escalating strikes to include evening strikes and weekend strikes with a mixed timetable of strikes leading up to contract imposition in August; and action short of strikes including both "softer" ac-



Top, CWU delegates join Royal Bournemouth picket line; bottom left, Newcastle Royal Victoria Infirmary; right, Royal London Whitechapel



tion such as giving leaflets to every patient and "harder" action such as disrupting non-essential paper-work.

**This is a fight that can be won. The government is clearly under lots of pressure. Keep the fight up!**

## Picket line round-up

**Lewisham Hospital:** Much bigger and livelier than last time. The general view seemed to be: now it's time to get serious and now we're going to have an impact.

**Royal Bournemouth:** Only six people involved in the dispute crossed the picket line. Mass attendance from CWU Conference delegates at lunchtime to show solidarity (about 150-200 delegates) with Dave Ward speaking at an impromptu rally.

**Royal London, Whitechapel:** Between 40 and 50 at the picket. Positive atmosphere and a good reception from the public. Chants focused on Hunt's incompetence.

**Newcastle:** Junior doctors and their supporters braved the snow and cold to hold a picket line at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle with an impressive array of placards.

## "Spread the word, counter Tory spin"

Dr Jessica Gates, BMA junior doctors rep, University Hospital (Queens Medical Centre) Nottingham, spoke to *Solidarity*.

**We have got well over a hundred people on the picket line and are being constantly beeped with messages of support from the public as they pass in cars.**

We have had some of the consultants come down to the picket line and talk to us how they are doing inside. We are confident that there are highly trained experts inside who are looking after the pa-

tients. And that no patients should come to harm.

It was our intention to stop the government turning the public against the doctors, and that has worked. Over the last few days we have heard cross-party support for removing the imposition of the contract. But Jeremy Hunt has not agreed to do that, which is why we are still here again today.

I hope that today is a big enough message to him, the public support that we have had, the amount of doctors who still feel strongly about this, should send a message to him to think again and get back

to talks.

We have had a lot of support from other trade unions and we obviously would like that to continue. It is going to get harder and harder if we have to escalate these strikes. Just spreading the word, talking and explaining the real facts to the public about the dispute, countering the government spin.

**The Labour Party has been very supportive both locally and in parliament. Yesterday several Labour MPs stood up to Jeremy Hunt and told him to think again. For that we are very grateful.**

## "Parents Defending Education" campaign launched

By David Ball

**On 23 April Parents Defending Education was launched at a 300 strong meeting hosted in the headquarters of the National Union of Teachers (NUT).**

The campaign aims to bring together parents campaigns against the Education White Paper, testing and forced academisation. An open steering committee meeting will be

held on 21 May for those wishing to get involved.

In Barnet (north London), for example, activists are meeting to plan a campaign to defend education — against forced academies; for decent levels of funding; against the divisive and stressful testing regime; for continued representation of parents on governing bodies; and for defending professional standards on Qualified Teacher Status.

Both Barnet Momentum and Barnet Trades Council have voted back and help build a big, active campaign against the proposals in the government's Education White Paper. Local reps in the NUT and UNISON have met up with parents and governors in Barnet, forming the nucleus of a campaign.

We met up at the Parents Defending Education meeting on 23 April and will be stepping up the campaign over the next few weeks.

Barnet UNISON (local government branch), along with Camden and other branches, also voted to submit proposals to UNISON Local Government conference in June to strike alongside the NUT and on a similar basis

**The motion demands a national contract for support staff in state-funded schools of every type and status.**

• Twitter: @PaDefendingEd

## Government backs down on "check-off"

By Charlotte Zalens

The government has said it will drop plans to end "check-off" (the system of employers collecting union membership dues on behalf of the union through deductions from pay) after a threatened rebellion in the House of Lords.

This is a good thing. However it will not neuter the other, worse, attacks in the Trade Union Bill, nor is a long-term solution.

PCS members in the civil service have already had the system of check-off dismantled. Civil Service employers didn't need legislation to do that. Local government employers could do the same.

Ultimately unions should move away from using check-off; it leaves them vulnerable to the whims of employers who could withhold collected funds or use membership data to discriminate and intimidate.

However the government was about to end check-off without allowing time for unions to prepare to sign large numbers of members over to direct debit. It would have caused unions to lose members and a lot of money. It is good that the measure has been defeated.

The bill was passed on its third reading in the House of Lords on Monday 25 April, and has now been passed back to the House of Commons for consideration of the amendments.

There is no suggestion that the Commons will either reject any of the amendments or reject the bill altogether, meaning it is likely to become law in the next few months.

**Trade union activists should start now build up union organisation in the workplace and networks of solidarity to fight aspects of the bill such as the new thresholds for ballots and new picketing rules.**





# Can Zionists cope?

## LETTER

**Piers Corbyn tweeted: “#Zionists can’t cope with anyone supporting rights for #Palestine”. Eric Lee in his column (*Solidarity* 400) responded that “Zionists” can cope.**

He, Eric, is a Zionist in the sense of “a person who supports the Jewish people’s right to a national homeland”, but he also opposes the Israeli government and supports the right of the Palestinian people to an independent state alongside Israel.

Luke Hardy responds (*Solidarity* 401), that Zionism is in fact Israeli nationalism, and as Marxists we oppose all nationalism (even while supporting national rights).

That is true on a barebones level, but, I think, misses some points.

Usually, as with Piers Corbyn’s tweet, jeers against “Zionists” as hopeless bigots are aimed not at non-Jewish but at Jewish sympathisers with Israel.

Are those Jews “Israeli nationalists”, by way of identification with Israel? Probably most of them are. As Luke points out, most people other than revolutionary socialists and other ideological minorities are to some degree or another “nationalist” for the nation they identify with.

We can respond to this by saying: “Ah yes. Israeli nationalist. Very bad. Lenin explained that Marxists oppose all nationalism. Not as bad as the ‘absolute anti-Zionists’ say, but bad. Nothing to do with us, thank god”.

Yes, Lenin did argue, rightly, that Marxists must ideologically oppose all nationalism, even the most refined and liberal.

## NATIONALIST

**And, as it happens, in my opinion, Eric’s political views on some issues, notably Israel’s assault on Gaza in early 2009, have been distinctly Israeli-nationalist. We have debated that in *Solidarity* ([workersliberty.org/gazadebate](http://workersliberty.org/gazadebate)).**

The question here is whether we use that debate to get out of the line of fire when people like Piers Corbyn denounce “Zionists” across the board.

When anti-semitism raged in East London in the late 19th century, Eleanor Marx would declare defiantly at public meetings there: “I am a Jewess”.

Strictly speaking she wasn’t (her mother was gentile). She wasn’t religious-Jewish. She could “correctly” have responded: “Of course I’m not Jewish, and I’m hostile to Jewish religion. If you want to attack Jews, well, that’s not me. But in any case I think your attacks are overdone...”

In more recent years, sometimes comrades whom we know to be atheist respond defiantly to anti-Muslim racists: “Yes, I’m a Muslim”. They know that with the racist they are not having an argument about theology, but one about his or her prejudices against those who “look Muslim”.

**Likewise, much of conventional ragging against “Zionism” is not an erudite explanation of why we should criticise all nationalisms, but a hostility to those who “look” to have some identification with Israel.**

*Martin Thomas, north London*

# Right question, wrong answer

By Ben Tausz

**In response to recent controversies around “no platforming” and censorship in the student movement, the Right2Debate campaign has sprung up.**

It opposes the growing practice of denying controversial, bigoted and “extremist” speakers platforms on campuses, and instead proposes that student unions adopt its model policy for dealing with these situations, focussed on ensuring that these speakers are countered in debate.

Right2Debate’s starting principle — that in general, it is better to counter reactionary and bigoted views through debate, rather than “no platform” tactics — is a good one (though I would add protest alongside debate). However, its approach and its proposed solution is deeply flawed, and underlines the need for a left-wing campaign on this issue.

First, Right2Debate’s proposed solution ([bit.ly/R2Dstatement](http://bit.ly/R2Dstatement)) is intensely bureaucratic. In the name of free speech and its zeal to ensure debate, it ends up infringing other freedoms — the rights to organise and protest freely. It says that unions should give SU managers the power to interfere in student-run events and meetings featuring speakers who they deem offensive, dangerous and controversial. They would be able to force student groups to accept counter-speakers not of their choosing; to limit the time given to speakers; to replace their own event chairs with SU representatives; and to film and make public the entirety of the event. It also endorses the right of “campus officials” to ban protests they consider not to be “reasonable”: it is naïve to trust university and college managers as the guardians of free expression.

Reactionary and bigoted speakers and groups should indeed be opposed, but this

must be political not bureaucratic. The left should challenge such speakers to debate, but it is wrong to use SU hierarchies to forcibly impose it, top-down, and to interfere with students’ rights to run their own meetings. Beyond challenging speakers to debate, we should respond with protest, our own counter-meetings, and literature (leaflets, social media, student press articles and so on, making our arguments).

Incidentally, there should be little doubt that Right2Debate’s policy could be used against left as well as right-wing speakers, and used to disrupt the ability of any “controversial” political groups, including left and liberation campaigns, to organise their own internal events without interference. As we have seen, objections about offensiveness have been used by people across the political spectrum to block events they don’t like and reject open political discussion.

## NO PLATFORM

**Second, Right2Debate is hazy on the question of no platform for fascists.**

On the one hand, it says it will not dispute the NUS’s core list of no-platformed organisations (the British National Party, the English Defence League, National Action, Al-Muhajiroun, Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Muslim Public Affairs Committee). On the other, it opposes the denial of a platform to anyone except those who will make illegally inciting speeches. They need to clarify this inconsistent position.

The left should support no platform for fascist organisations. Not because they are too offensive to be heard (we don’t want to ban fascist books from libraries), but as part of a necessary defence against organised movements of physical violence. Fascist organisations don’t just spout objectionable ideas but have declared war on the very existence of the workers’ movement and oppressed and marginalised groups of people.

# The EU is not more capitalist than Britain

## LETTER

**The referendum on UK membership of the European Union on 23rd June has major implications and unique divisions across the political spectrum.**

For staying in EU are Cameron’s wing of the Tories, LibDems, most of the Labour Party for a “social Europe”, SNP, Plaid Cymru and Greens, plus US instructions.

For leaving EU are UKIP (who called the referendum), Tory Eurosceptics, the far-right and, for different reasons, most of the British left groupings, eg, CPB, SWP, SP, Counterfire and Respect.

Socialist Resistance calls for a critical “in” vote to resist the xenophobia/racism of the mainstreams of the “leave” camp but declares in its recent pamphlet, that the European Union is unreformably “a reactionary anti-working class neo-liberal institution and we are in favour of exit from it” (page 10). The Revolutionary Communist Group is for abstention.

The two right-wing main streams of the “leave” camp (Brexit) are nationalistic xenophobia in response to migrants and refugees, particularly Islamophobia: secondly deregulation of commerce and industry generally adverse to the interests of the working class. There is no plan A or B, but a general atavistic nostalgia for Empire, Commonwealth and

national super-power status.

Conversely the left groups, as listed above, support Brexit for two quite different reasons. Firstly in protest at the savage “pound of flesh” debt-recovery forced on to a pauperised Greece by the Troika (IMF, ECB and EU). Secondly regarding the “democratic deficit” of the EU, the powers of its Council of Ministers and Commission over the European Parliament.

## BRUTALITY

**But it is wholly mistaken to regard the Eurocapitalist brutality against Greece as essentially any different to domestic brutality at Orgreave, the Poll Tax demo or Atos work-testing. It’s the nature of the beast!**

Mistaken too to regard the neoliberal regime and democratic deficit of the European Union as to warrant turning back to Westminster rule: to Parliament’s museum of first-past-the-post MPs, unelected Upper House, unwritten Constitution, corporate lobbyists, shackled trade unions, world’s highest surveillance, muddled powers of established Church, civil service and Monarchy, arcane and archaic feudal procedures controlled by a liveried apparatus. all symbolised by the displayed golden Saxon war-club called the Mace.

The European Union is a higher form of

Third, Right2Debate is overly concerned with legality as a guiding principle. This is not surprising given Right2Debate’s origins in Quilliam, an organisation very cosy with the government. The lines the state lays down on freedom of speech are not necessarily right. When we do happen to agree with the state’s lines, we should follow them because they are correct, not because we think respect for the law is an inherent good. A clear example of this is in Right2Debate’s endorsement of compliance with the government’s counter-terror Prevent policy, much of which is racist in its targeting of Muslims and itself closes down freedom of expression.

This reflects Right2Debate’s exclusive focus on SUs as the source of threats to freedom of speech in education. A campaign on freedom of speech needs to be consistent, by recognising, linking and fighting all the threats – most of which come not from students but from the government and university and college managers.

**That’s why activists in Workers’ Liberty want to work with others on the left to set up a campaign for open discussion, free speech and the right to organise on campuses, understanding this cause as an essential part of fighting oppression and allowing a flowering of students’ and workers’ organisation and struggle.**

• You can read our initial draft statement in *Solidarity* 401 ([bit.ly/rosastatement](http://bit.ly/rosastatement)). Please get in touch with your comments and if you’d like to work with us.

• Finally, you can read more about left-wing arguments for free speech and open discussion, and for no-platforming fascists, in this statement, from various student activists including Workers’ Liberty supporters, backing an (unsuccessful) motion to this Spring’s NUS LGBT+ conference: [bit.ly/noplatformstatement](http://bit.ly/noplatformstatement)

government than its constituent nation-states. It has subsumed Franco-German rivalry of the last two centuries and the Benelux national boundaries. It leads the world in civil, workers’ and LGBT rights and justice, health and safety, environmental protection of land, air, rivers and beaches, renewable energy, climate action and industrial, fishing and food standards. Its greater mobility to work, live and study should be championed and extended by all progressives.

Internationalists, Red or Green, should and must engage with the world, with the continent of Europe and with its Union to unite its struggles for revolutionary transformation. To quit the European Union because it is less reformable than Westminster is mistaken and reactionary. The laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus. Leaving the EU has no resonance with the anti-austerity parties and groups of southern Europe.

British socialism, like all National Socialism, is an oxymoron and swear-word; patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel. Leaving the European Union will bring a carnival of racist, deregulated reaction.

A vote to Stay In the European Union on 23 June fits the strategy for engagement, for global eco-socialist revolution from below, the only hope of survival.

**Workers FOR the world, unite!**

*Tim Summers (Green Party since 1999)*



# Vote Labour, turn against the cuts

A 12 April opinion poll put Labour ahead of the Tories, 34/31, for only the second time since the 2015 general election. Among people aged 18 to 24, it showed a Labour lead of 51/20.

The Tories have been battered by Ian Duncan Smith's resignation, by their splits over Europe, by their forced retreat on disabled benefits, and by the Panama Papers. Labour can get ahead.

It will be hard on 5 May. Sadiq Khan should win London mayor for Labour. But an SNP landslide in Scotland is almost certain. In polls for the Welsh Assembly, Labour is still ahead of the Tories and Plaid Cymru, but less than it was in the last Assembly elections because Ukip's rise to 16% of the poll has taken more from Labour than from the others.

Across Britain, some other polls show the Tories still ahead, and, despite their splits and rows, Ukip is on 17%. Labour did relatively well last time round — four years ago — in many councils being contested now, and that will make the 5 May results look bad.

The other downside is that many Labour right-wingers don't care how Labour does on 5 May, or actually want Labour to do badly

so that things look bad for Jeremy Corbyn.

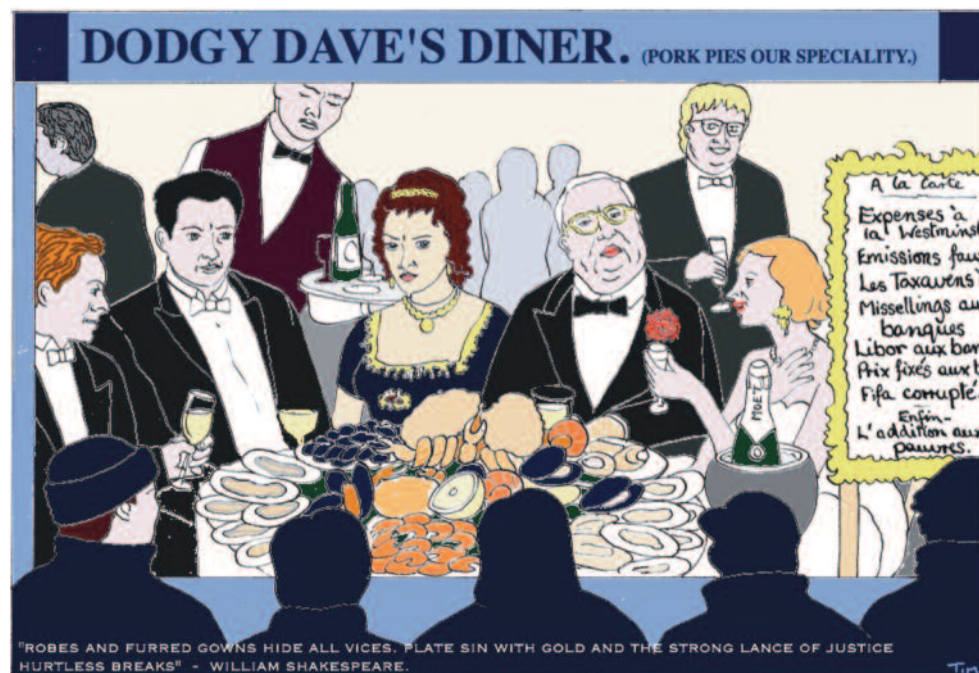
Every tilt towards Labour on 5 May will help weaken the Tories and push back the Labour right's plots.

The token left-of-Labour candidacies for 5 May are neither politically bold enough to plant a flag for revolutionary socialism, nor well-based enough to give confidence to the broader movement.

What happens after 5 May? Across the country, Labour councils are dead set on continuing to do the Tories' dirty work, transmitting the chops in central government funding into cuts in local services and jobs. Even individual rebels, like Lambeth Labour council Rachel Heywood, who has come out against library closures there, are rare.

The cuts are now huge. Any difference made by carrying them out in a supposedly "caring" way is now marginal, and will anywhere disappear when next year's cuts come round.

If Labour councils defy the government and refuse to make those cuts, the government will have to back down as it did on disabled benefits and tax credits. If even one or two councils defy, they can win as Clay Cross and Poplar did in their day.



The choice of Labour councils complying with the cuts is a choice to line up those councils with the Tories against their communities, to undermine Labour's revival, and to help the Tories get over their disarray.

Tories are now claiming that the junior doctors' dispute is an attempt to bring down the government — in other words, saying that if they are forced to concede to the junior doctors, then they will be forced to concede to public service workers across the board, and will become a lame duck government.

They say they now look on the junior doctors' dispute as their "miners' strike", their equivalent for this decade of Thatcher's Tories' showdown with the labour movement in 1984-5.

The labour movement should make it a "miners' strike" for us today. We — other unions, and the Labour Party, and the Labour Party leaders too — should rally round the junior doctors, and without the weaseling, equivocation, and betrayals of 1984-5.

The government has taken one step back already on its plans for forced academisation of schools and abolition of Qualified Teacher Status, saying they'll delay legislation.

If teachers and parents mobilise a big campaign, without waiting for the teachers' strike pencilled in for 6 July, that will keep the government off balance.

**So vote Labour on 5 May. Turn the labour movement against the cuts and into a fightback!**



A new book from Workers' Liberty which makes the case for socialism. In a time when socialism is the most searched word in the Merriam-Webster dictionary website, more and more people call themselves socialists, and a self-confessed socialist is leader of the Labour Party, this book explores what socialism means, whether it can rise again, how, and why. Answering questions such as: What about Stalin? Are revolutions democratic? How can we have a planned economy? and is socialism still relevant?

**Pre-order online at [www.workersliberty.org/socialism](http://www.workersliberty.org/socialism) before 27 May for the reduced rate of £10 inc. postage**

## BHS: don't accept "hard luck"

The news of a potential 11,000 job losses at British Home Stores, now the retailer has gone into receivership, should not be "hard luck", a capitalist reality that workers just have to accept.

While department stores may be a form of retail that is past its sell-by-date, there is no law of nature which dictates the buildings, goods and most importantly, the skills and knowledge of the thousands of shop workers, have to go to waste.

By some accounts the capitalists might have been able to save or restructure BHS had they been so minded. Unfortunately BHS has been run by Philip Green for most of the last 15 years and he used the company as a cash cow to fund his lifestyle to the tune of £586 million. The new owner over the last year, Dominic Chappell, has, according to the *Guardian* (26 April), taken out more than £25m.

There is an alternative. At BHS, at Tata Steel, or any other company cutting jobs. All it requires is a little imagination, and some political will from an elected government. Nationalisation and putting companies under the control of the people who really understand them, the shop floor workers, the technicians and ordinary administrators. Under these conditions, all economic enterprises can be rethought, reshaped and put to good use. There is no such thing as a "failing industry", just industries that capitalists can't make profits out of, and therefore don't want to hang onto.

At Port Talbot a management buyout is currently being discussed, and the government has indicated it would take a 25% stake. But this deal, if it happens, will be at the expense of the workers and involve redundancies. Such deals always take place within capitalist logics. At Port Talbot they will recreate a company, keep on workers and save the jobs communities rely on, keep producing a material that is needed to build new homes and other things — but only if it is "financially viable". For the capitalists and the government which serves them, that is always the "bottom line".

After the financial crash, a string of high-street shops closed down and there were, especially in Ireland, examples of retail workers taking direct action — mostly to demand that wages owed to them were paid. These were also protests at the carnage of job losses.

Workers at BHS should now consider taking action, occupying their shops and asserting their right to a job. And action needs to happen sooner rather than later, while the stock is still in the shop waiting to be sold.

**Workers at BHS, in steel, and in any other areas where job cuts occur, socialists and labour movement activists need to organise for solidarity and to assert the idea that workers are worth more than the "bottom line".**



# How Connolly became a socialist

**Michael Johnson begins a series on the life and politics of James Connolly.**

**James Connolly was born in poverty in the Edinburgh slum of Cowgate in 1868 to Irish parents. His father, John, was a mure carter for the Edinburgh Corporation and his mother, Mary, a domestic servant.**

Cowgate was part of a "little Ireland" ghetto in Edinburgh, politically dominated by the Irish National League (linked to the pro-Home Rule Irish Parliamentary Party) and the influence of the local clergy. Some Irish workers found a niche in the local garment trade, and their relative advantage over poorer Scottish labourers generated a cross-class national solidarity with the Irish middle-class, reinforced by the anti-Irish racism and sectarianism of the period.

Connolly was largely self-educated, learning to read by the light of embers, using charred sticks as pencils. Too poor to continue into secondary education, Connolly left primary school with the basic skills enabling him to continue his own private study, eventually developing into a well-read working-class autodidact and a prolific writer.

In 1878-9 Connolly entered the workforce aged ten or eleven, working in a print-works, then a bakery, and a tiling factory.

Although it seems strange in retrospect, it was common for young Irish nationalists to join the British Army, both for work and also to "learn the use of arms". Like his eldest brother John, Connolly joined the British Army. Little is really known about this period of his life, and he was later reluctant to talk of it, though his time in the army did appear to leave Connolly with an abiding hatred of militarism. In 1888, while his regiment was stationed in Ireland, he met Lillie Reynolds in Dublin, a domestic servant from a Protestant Wicklow family. They moved to Perth and married in 1890.

## EDINBURGH

**By the time Connolly returned to Scotland, politics was changing in Edinburgh.**

Hitherto, its large professional middle class, small industrial base, and preponderance of skilled trades made it an unpromising area for socialist advance. Connolly himself wrote in an early piece of journalism that the population was "largely composed of snobs, flunkeys, mashers, lawyers, students, mid-

dle-class pensioners and dividend hunters. Even the working-class portion of the population seemed to have imbibed the snobbish would-be respectable spirit of their 'betters', and look with aversion upon every movement running counter to conventional ideas."

However, the organisation of semi- and unskilled workers made progress throughout the 1880s, including on the Leith waterfront. This was the period of "New Unionism", where unskilled workers, firstly amongst young women in the Bryant and May match factory in east London, and then in the nearby gasyards and docklands, fought for higher wages and shorter hours, going far beyond the old traditional craft unions, laying the basis for the modern trade union movement.

Edinburgh was no different, and local disputes gradually became part of wider struggles. In the winter of 1890-1, the local trades council became involved in an ultimately unsuccessful Scottish railway strike and began to soften on their opposition to the demand for an eight-hour day. The old guard, however, eschewed political action of any sort. Others were in the business of nudging the Liberal Party to accept "labour men" as can-



**Connolly with his wife Lillie, whom he married in 1890, and young family**

didates.

When Connolly first entered socialist politics, he joined the Socialist League in Dundee in 1889. The Socialist League was formed in 1884 when William Morris, Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling and Belfort Bax, supported by Friedrich Engels, walked out of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF).

The SDF was Britain's first Marxist organisation, and had been founded by the former Tory Henry Hyndman. As a historian of the

## 1966: a socialist republican reflects on the "Easter jamboree"

**This extract is from a 1966 article by Liam Daltun about the hypocritical celebration of the Easter Rising by the Irish government of that time. It appeared in the London monthly of the Irish Workers' Group, *Irish Militant*. Daltun was a former member of the IRA who, after migrating to London, moved to the left, eventually becoming a Trotskyist in 1958. This article, as well as being a socialist commentary on mid-60s Ireland, is also a valuable portrayal of the mindset of a representative socialist republican of the mid-20th century before the eruptions in the north of Ireland.**

**Recently the Irish capitalist establishment commemorated the Easter Rising. Well they might. They've much to be grateful for.**

Over the past 40 years they've lined their cavernous pockets at the expense of the Irish workers and small farmers. It was by placing themselves at the helm of the great movement which grew out of the sacrifice of the dead revolutionaries of Easter Week that they got the opportunity to do this. The death of Connolly left the only class which would have been capable of leading the country to a complete break with British imperialism leaderless.

The bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaders used the movement in the service of their own class interests. Once their own class aims had been achieved, they called a halt to the march of the nation. When sections of the nation tried to press on, the capitalists, represented in turn by Cosgrave and de Valera,

turned their military and police forces on them.

A capitalist compromise took place. The 26-County neo-colony was set up and trapped out in tricolours, signs in Irish and daubs of (imported) green paint. Connolly had said that unless the social system were changed nothing at all would change. In fact, the City of London still ruled. It continues to rule.

Connolly knew that the capitalist and middle class leaders such as Griffith, deValera, Collins, etc., would seek a compromise "short of our goal".

Only the working class stood to gain economically and in every other respect from a complete break with the Empire and the [financial] City of London. Therefore only that class could lead the nation to independence, giving a determined lead to the small capitalists, the small farmers, the shopkeepers, the middle-class intellectuals, etc. Leadership by the latter element could only be indecisive and end in compromise and a return to the old status quo.

The same capitalist elements who either condemned the Rising at the time, or afterwards murdered those who remained loyal to its aims, have now celebrated the 50th anniversary of the event with parades, speeches, High Masses and prayer services.

They have nothing in common with Connolly and his aims — any more than whoever happens to lead the millions-strong privileged officialdom in Russia next year in commemorating the Revolution of October 1917 will have anything in common with Lenin and Trotsky and the aims of the Revolution they led. Connolly were he alive today

would not have gone within a million miles of the establishment's 50th anniversary celebrations.

What has the present set-up in Ireland North or South got to do with Connolly's programme?

Like [the leader of the United Irishmen in the 1790s Wolfe] Tone, Connolly sought to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter under the common name of Irishman. He saw a growing movement of the working class, of the "men of no property" leading the country to that political and social freedom which "are not two separate and unrelated ideas, but are two sides of the one great principle, each being incomplete without the other."

## SINN FEIN TYPE

**Connolly knew that a purely nationalist-capitalist movement of the Sinn Fein type could not win independence nor maintain national unity. It could not appeal to the Protestant working class and win them to the idea of a united Ireland.**

What has the so-called educational system in the 26 Counties got in common with Connolly's programme? It is managed by narrow-minded clerics. Connolly advocated "public control and management of the national schools by boards elected by popular ballot."

The Free State Army patrols the border with the British Army.

It is sent to Cyprus to help the British there in maintaining "peace." In the Congo it helped the big US, Belgian and other mining interests to repress the Congolese national

movement in blood, and murder its leader Patrice Lumumba. In the UN the 26 Counties vote is cast not on the side of the struggling African, Asian and other peoples, but on the British, French and US imperialist side. On Ireland's national demands [reunification] the Dublin delegation is of course silent..

Are the children of the nation "cherished equally?" [As the Declaration of the Republic in 1916 said they would be] What of the majority of Irish children who never see the inside of a secondary school, much less a university?

One could go on.

In the coming struggle for Ireland's freedom, the workers must lead. The programme of Connolly and Larkin is as valid as ever it was. The Protestant workers can be won to a United Ireland if that unity is posed in socialist terms.

We must make the Workers' Republic our slogan, the Starry Plough our banner, and the Citizen Army our model.

We must counter Taoiseach Lemass's Common Market plans with our own plan: for a Workers' Republic as a free participant in a Socialist United States of Europe.

In common struggle with the British, French, German, and other workers of Europe against our common enemy the capitalist class, we could yet, in Connolly's words, "set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord".

**Beidh la eile ag an bPaorach [There will be another day].**



early British socialist movement, Walter Kendall, has written, “Hyndman’s party, despite sectarian faults, instilled for the first time a Marxist tradition into the advanced ranks of the British working class.”

The rebels objected to Hyndman’s authoritarian manner and excessive personal control of the party and its press, and the Socialist League had a more libertarian character. However, some in the Socialist League had an ultra-left bent, rejecting electoral activity of any sort. Others were anarchists. A subsequent faction-fight with the anarchists in the League consumed the organisation, leading many to drop out, and others to re-join the SDF by the early 1890s.

In Scotland, however, the Socialist League and the SDF did joint work in support of the miners in 1887 and increasingly held joint meetings. They eventually merged, and Connolly continued his involvement in the reunified Scottish Socialist Federation (SSF).

The SSF was mainly a socialist propaganda organisation, carrying out open-air meetings and circulating the few Marx texts available in English at the time. One of the mainstays of the group and an early influent on Connolly was Léo Melliet, a revolutionary socialist and veteran of the 1871 Paris Commune.

Connolly himself attended the 1895 Paris Commune commemoration, and wrote in 1899 that “the Commune, if it had been successful, would have inaugurated the reign of real freedom the world over – it would have meant the emancipation of the working class... Long live the Commune!”

As an active member of the SSF, Connolly threw himself into a routine of regular meeting and a public gathering each Sunday. He thus undertook the pioneering work of introducing socialist ideas to the working-class public, of “making socialists”.

At the same time, Keir Hardie was agitating for the idea of independent labour representation in politics, and the creation of an Independent Labour Party. Preparatory committees were created for this purpose. The SSF’s policy was, quite rightly, to “work alongside” Hardie’s movement and try to “imbue it with socialist principles.”

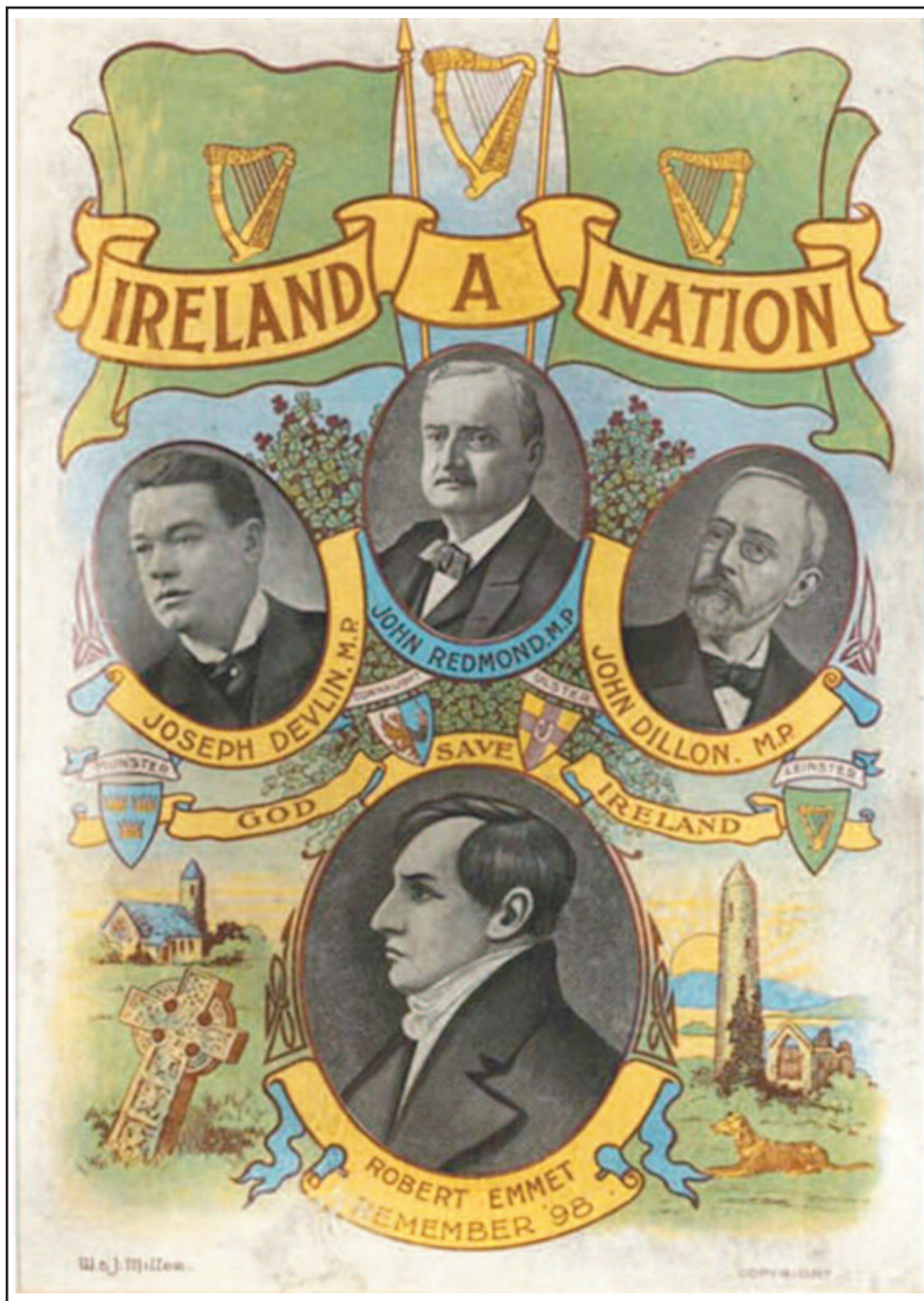
In Edinburgh, the SSF and ILP branches founded a Labour Federation for joint electoral work. In practice, however, there was “a tacit division of labour between the two organisations and much joint membership. While the SSF preached and taught, the ILP prepared the way for an electoral organisation and won increasing influence in the trade union movement.”

The new ideas, of socialist politics and independent labour representation, began to have an effect on the local labour movement. In 1890, only six members of the Trades Council voted to accept the affiliation of the Labour Federation. The following year it was up to ten votes, and in 1893 the Trades Council agreed to participate in a joint May Day demonstration with the socialists calling for the eight-hour day.

## IRISH NATIONALISM

**As a result of speaking from the platform on the demonstration, Connolly’s brother John was dismissed from his job in a case of victimisation and had to seek work elsewhere. Connolly became the SSF secretary, and soon afterwards was elected to the position of secretary of the Edinburgh ILP.**

The first decisive influence on Connolly’s view of Irish politics was John Leslie, a vet-



**Connolly argued socialists should ally with the Irish labour movement, not the middle class Home Rule Party**

eran of the Edinburgh SSF. Leslie was forced to develop his views on Irish nationalism when in November 1893 the ILP decided to challenge the Liberal candidate in Edinburgh. As Irish nationalists generally called for a vote for the Liberals due to their support for Home Rule, the forces of the INL and the Catholic Church were ranged against the socialists, and Leslie was denounced as a traitor.

Developing a theme later present in Connolly’s writings, Leslie argued that purely political independence was insufficient, denying that “the Alpha and Omega of the Irish Question consists in the hoisting of the green and gold banner above the old Parliament House in Dublin.”

Rather, “the cause of Irish misery is not to be found in the incorporation of the Irish Parliament in that of England, (although such incorporation undoubtedly tends to aggravate the evil), but is to be found in the fact that the means by which Irish people must live are in possession of a class, which class will not allow the people to use these means unless by so doing a profit will accrete to this class.”

This emphasis can be found in some of Connolly’s earliest writings on Ireland. In his famous 1897 article ‘Socialism and Nationalism’, Connolly wrote:

“If you remove the English army to-morrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Cas-

tle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country...”

Corresponding with Keir Hardie about the possibility of an ILP candidate standing in Edinburgh Central, Connolly denounced both wings of the Irish Parliamentary Party (it had split in 1890 over leader Charles Stewart Parnell’s involvement in a divorce case) as “middle-class parties” which instrumentalised social issues to build support for Home Rule. Connolly argued that British Labour should bypass the bourgeois nationalists and form a relationship with the nascent Irish labour movement.

In 1894, Connolly ran in St Giles ward of the Edinburgh Corporation as a socialist candidate. He was denounced by the nationalists and by the Church and responded in turn against the “crew of hucksters who have seized the National League.”

Connolly wrote of the Irish working-class electorate: “Perhaps they will learn how foolish it is to denounce tyranny in Ireland, and then vote for tyrants and the instruments of tyrants at their own door. Perhaps they will begin to see that the landlord who grinds his

peasants on a Connemara estate and the landlord who rank-rents them in a Cowgate slum, are brethren in fact and deed...Perhaps they will observe how the same Liberal Government which supplies police to Irish landlords to aid them in their work of exterminating the Irish peasantry also imports police into Scotland to aid Scottish mine owners in their work of starving the Scottish miners.”

## ELECTIONS

**In a bitter campaign, Connolly came third, with 263 votes.**

The Liberals won 1,056 votes against the Tories’ 497, with a Catholic independent scoring 54. Connolly reasoned that many workers voted Liberal to keep out a Tory Unionist, and concluded that: “They will now have twelve months in which to meditate on the difference between the Liberal Tweedledee and the Tory Tweedledum”

Explaining his decision to run as a socialist and not a Labour candidate, Connolly expressed the orthodox Social-Democratic view that: “The return of a socialist candidate does not mean the immediate realisation of even the programme of palliatives common set before the electors. Nay, such programmes are in themselves a mere secondary consideration of little weight, indeed, apart from the spirit in which they will be interpreted. The election of a Socialist to any public body is only valuable in so far as it is the return of a disturber of the political peace.”

Due to his electoral activity, Connolly soon found himself out of work again, and attempted to tough out the cold winter by setting himself up as a cobbler. Connolly had many talents, but unfortunately running a business was not one of them.

He did, however, try a novel approach, placing the following add in the *Labour Chronicle*: “Socialists support one another. Connolly, 73m Buccleuch St. repairs the worn-out understandings of the brethren at standard rates. Ladies boots 1/6. gents 2/6.”

It was not to be. The cobbler shop failed, and Connolly considered emigrating to South America. He was only dissuaded when Leslie promised to place an appeal in the SDF paper *Justice* to find him work in the labour movement.

“I know something of Socialist propaganda,” wrote Leslie in the paper, “and have done a little in that way myself, and I know the movement in Edinburgh to its centre, and I say that no man has done more for the movement than Connolly, if they have done as much...he is the most able propagandist in every sense of the word that Scotland has turned out. And because of it, and for his intrepidity, he is today on the verge of destitution and out of work...is there no comrade in Glasgow, Dundee, or anywhere else who could secure a situation for one of the best and most self-sacrificing men in the movement?”

The reply came, not from Glasgow or Dundee, but from the Dublin Socialist Club. Connolly was delighted, and set sail for Dublin in May 1896. He travelled with his wife Lillie, his three daughters, and his library of books.

**Leaving Edinburgh an orthodox Social Democrat, with insights on Ireland influenced by Leslie, Connolly would arrive in Dublin seeking to apply the skills of his Marxist apprenticeship to the complex problems of Britain’s oldest colony.**



# Remembering Leon Brumant

By Daniel Randall

**Leon Brumant, London Underground worker, RMT union rep, and socialist and anti-racist activist, died on Friday 22 April, aged just 30 years old. He is survived by Nia, his young daughter.**

He was an inspirational organiser and a profoundly effective communicator, with a non-sectarian attitude to politics that saw him build links and win friends across the socialist left, inside and outside of his union. He served on the RMT's national Young Members' Advisory Committee, and was my predecessor as RMT London Transport Regional Council Young Members' Officer, from 2013-2014. He had recently been elected Assistant Secretary of the London Transport Regional Council, as well as RMT Health and Safety representative for the Special Requirements Team, the department of London Underground in which he worked. He was also a founding member of Brent Anti-Racism Campaign, a community anti-racism and anti-fascist campaign in the part of London where he had grown up and still lived.

Leon grew up in a working-class community in north west London. His political journey to socialism had taken in Christianity, Islam, and versions of Black nationalism, the latter of which continued to inform aspects of his politics. He was an intensely thoughtful individual, a voracious reader of political and philosophical texts, and tenacious and engaging in debate and discussion.

His commitment to the campaigns he became involved in was unparalleled. Members of Workers' Liberty working on London Underground developed a close relationship

with Leon through struggles such as the "Justice for the 33" campaign, a fight against the unjust sacking of 33 agency workers at stations on the north end of the Bakerloo Line. Leon's work in this and other campaigns was characterised by a tireless, burning dedication.

Leon was conscious that the extent to which he threw himself into campaigning work made him prone to activist burnout, leading to periods of inactivity. He was constantly searching for strategies to rationalise his activist rhythms, for ways to avoid those peaks and troughs; but if he had been able to participate in activity with anything less than the total, all-consuming passion that he did, he would, perhaps, not have been Leon.

Leon was one of my closest friends and comrades at work and in the union. I first met him a few months before I started working on the Tube, and he was a constant source of guidance, inspiration, and support to me from that point onwards, probably to a far greater extent than he ever realised.

## TALK UNION

**Some of my proudest work as a London Underground trade union militant so far was undertaken alongside Leon — organising picket lines at Oxford Circus station during strikes in the summer of 2015, for example.**

The last time I saw Leon was on an RMT Bakerloo Line branch organising walkabout, an activity we had often done together before. I was in awe of his ability to "talk union on the job", finding ways to communicate and express radical trade union ideas and culture to colleagues in a way that never felt

artificial, contrived, or hectoring. After a morning walking round stations, distributing literature, talking to members about ongoing union campaigns and listening to their issues, we stopped in the Stonebridge Park station mess room for a coffee break. A casual chat over coffee with Leon had a tendency to become pretty intense, pretty quickly; our discussion that day took in all manner of issues: whether Marxism's materialism was capable of responding to or engaging with the "emotional" sphere; how liberation struggles and class struggles intersect; how the working-class movement should deal with the question of "aspiration"; and more.

Those topics are fairly representative of the way Leon connected to and explored his ideas.

## OPPRESSION

**There was a profoundly "spiritual" element to his politics; not in a religious or mystical sense, but rather a deep concern for the ways in which the daily brutalities of exploitation and oppression under capitalism twist and distort the human spirit and its creative potential.**

He often criticised me for being reductionist, for too crudely boiling politics down to the economic relation between boss and worker, and sidelining those "spiritual" or emotional aspects which can sometimes be people's first engagement with revolutionary ideas. He agreed with me, I think, that the class relation was at the core of capitalism and therefore must be the ultimate basis of revolutionary organisation; but I think too that he was right to check me for sometimes slipping into a vulgar "workerism". I wish I



had the opportunity to tell him how much I learnt from him.

In an age characterised predominantly by defeats for our class and our movement, many trade unionists find themselves ground down into routine, simply running to stand still. Leon resisted that pressure. He was an "intellectual" in the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's sense of the term — someone motivated by a worldview, who acted to make that worldview hegemonic.

This obituary can hardly do justice to his political work, still less to his sense of humour or his warm and steadfast friendship.

**We have lost a comrade who in many ways represented the future of the movement, and we have lost a dear friend. Our movement, and all of our lives, will be poorer without him in them.**

• A fund for Leon's daughter Nia has been set up. Donate online at [bit.ly/leon-brumant-fund](http://bit.ly/leon-brumant-fund). The RMT will also be fundraising with the union and wider labour movement to contribute towards funeral costs and a memorial event for Leon. We will publish details on our website when we have them.

## May Day greetings from Solidarity to all our readers

**PCS DWP East London branch sends May Day greetings to all Solidarity readers.**

**The weekend is ours — Vote against Saturday working.**



Dear comrades

We approach yet another May Day mindful of the many lessons of previous struggles and the many battles facing us. The crisis of the revolutionary leadership of the world proletariat spans many decades. Yet the elements of the solution to this crisis lie before us: patient, serious and consistent work within the working class and the linking of day-to-day problems and struggles to the final aim of overthrowing the bourgeoisie. We are sure that by learning the lessons of past struggles and fusing them with today's struggles the preparatory work for building an international like the early Comintern can be accomplished.

We send you this May Day greeting in the hope that we may continue co-operating in achieving this great and vital task.

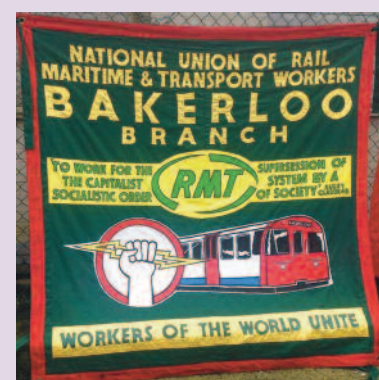
With Bolshevik-Leninist greetings  
Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency



**May Day greetings to readers of Solidarity from RMT Bakerloo Line branch. In memory of Leon Brumant.**

**The past we inherit, the future we build.**

[www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/bakerloobbranch](http://www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/bakerloobbranch)



**May Day greetings from Central Line East branch RMT.**

**Every job matters. Public ownership of public transport under democratic workers' and passengers' control.**

**Glenn Brown, Chair and Janine Booth, Secretary.**

[www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/central-line-east-branch](http://www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/central-line-east-branch)





# Workers' democracy is the bottom line

By Gemma Short

Steve Bloom has written an interesting and thoughtful review of *The Two Trotskyisms confront Stalinism* (Solidarity 400 and 401).

It is interesting to hear from someone who identifies with the Cannon tradition where they feel that tradition went wrong.

There is one point in Bloom's review which is not expanded upon much. Bloom describes it as "obvious". When posing the question "if nationalisations carried out in eastern Europe had a socialist content", Bloom says in hindsight the answer is "obviously both 'yes' and 'no'".

The question of whether nationalisations are per se progressive continues to shape how socialists have responded to a variety of regimes throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

Bloom does not explain why he thinks that the nationalisations in eastern Europe had any socialist content, other than that it is "obvious". His answer to why they both did and didn't have socialist content seems to be that 1. Things are dialectical, and 2. That no real world revolution measures up to a perfect, abstract, theory.

Whilst it is true that the "real world" is not "perfect" there should be a limit to how elastic your theory can be if the evidence around you consistently contradicts it!

Bloom says "a dialectician can accept such contradictory realities and attempt to relate to them". In reality the Orthodox tradition attempted to assimilate each new reality into existing theories into which they obviously didn't fit.

The question of nationalised property is one of those. For Trotsky, and for all of Marxism before him, it was "obvious" that nationalised property is only progressive (and has any socialist content) in so far as the working class has control of the state. However Trotsky, wrongly but understandably, clung onto the existence of nationalised property in Russia as his evidence that the bureaucracy had not managed a full counter revolution, a social revolution replacing the economy put in place by the workers' revolution. Therefore there was still some link to the working class.

However no such workers' revolution made the nationalised property in countries swallowed up in the USSR's expansion. That nationalised property was made directly by the ruling bureaucracy. To say that the resultant nationalised property has a socialist content is to ignore the agency of the working-class in those countries and suggest that socialism can be brought from without.

Trotsky's mistake here would misguide the movement on many other issues in the future, though most took the "nationalised property" argument to a place that I think Trotsky would never have gone. Trotsky's

definition of the bureaucracy as the "gatekeepers of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution" takes one step down the slippery slope of abandoning the idea accepted by Marxists until that point that nationalised property only has a socialist content when controlled by a workers' democracy.

In *The Fate of the Russian Revolution volume 1* Sean Matgamna quotes James Connolly on this issue:

*State ownership and control is not necessarily socialist — if it were then the army and the navy, the police, the judges and gaolers, the informers and the hangmen would all be socialist functionaries, as they are all state officials ...*



Even if you are not willing to define the bureaucracy as a new ruling class, it is clear that there was no workers' democracy in Russia, let alone in countries in eastern Europe.

**Bloom might accuse me of wanting a "perfect theoretical revolution", but for me workers' democracy is a bottom line.**

## Challenging the nationalist narrative

### WAR POEMS

**From its declaration of war in 1914, Britain's ruling class appealed to patriotism to boost its support and its military recruitment.**

By 1916 both were flagging. On the pages of socialist newspaper *The Herald*, poets used verse to question both nationalism and the war's aims. When the government asked men to fight for King and Country, was it shielding its true motives?

Harcourt Williams prefaced his poem "England Fights" (published in *The Herald* on 16 December 1916) with a quote from Shakespeare's Richard III:

"To reap the harvest of Perpetual Peace

By this one bloody trial of sharp war!"

Williams, a conscientious objector, portrays the First World War as the latest in a long line of English imperial crusades, in particular drawing comparisons with Sir Francis Drake's sixteenth-century battles with Spain. He concludes by suggesting that, like the privateer Drake and his royal sponsor Elizabeth I, England's contemporary war motive may have been to protect its riches rather than the more noble purpose it claimed.

Williams was much better known as an actor than as a poet, and went on to become director of The Old Vic theatre company.

Janine Booth

### England fights by Harcourt Williams

England fights; England fights!  
As oft she did of yore -  
In the cause of freedom -  
To make an end of war.  
Down from the musty racks  
The muskets come again;  
They grind the rusty steel  
From battlefields of Spain.  
The ghostly galleons rise -  
(Drake's drumming on the flood!)  
They swab the shrouding seaweed  
From decks amuck with blood.  
And now the mangled men  
Assemble from their sleep;  
Whose wounds shall never heal  
Till we Christ's Peace can keep.  
England fights! England fights!  
Once more the story's told.  
But is it for humanity,  
Or safety of her gold?

**The poem 'Nations' by G Egremont is written in a formal style called the Petrarchan sonnet.**

Its fourteen lines of iambic pentameter (each line containing five "beats" of an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable) consist of an octet (eight lines, rhymed abbaabba) setting out the problem that nations have divided people against each other, and a sestet (six lines, rhymed cdcdcd) offering the solution whereby global brotherhood destroys national division.

The poet writes with the vocabulary of the time, in which men stand in for humanity as a whole, and with religious imagery that was common among poets and peace campaigners, and popular with *The Herald's* editor,

Christian socialist George Lansbury.

*The Herald* published this poem on 30 March 1916. I have not been able to find out any information about the poet.

### Nations by G Egremont

Let us be men, my brothers; men are more  
Than nations; Brotherhood's once-loosened  
tide  
Shall sweep away all barriers that divide  
Mankind; "they may be one" — can we not  
soar  
To this? Through stygian darkness of the  
hoar  
Past centuries, touch of each was lost; in  
wide  
Emergence into dawn, shake hands! beside  
The pale no longer cur-like snarl; the door  
Of Love lies open; enter; rase for aye  
The savage's blood-pricked confines;  
patriots then  
Of one vast realm where brother lights the  
way  
For brother, with no crown on earth again  
But His the Omnipotent King of Glory, say,  
Shall this be so? not nations; no! but Men.

**'While', by Helen Cash, questions the call for loyalty to England when its people are experiencing such suffering and deprivation.**

Although not a sonnet, it is written in iambic pentameter style which gives it an epic tone, emphasising the scale and seriousness of the subject matter. *The Herald* published this poem on 4 November 1916.

"Cash" was the pen name (perhaps the maiden name?) of Helen Stocker, who published two books of poetry — *The Dreamer*

and other poems' (c.1918), which includes 'While', and 'Machines and Men and other new poems' (1923). There is little other information available about her, other than that she was married to Richard Dimsdale Stocker, who wrote extensively on telepathy and other 'occult' subjects.

### While by Helen Cash

While there are weary feet and toilworn  
hands,  
And lips too tired for laughter, eyes too sad  
To weep, and hearts made wolfish by  
despair,  
And misery that drives men almost mad;  
While there are feet that creep before the  
dawn,  
With brains enfeebled, bodies weak and  
starved,  
And souls depraved by vile, incestuous  
loves,  
Young faces marred by lines that crime has  
carved;  
While there is bestial bargaining for love,  
And loathsome gutters where wan children  
play,  
And rooms in which men breed like  
human lice,  
And men who say the world was made that  
way;  
While there are sunshine, woods, and  
flowring fields,  
Seashore, and brown wet rock, and golden  
sand,  
While there is one wan child-face lacking  
these,  
England, I scorn Thee, Thee my native  
land.



# Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth 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 must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants 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 trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

**In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political 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 domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. 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.
  - 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!



## Events

### Thursday 28 April

Students for Another Europe meeting  
7-9pm, Room S-2.08, King's College, London, WC2R 2LS  
[bit.ly/studentseurope](http://bit.ly/studentseurope)

### Thursday 28 April

Workers' Liberty London forum — Iran: the workers' movement after the nuclear deal  
7-9pm, Indian YMCA, W1T 6AQ  
[bit.ly/iranforum](http://bit.ly/iranforum)

### Saturday 30 April

Protest to save Lambeth Libraries  
1pm, Upper Norwood Library, London, SE19 1TJ  
[bit.ly/librarymarch](http://bit.ly/librarymarch)

• Workers' Liberty day school for this day has been moved to 7 May

### Sunday 1 May

London May Day march  
11.30am, Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1R 0DU  
[bit.ly/1maymarch](http://bit.ly/1maymarch)

### Saturday 7 May

Workers' Liberty day school: where we came from, and where we're going  
12 noon, meet at New Cross Gate station, London  
[bit.ly/WLschool](http://bit.ly/WLschool)

### Saturday 7 May

Evening demonstration to shut down Yarlswood Detention centre  
6pm, Yarlswood Detention Centre, Berkshire (details for transport to follow)  
[bit.ly/yarlswooddemo](http://bit.ly/yarlswooddemo)

Got an event you want listing? [solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

More online at [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org) Workers' Liberty @workersliberty

## Come down to the picket line, Heidi!

### LABOUR

By Gemma Short

Instead of joining the junior doctors picket lines and backing the strike like junior doctors and Labour members have asked her to, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary appears to have been spending her time organising a cross-party letter to Jeremy Hunt calling for a trial imposition of the contract.

The letter, signed by Heidi Alexander, Conservative Dr Dan Poulter, Lib Dem Norman Lamb and the SNP's Dr Philippa Whitford and supposedly with the backing of the BMA (though it is unclear through what mechanism), suggests that a limited "trial" imposition of the contract would allow evaluation of its effect and lead to "real understanding of the problem".

This is despicable behaviour. Not only does it not trust the thousands of doctors (and other health professionals) who have been saying unequivocally for months that the contract will not be fair or safe, it actively suggests that they "misunderstand" and that an in-situ evaluation of the contract's effect on weekend working and safe working would lead to these misunderstandings being cleared up.

A trial run of the contract is not necessary for junior doctors to un-



Labour MPs on the picket line at St Thomas' Hospital on 26 April.

derstand the impact it will have, and many of the impacts junior doctors have identified would not show up for many months or years after the contract change. Junior doctors fully understand the effect it will have and have been shouting it from the roof-tops for the last few months.

I can see that Alexander may see this as a clever ploy — make Hunt seem incredibly unreasonable and negotiate small changes to the contract that are shown as unworkable by the trial imposition. But it is a ploy which misses the larger picture and undermines the junior doctors fighting for the future of the NHS.

The larger picture is that this is not just a dispute about the junior doctors' contract (though even if it was Alexander should have put her faith in their arguments and backed them up), it is a fight to save the NHS. The junior doctors' struggle has inspired a reawakening of health struggles and that reawakening is not yet complete — more struggles are to come. Labour should be using and encouraging this momentum, not attempting to stifle it!

**Come down to the picket lines and demonstrations, Heidi, and support the junior doctors' fight to save the NHS.**

## Labour right moving fast

By Martin Thomas

For probably the first time, the right wing slate for the six constituency places on Labour's National Executive Committee, put together by Progress and Labour First, is getting far more nominations from Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) than almost all the nominees on the Centre-left Grassroots Alliance (CLGA) slate.

This is not because CLPs have shifted to the right. All the evidence is of the hundreds of thousands of new members being predominantly left-wing.

But the Labour right, with its millionaire funding, is organising with more energy than the left. And there is other evidence on the same lines. The left has to step up a gear, on this and many other issues.

The deadline for CLP nominations is 24 June, and details of the CLGA slate are at [www.clpd.org.uk](http://www.clpd.org.uk).



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# Strikes hit Glasgow council

By Dale Street

**CCTV workers employed by Glasgow Community Safety – a Glasgow City Council Arms Length External Organisation (ALEO) – are back at work having won a 24% pay rise after twelve strike days over six weeks.**

The 19 workers, all Unison members, struck to achieve equal pay, i.e. parity of shift allowance payments, with other employees who work the same pattern of 12 hour shifts in a round-the-clock service.

A campaign by Glasgow school janitors, also Unison members, in primary, nursery and Additional Support for Learning schools continues, with another three-day strike in late April following on from a three-day strike in March.

Employed by Cordia, another City Council ALEO, the janitors are demanding Working Context and Demands Payments, paid to other ALEO and Council employees who meet the relevant criteria, as do the janitors.

Glasgow City Unison is also currently conducting two separate ballots.

A consultative ballot of 4,000 members mainly employed in the Council's Corporate Services, CBS, Financial Services, and Social Work Fieldwork and Daycare has been underway since the end of March, with the result due out as *Solidarity* goes to press on 26 April.

The ballot is being run in response to the City Council's proposals to cut public holidays, flexi-leave and annual leave, targeted in particular at new workers.

Another thousand Unison mem-



bers – employed in Social Work Residential Units, Standby, 5/7 Daycare and Land and Environmental Services Cleansing – are also taking part in an official ballot on industrial action.

They are shift workers who are rostered to work on public holidays. They therefore face average pay cuts of around £600 a year as a result of the Council's plans to cut the number of public holidays.

Ironically, given that Glasgow is one of the few remaining Labour-controlled local authorities in Scotland, one of the six public holidays to be scrapped is May Day.

GMB is also balloting its members in the City Council workforce.

Following on from an indicative ballot earlier this year, 1,500 GMB members in cleansing, refuse, social care and Land and Environmental Services are now being balloted on industrial action in response to the Council's plans to cut the number of public holidays.

GMB members also stand to lose upwards of £500 a year from changing public holidays into annual leave. The results of the ballots are due in mid-May.

The bigger picture is the SNP Holyrood government's savage cuts in the funding of local authorities, especially Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council.

The SNP claims that they have not cut local authority funding. Alternatively, and inconsistently, they blame the cuts on Westminster.

But the Tories have cut the block grant to Scotland by 4.5% since 2007, whereas Holyrood's cut in the funding of local authorities over the same period amounts to 8.5%.

**Instead of implementing the SNP's cuts by axing 1,500 posts and cutting the terms and conditions of employment of the rest of the workforce, the ruling Labour Group on Glasgow City Council should ally itself with the council unions in a joint campaign against the cuts.**



Lambeth Momentum and Another Europe Is Possible organised an "Our Europe: A Speak Out in Brixton's Windrush Square" on Sunday 24 April. Its message was that the free movement of people across Europe must be defended by voting to remain "in" the EU.

## John Roan teachers strike

By Gemma Short

**Teachers at The John Roan School in Greenwich, south London, struck on Thursday 21 April, and again on Tuesday 26 and Wednesday 27 April in their on going dispute over cuts.**

After strikes earlier in the year a proposal to convert the school to an academy has been defeated, but the head teacher has attacked staff with a restructuring and set of redundancies.

The school has proposed to cut 15 teacher posts, two assistant heads, and five support staff. Due to unfilled vacancies, this would amount to 11.2 posts being made redundant, including two Modern Foreign Languages posts, two PE posts, 1.2 Psychology posts, two Sociology posts, one Science post and one Technology post. The restructuring will also heavily attack teaching in certain subject areas, with Religious Education being cut to nine "focus days" rather than reg-

ular lessons, and Sociology and Psychology GCSE, Film Studies A-level, Government and Politics A-level and BTEC sport Level Three courses being cut. The attacks will also involve increasing teaching periods from five one hour lessons to six 50 minute lessons, increasing teachers' planning load. Teachers' teaching hours will also increase to 22.5 hours a week.

The GMB has now announced plans to ballot support staff over the proposed cuts, and the NAS-UWT (another teachers' union) has announced strikes for 3, 11 and 12 of May.

Teachers at Hornsey Girls School also struck on Tuesday 26 April in a dispute over oppressive management monitoring and excessive workload.

**Similar disputes are brewing in schools across the country, given confidence by the NUT's decision to ballot for a national system of pay and conditions and to fight the education White Paper.**

# Southern Rail guards strike to keep trains safely staffed

By Ollie Moore

**Guards on Southern Rail services will strike from 26-27 April in an attempt to stop Southern's parent company, Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), moving to "Driver Only Operation" (DOO).**

Further strikes are planned for 10-11 and 12-13 May.

DOO will mean that drivers, rather than guards, will perform safety-critical tasks such as opening and closing doors. The workers' union, RMT, says that DOO will hit passenger safety.

GTR's move comes on the back

of a series of other cuts on Southern routes. An RMT statement said: "This company has already axed catering services, threatened ticket offices and delivered appalling levels of customer service in their drive to milk these routes for every penny they can regardless of the impact on safety, reliability and quality."

"These trains are desperately over-crowded and the conductors are the eyes and ears preventing a major tragedy on the platforms and carriages."

In the ballot for the industrial action, workers returned a 95% majority for strikes and a 99.6%

majority for action short of strikes.

Bosses have lashed out at workers. Chief Executive Officer Charles Horton sent a letter to staff in an attempt to intimidate them out of striking. The letter, which insists that "taking strike action is pointless" and "will achieve nothing", also announces the immediate suspension of normal sick pay and shift swap arrangements. It also demands that staff return travel passes and parking permits, and says it will deduct two days' pay for any shift lost through strikes. It says that workers who give "guarantees" that they will not strike, for the remainder of the industrial dis-



pute, and will work any shift asked, whether rostered to or not, "may" have some of these things reinstated.

In a letter to member, RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said: "Some of the things that the company are threatening, for example taking the Govia travel passes from your partners and dependants, is basically pathetic. A petulant child wouldn't be that petty."

"Some of the other threats regarding pay deductions are much

more serious and I am getting urgent legal advice on this matter and will email you again Monday.

**"In the meantime don't be intimidated by the company's letter. Stand firm, the fight goes on, support the strike."**

## GTR bosses use courts to scupper strike

**Govia Thameslink has secured a High Court injunction against train drivers' union Aslef, which planned to ballot its members on the Gatwick Express service to operate new 12-car trains.**

Gatwick Express already has Driver Only Operation on its exist-

ing 10-car trains, but in line with its policy to resist any extension of DOO, Aslef planned to ballot members against plans to extend DOO to the new 12-car fleet.

An Aslef statement said: "Longer trains without guards are not safe for passengers, especially

with the rise in sexual assaults, and not safe for drivers.

**"This is purely greed and a cost-cutting measure risking safety – no member of the public has ever demanded a train without guards."**

**The fight against DOO on Northern Rail — from the *Off the Rails* blog: [bit.ly/otr-northern](http://bit.ly/otr-northern)**





# Solidarity

For a workers' government

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## JUSTICE FOR THE HILLSBOROUGH 96

By Rosalind Robson

**On Tuesday 26 April the jury returned their verdicts in the inquest into the 1989 Hillsborough football disaster in which 96 football spectators, all except one Liverpool fans, were killed.**

Among other things the jury found that the police officer in charge of policing the event in which fans were crushed to death, and 400 others were injured in an overcrowded pen — Chief Superintendent David Duckenfield — was guilty of “manslaughter by gross negligence.”

This is a tremendous victory for justice, but it has been, for the families and friends of the people who died on 15 April just over 27 years ago, at a huge cost.

For 27 years the police lied, and covered up their actions on the day. They continued to lie and cover up during this latest inquest.

Shortly after the day Duckenfield fed a lie about fans being drunk and to blame, a lie that would make its way to the front page of the *Sun* and other newspapers a few days after the event.

Today, the *Sun* newspaper continues to blame the police for their printing of a story vilifying Liver-

pool fans.

South Yorkshire police not only maintained the lie through the years, and systematically changed witness statements to distort the truth.

For 27 years MPs and governments obstructed debates in Parliament, and then the demand for a further inquest to reverse the failings of the first inquest, in which the coroner decided not to look at the emergency response to the disaster.

For over 20 years David Duckenfield lied. Then, in the last few years, possibly since he knew the truth was soon to come out, admitted some responsibility. Still he continued to maintain fans were drunk, despite this being something he knew nothing about, being for all of the match inside a control room.

Duckenfield was put in charge of Hillsborough despite having no experience. He took the decision to open an exit gate so that people rushed into an already overcrowded pen. It was a mistake, but he behaved like a cop. He sought to enforce order at all costs. He chose to treat the fans as “hooligans”. He calling for dogs instead of ambulances, when it was clear that people were suffering — in fact being asphyxiated to death.

In 2009 a review was set up by



Labour. It led to the original inquests being quashed. But it took yet another campaign by the bereaved families for the High Court to order a new hearing.

More of the truth must now come out and there may be criminal prosecutions. Good.

It must, at times have seemed for the families that they were never going to get there. That they did not give up is something of a

miracle.

As Julie Connor, whose brother Andrew Sefton died at Hillsborough expressed what today means and why it is an inspiration for anyone who has to fight the system in smaller and larger ways:

“We have paved the way for other ordinary, decent people in this country, who also find themselves in extraordinary circum-

stances of someone else’s making, to tread the path to truth and justice.

**“We have swept the road before you, heaved boulders, checked for mines, swallowed dust, buried our dead at the roadside and, at times, crawled on our hands and knees, so that the path is now a little easier for you to walk on.”**

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### Contact us

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Write to us: The editor  
(Cathy Nugent), 20E Tower  
Workshops, Riley Road, London,  
SE1 3DG

Solidarity editorial: Cathy Nugent  
(editor), Gemma Short, and  
Martin Thomas

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