



& Workers' Liberty Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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Labour yes to customs union

OPEN BORDERS FOR PEOPLE

At the September 2017 Labour conference, Brexit debates were, lamentably yet largely thanks to a push by sections of the left, squeezed off the agenda. But the issue needs debate, open, thorough, and intelligent debate.

Solidarity, along with others, will push for Labour to uphold free movement of people — at least, to defend the existing free movement within Europe — to campaign to stop Brexit, and to support a referendum over whatever deal the Tories come up with.

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Stop the bombing in Syria!



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Pull down the statues!



Dan Katz examines the legacy of political statues.

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School workers' anti-academy strikes



School workers, parents and Labour Party members fight academy plans in Newham.

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Join Labour!

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Italian elections: fascist menace grows

By Hugh Edwards

The horrific act of fascist violence on the 3 February in the central Italian town of Macerata, where eight young west Africans were gunned down by a neo-fascist thug, has highlighted the level of putrefying decadence of the major political contenders for office.

All of them, from the inveterate xenophobes and the racist (northern) Lega, to the now-not-so-populist 5 Star Movement, through to the resurrected corpse of Berlusconi's Forza Italia and rounded off by the Renzi-led Democratic Party of government, instinctively chorused that the answer to the ever-more palpable violent presence of neo-fascist action against immigrants was to get rid of the immigrants once and for all.

"No more invasions"; "close

down all mosques"; "deport all of them"; "end all benefits and asylum centres" were just some of the utterances of the centre-right leaders. Meanwhile the organs of the liberal centre-left government cynically echoed the Minister of Interior Minniti (author of the deal with the Libyans to seal off the Mediterranean and "aid the refugees" by consigning them to the inferno of that country's concentration camps) saying that "defence of public order" was now the priority, applauding his decision to ban a anti-fascist, anti-racist march in Macerata planned for 10 February.

Predictably, his ruling was supported by the leaders of the CGIL trade union and the leaders of the anti-fascist partisan/cultural organisation. Minniti and his cronies in government and the union bureaucrats were scared that any serious mass mobilisation of trade

union and working class anti-fascist action in defence of the immigrants would endanger hoped-for electoral support for Minniti's anti-immigrant "hardman" stance. They also feared that the hypocritical genuflections of the governing classes before the country's constitutional and legal "anti-fascism" would be exposed — and not just for its utter impotence, but for its role as an ideological and political weapon aimed to prevent any serious independent anti-fascist mass organisation emerging in the heart of a working class movement.

The origins and growth of fascism are fed by a widespread anger at, and desperation before, an oppressive social order. And responsibility for it lies with those championing that order.

However, in defiance of the Minniti ruling, more than 20,000 (from a town of 45,000) marched behind a massive anti-fascist, anti-racist

banner on 10 February. The majority identified with political and social forces on the left and hostile to the Democratic Party (with a strong showing for the pro-migrant base unions), though many of the rank-and-file Fiom and CGIL workers present still clung to illusions that Renzi's defeat in next week's elections will see the party restored to he "left" — currently decamped in Liberty and Equality, a stitch-up got together by the magistrate Grasso (once a part of the "Tangentopoli" scandal), now president of the Senate, and ex-Stalinist Bersani.

Reference was made to what had happened a week before in Genoa, where after another fascist attack, thousands of local anti-fascists gathered all day to address the need to go beyond symbolic gestures of protest, and forge a common political programme and perspective of working-class struggle, not only against fascists but the

policies of reaction everywhere in the city, beginning at the top with its PD-led council.

The 5,000-strong march through the city, behind a banner which in declaring opposition to fascism, racism and the rightwing parties including the PD, proved too much for some of the trade union militants of CGIL/Fiom. Clearly, as at Macerata a week later, this was another pointer to the enormous political tasks ahead for the profoundly divided Italian socialist and working class movement — where the governmental crisis is about to enter a further stage of sharpening and deepening social conflicts.

The election, whatever permutation of individuals and forces it produces, looks set to create a favourable context for continued far-right resurgence.

German union wins over hours, but at what price?

By Stefan Dietl

Last month the German metalworking and electronics industries waged their most intensive struggle for years. More than 1.5 million workers downed tools in three 24-hour stoppages.

The 24-hour strikes allowed them to make a strong show of economic force. The strikes meant between 770 and 980 million Euros' worth of lost production. Little wonder, then, that the Gesamtmetall employers' association wanted to prevent open-ended strikes.

Unions and employers have agreed to a wage increase of 4.3% over two years from April 2018, and a one-off payment of 100 Euros. From 2019, employees

should receive a bonus each July to the value of 27.54% of a monthly salary, and also a fixed sum, initially set at 400 Euros. Apprentices will also receive a wage increase of 4.3%. But their one-off payment will only be 70 Euros and in 2019 they will receive 200 Euros. Most economists assume an average wage increase of 3% per year, with lower-wage groups performing markedly better.

CENTRAL ISSUE

But the central issue in the wage dispute was not just about higher pay.

For the first time since the historic strike for the 35-hour week in East Germany fifteen years ago, the biggest single union in the world

was fighting for a reduction of working hours.

Instead of a collective and permanent reduction, the union IG Metall took a more individualised approach to working time and demanded that workers be provided the option of reducing their working hours from 35 to 28 hours a week over a period of up to two years. Taking that tack won the union a partial victory.

From 2019, full-time workers who have worked in their plant for at least two years, will be able to reduce their working hours to 28 hours a week for between six months and two years, before returning to a 35-hour week. If more than 10% of workers are on reduced hours at a given time, the employer may not grant any addi-

tional requests. However, IG Metall didn't win their demand that pay lost through reductions in working hours should be compensated through an additional raise.

Workers who have children under eight years old or who care for dependants — that is, those workers for whom the reduction in working time is especially important — have the option of giving up the additional payment of 27.54% of a month's salary, in return for eight additional days of leave, of which the employer will pay them for two. This also applies to shift workers, provided that they have been employed at the works for a long period of time. More free time or more money — this is the choice that the wage settlement puts before the workers.

working hours for some will be repaid by an extension of working hours for others; but also attacked the increased individualisation of the rules set out in collective agreements. More than a few people fear that in the future, workers will be easier to play off against one another, and warn that unions' collective power might be weakened. Union reps [Vertrauensleute] at the Bremen Mercedes-Benz works criticised the IG Metall strategy in sharp terms before the agreement was concluded: "No more united demands, everyone can go on strike for their individual desires (if any). A strike becomes almost impossible, so long collective wage agreements." This, they said, would be "a further step towards the self-destruction of our union".

However, in a survey on working hours conducted before the dispute, in which 680,000 workers in the metalworking and electronics industries took part, the great majority said that they were generally happy with their working hours.

82% of those questioned said that they would, however, like the opportunity to temporarily reduce their hours, for example to raise children, look after relatives, or undergo further training; and also to adapt their working hours to the circumstances of their life, instead of following rigid models.

Through this wage settlement, IG-Metall is trying to meet their members need for flexible models of working hours, without giving up collective bargaining rights over working time and wages.

Whether that works or not remains to be seen.

• Translated from <https://jungle.world/>

Israel: 20,000 march for migrant rights



On 24 February, around 20,000 people gathered in Tel Aviv in Israel to protests against the deportation of African asylum seekers. Protesters carried signs reading, "No to deportation", "We're all humans" and "Refugees and residents refuse to be enemies". The protest was a response to tensions between local residents and recently-arrived migrants. The protest — which, if scaled up to the UK population, would have numbered about 140,000 — came after the Israeli state began to jail African asylum seekers who refused to leave Israel of their own accord. On Tuesday 20 February, asylum seekers at a detention centre in Holot began a hunger strike.

UNDERMINE

In return for this option, IG Metall agreed to a measure that would further undermine the 35-hour week.

Whereas until now up to 18% of all work contracts could stipulate a 40-hour week, from now on, joint-management works councils will be able to raise that proportion to 22%. If the employer can prove that they are suffering from Germany's infamous labour shortage, a works-level agreement can be signed to permit that figure to go as high as 30%; if at least half the employees earn more than 5,500 Euros a month, it can be 50%.

Not everyone shares the enthusiasm of IG Metall leader Jörg Hofmann, for whom the agreement represents "a milestone on the way to a modern, self-governing world of work". Critics have not only pointed out that the reduction in

Poland: women's rights, not church law!



The ruling right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland is backing a law to further restrict in Poland. Polish feminist Magdalena Zielinska spoke to *Solidarity*.

Currently abortion is only legal in three cases: when it is the result of rape or incest; where it threatens a woman's life; or when the fetus is sick or damaged.

This set-up is described as a "compromise". But it is not a compromise with women: it is a compromise between the church and the state. We have church law!

The Polish government is currently discussing a ban on what they call "eugenic abortion", where doctors detect health problems in an unborn child. That is the basis on which the vast majority of legal abortions take place: after all, it is extremely difficult to prove cases of rape.

There was a famous case two years ago in which a pre-natal scan discovered that a foetus would be extremely ill when it was born. The mother wanted to get an abortion, which was her legal right. But the doctor, a conservative Catholic, said he needed to do more tests, and played for time until it was too late for a legal abortion. The child was born without a brain and didn't survive: but the doctor was very proud of himself, and said that it was good that the child got to experience motherly love. The mindset is unbelievably twisted!

Two years ago, the government wanted to ban abortion completely. There were attempts by a conservative grouping called *Ordo Iuris*, and they lobbied for a bill to ban abortion, even in cases of rape, incest or a threat to a mother's life. It was very cruel, and this is what sparked the "Black Monday" protests. It mobilised women across Poland.

Abortion was entirely legal until

1993. Since then a pro-choice lobby has fought to un-restrict abortion.

In 2016 the wave of protests was huge: it was bigger than anyone had anticipated. The government got scared; international media were all over them, and the wave of protest was so huge that they dropped the legislation.

But there was another proposal, from pro-choice groups, which included legalising abortion until 12 weeks of pregnancy; and lots of other positive changes, like extra access to contraception and sex education in schools.

Sexual education in schools at the moment is a joke, it consists of people who normally teach religious studies telling students that homosexuality is a sin and the best contraception is abstinence... This bill was rejected at the first reading.

A few months ago the proposal to restrict eugenic abortion went to parliament and the pro-choice groups put together a new counter-proposal: it was pro-contraception,

sexual education and so on, and on 8 January it was rejected in the first vote again. But the liberal centre, with ten MPs from a centrist party which claims to be in opposition to the current government, abstained in the vote, and the proposal fell by exactly ten votes.

The restriction on "eugenic abortion" hasn't yet been passed. But what has been restricted is access to the morning-after pill. The doctor can refuse to give you a prescription for the morning-after pill. This forces women to drive across country, shop around, and wind up waiting over 48 hours.

Just before this bill came into effect, lots of women went into pharmacies and bought up morning-after pills. So there is now a network of self-help: a woman who needs a pill finds a woman who has got one, and then when she's taken it, she has a bit more time in which to try to obtain a replacement.

The next wave of protests will start on 8 March, International Women's Day. In 2016, Polish feminists got in touch with feminists around the world to talk about joint activity on 8 March. After we defeated the last bill, a lot of the movement died back. But there is a large core of women who are still active.

Involvement in the 2016 movement changed the way a lot of people thought: it turned people onto politics, made them understand that politics is about everyone, about you and me.

Czechia: Kurdish leader arrested

Salih Musleem was formerly the co-president of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, the political arm of the Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG), in Syria.

He was invited to take part in a conference on the Middle East, but was arrested in a hotel in Prague by Czech security forces following a request from the Turkish Government.

He has now been released.

The Turkish government accused Musleem of being a terrorist.

As a matter of fact, it is Turkey and Erdogan who have backed ISIS and terrorist groups... who has victimised civilians in Syria, assassinated its political opposition within Turkey and abroad and filled its jails with politicians, journalists and citizens who oppose Erdogan's policies.

The Turkish government is currently carrying out a major military campaign against the Syrian Kurdish area in the Afrin region of northern Syria. This has led to the killing and displacement of many innocent people.

• From a statement by Dashty Jamal, Secretary of the International Federation of Iraq Refugees.

Sarkocy: truth and spies

By Michael Elms

Jan Sarkocy, a one-time junior intelligence officer for the Státní Bezpečnost, the former Czechoslovakian State Security (StB) has made himself a few quid this month by trading off claims that Jeremy Corbyn was a paid asset of the Czechoslovakian state during the Cold War.

Sarkocy's claims have been comprehensively debunked. The head of the Czech Security Service Archive, Svetlana Ptacnikova, told the BBC that the file on Corbyn in the StB archive shows that Corbyn was at best a "person of interest" to the service, and not an asset.

But this tawdry story does raise some issues worthy of discussion.

One of these is the pattern that the whole "scandal" has followed. The capitalist press creates a market for smears. Any embittered has-been or marginal fantasist who cares to concoct a politically-convenient lie can expect to make a bit of cash and see their name in lights, even if their story is eventually discredited.

Unfortunately, this hailstorm of

lies and abuse from the right can feed a conspiracy-theorist fantasy politics on the left. Paranoid left-wing blogs both concoct "fake news" to suit our side's narrative; and denounce and deny any inconvenient facts. Both tendencies are poison to our movement.

The left should respond to the smears and slanders of the right by developing a culture that values education and truth as powerful forces for freedom.

The other issue is to do with the relationship of the British labour movement to world Stalinism.

Jeremy Corbyn had a better record on Eastern European solidarity than many in the UK trade union and labour movement. Rather than being awed by the anti-worker dictatorships of the Eastern Bloc, or a dupe of Stalinism, he was one of five MPs to sponsor the following Early Day Motion on "Workers' Democracy in Eastern Europe" in 1989:

"That this House welcomes the magnificent movements in Eastern Europe for full democratic control over what happens in society and recognises that this outburst of discontent and opposition in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, in

particular, reflects deep anger against the corruption and mismanagement of the Stalinist bureaucracy; sees the movement leading in the direction of genuine socialism, not a return to capitalism; congratulates the workers of the Soviet Union, particularly the striking miners of Vorkuta, in the Arctic Circle, who are leading the struggle for better pay and conditions and for an end to one-party dictatorship; notes that their fight has been in the face of vicious anti-strike laws of a type that even Her Majesty's government drew back from..."

Unfortunately, the bureaucracy of the labour movement still contains a few hold-outs, Sarkocy's spiritual brothers, who are nostalgic for the secret-police regimes that tortured and murdered trade union leaders in the Eastern Bloc.

Hopefully as the left develops and grows, a culture of respect for the truth will root wash away the anti-socialist methods and anti-socialist beliefs of Stalinism from our movement.

• Republished from the *Clarion*: bit.ly/Czechspy

Syria: massacre in Ghouta

By Simon Nelson

Almost 400,000 people are trapped in Eastern Ghouta, the last enclave on the outskirts of Damascus that is still not under the control of Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime.

The UN Security Council has asked for a month-long ceasefire and for a humanitarian corridor to be opened up to allow civilians to leave. Putin, on whose army and air support Assad has relied, has instead called for a daily five-hour "humanitarian pause"

RUSSIA

Russia's call will carry more weight than the UN's. Meanwhile, one of the regime's worst bombing campaigns has been allowed to kill 500 people in eight days.

The ceasefire which should begin on 27 February may be a small respite but will not stop the Syrian army from continuing to bombard the area and anyone in it, including with chemical weapons. Russia immediately broke the terms of the UN resolution by dropping further

bombs on Eastern Ghouta while Iranian-backed militias controlled by Qassem Suleimani continued to try and drive out the last of the rebel forces.

The 250-300 remaining members of Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) are thought to have lost almost all control of the area. But their military efforts are keeping the army at bay.

Eastern Ghouta fell early on in the initial 2011 uprisings against Assad and HTS and their predecessors were quick to establish themselves there, but both of the largest rebel groups, Jaish al-Islam and Faylaq al-Rahman, say they have little power and are not in direct contact with the main Syrian al-Qaeda base in Idlib. HTS were able to institute their own taxes, establish Sharia courts and harass and govern the population of Ghouta through fear.

The siege has been ongoing since 2013 and now appears to be in its final phase, and the complete destruction, rather than just the starvation, of the territory is on the cards.

Guns, controls and the labour movement

By Gerry Bates

The US constitution famously states that “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed”; historically, revolutionary democrats insisted on this right as a guarantee against arbitrary state power and the development of tyranny.

But the early United States was a society composed predominantly of independent small farmers, with only a small urban population. It is obvious that carrying a gun around your farm is different from carrying a gun in the hot house of a big city packed with people, full of social tension and with numerous potential flashpoints for violence.

Nonetheless, in recent history too, some socialists in the US have opposed gun control on the class grounds that the working class movement should not endorse — even when it is not strong enough to decisively challenge — the bourgeois state’s monopoly of force.

This was the position of the James Cannon and the American SWP, for instance. As Trotsky put it in the *Transitional Programme*, socialists must dispute the reformist idea “that the sacredness of democracy is best guaranteed when the bourgeoisie is armed to the teeth and the workers are unarmed.”

The working class and oppressed groups may need arms for self-defence, as in the late 1960s when the Black Panthers armed themselves for protection against the police. In a revolutionary situation or even major class



The mass shooting that left 17 dead at a high school in Parkland, Florida, earlier this month has led to new calls for gun control legislation in the US.

struggle, this becomes more important still — how can we even begin to prepare the ground for a workers’ militia if we have supported laws which prevent anyone except the state from acquiring weapons?

The problem, of course, is that the current beneficiaries of guns being freely available will not be revolutionary workers’ organisations but petty criminals, not to mention the kind of disturbed individuals who have carried out numerous shootings in American

schools.

Gun-related crime is a massive problem in US and increasingly some British cities (for instance Nottingham); and the victims of it are almost always working-class (and again often black working-class) people. Moreover, in Britain the situation is somewhat different from the US: although we generally oppose the police having guns, there is not a threat to the workers’ movement and the oppressed from armed police and right-wing vigilante

Levels of gun ownership, per 100 people

United States	101
Serbia	58
Iraq	34
France	31
Germany	30
Switzerland	24
Australia	24
UK	6

militias in the way that there at least has been historically in the US. It therefore makes a lot less sense to highlight the right of citizens to be armed.

In addition, the police are not the only threat working-class people face, and there is nothing progressive about communities being flooded with weapons. This suggests a case for some kind of gun control, but the question is how this can be done without strengthening the repressive powers of the state and disarming — ideologically and, in the end, physically — the workers’ movement.

Perhaps the solution is what we understand some socialists in Australia have advocated: gun control administered not by the police but by the labour movement. In any case, there is an urgent need for a debate on these issues, and first of all among the revolutionary left.

A book that will make socialists

Jim Denham reviews *Socialism Makes Sense*, by Sean Matgamna.

They say that people — young people in particular — don’t read books any more. I hope that’s not true, because books have always been powerful weapons in the struggle for socialism, and many of us can look back to a particular pamphlet, novel or collection of essays and say, “that’s what convinced me.”

Many comrades I’ve known said they were won over by Tressell’s *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (which, to my shame, I’ve never read), the poetry of Shelley or the writings of William Morris. For me it was youthful exposure to Orwell (*The Road to Wigan Pier*, especially) and then, a few years later, Hal Draper’s *Two Souls of Socialism*.

Sean Matgamna’s *Socialism Makes Sense* — *An unfriendly dialogue* may not be quite such a classic, but it serves the same purpose. Like all the best socialist proselytising, it’s entertaining as well as didactic, full of colourful language and rich metaphors. It’s simultaneously accessible (no prior knowledge of socialist theory is assumed), and demanding (it requires careful reading and sustained concentration).

Matgamna has adopted the format of a dialogue between a Marxist (A) and a defender of capitalism (B) for all but the closing pages of the book. It’s not altogether clear whether B is a Tory, a liberal (with a large or small ‘l’) or a fairly right-wing social democrat: he or she may, in fact, be a combination of all of those, but one thing is for sure, she or he is no fool.

Matgamna is unusual amongst leading revolutionary socialist writers in that he’s debated leading right-wing thinkers like Kenneth Minogue and Roger Scruton — characters who are well versed in pro-capitalist ideology and whose criticisms of socialism have at least a veneer of sophistication and a sense of history and philosophy.

Quite rightly, Matgamna believes in taking on opposing arguments at their strongest, as put forward by their most eloquent and persuasive representatives, rather than wasting time arguing with self-evident clowns and ignoramuses.

The pro-capitalist B raises half a dozen or so main objections to socialism: the experience of Stalinism, human nature, the (alleged) decline of the working class, democracy, the bureaucracy of state ownership and, finally, the cynic’s ultimate put-down, “What’s in it for me?” (i.e. “Why waste your life on this foolish quest? Why invite me to do the same. Why fight for a cause that may suffer nothing but defeat, in your lifetime, or forever?”)

Matgamna takes these objections seriously, and (assuming that A is in fact the author himself), answers them with arguments that are essentially Marxist, but avoid unnecessary jargon, and without shying away (as some Marxists have done) from such concepts as human nature, reason, enlightenment, respect for individuals and ... (yes!) love. Indeed, more than once B accuses A of sentimentality: “Love? Have I suddenly fallen down a rabbit-hole into a sloppy romance for pre-pubescent girls?”

Happily, the book is not without a leavening of humour, as when A notes that a late 19th century British Marxist called Edith Lan-

chester was committed to a mental asylum for her beliefs (no, that’s not the funny bit) and that her daughter became a well-known actress, Elsa Lancaster; B replies, “Ah, the ‘Bride of Frankenstein’ herself. That figures. Bet she was a socialist. Frankenstein too. And the monster as well, maybe?”

The closing pages contain a more conventional exhortation to the reader to commit her or himself to Marxism and the class struggle:

The fight for Marxism and for a Marxist labour movement is the fight to prepare the only force capable of taking humanity out of our age of neo-barbarism, the working class, for that task. It is for that task that the Alliance for Workers Liberty exists and fights.”

Matgamna’s impressive little book should certainly persuade some readers to head his call, and as James Connolly put it, “dare to hope and dare to fight.”

Socialism makes sense

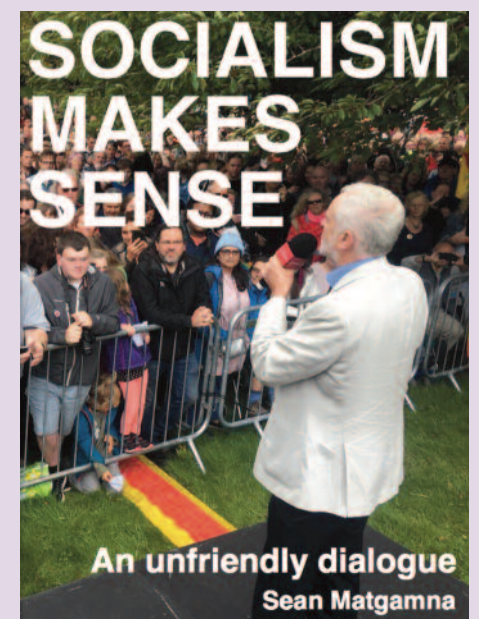
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Open borders for people!

The Labour Party has inched a step further to oppose the erection of new barriers between Britain and Europe.

That brings the immediate prize of a possibility, within the next few weeks, of defeating the Government in Parliament over its desire to take Britain out of the European customs union.

It should also open a thorough discussion in Labour over Europe, leading to a debate at the Labour Party conference in September.

At the September 2017 Labour conference, Brexit debates were, lamentably yet largely thanks to a push by sections of the left, squeezed off the agenda. But the issue needs debate, open, thorough, and intelligent debate.

Solidarity, along with others, will push for Labour to uphold free movement of people — front-line, to defend the existing free movement within Europe — to campaign to stop Brexit, and to support a referendum over whatever deal the Tories come up with.

On 26 February, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said that Labour would back Britain remaining in “a customs union” with the EU. A sizeable block of dissident Tories also want a customs union. The Government is due to bring that issue to a vote within the coming weeks, and as things stand it looks like being defeated.

The Labour leadership has signalled two other shifts recently.

A few months ago, shadow EU minister Keir Starmer committed Labour to demanding a vote in Parliament on whatever Brexit deal the Tories produce.

And on 21 February, shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott made a speech de-

nouncing the idea that migrants should bear any blame for depressed wages or inadequate public services.

Fundamentally, as Abbott said: “We must go back to before the 1962 Immigration Act, and talk about immigrants as people”. “Of course”, she said, “there is pressure on schools, on the NHS, and on housing from a growing population. But these are problems associated with [population] growth, which should be met with investment”.

In fact, the “population growth” coming from migration is essential for making that investment. The NHS, in particular, depends heavily on migrant workers, and will shrink without them. Funding for pensions and benefits depends on migrants, more of whom (compared to the British-born population) are of young, working, heavy-tax-paying, low-benefits-claiming age.

ABBOTT

Abbott’s speech was lighter on specific commitments than on general sentiments.

But she did pledge Labour to end the family break-ups caused when Britain deports, for example, children who reach the age of 18, because they lack a right to remain, when their close family does have that right and will remain. And the change in tone signalled by her speech was very welcome.

Labour’s “customs union” shift is studiously ambiguous. It supports “a” customs union with the EU, not “the” customs union. It is obviously fantasy to suppose that the EU will suddenly replace its customs union, as it has evolved since 1958, by

some different construction, though it is possible that Britain could have a partial-membership deal with the customs union as Turkey and two small European territories, Andorra and San Marino, have.

Pro-Brexit, anti-immigration, maverick Labour MPs such as Frank Field appear to have been coaxed into backing the new policy by being told that Labour will accompany it with conditions for “a” customs union such as the EU will surely not agree to.

Labour’s policy on the other major trade dimension of the EU, the Single Market, is for “a new and strong relationship with the Single Market that includes full tariff-free access and a floor under existing rights, standards and protections”.

That too is ambiguous. How would it differ from just being in the Single Market?

The Single Market is a system of harmonising trade stipulations across Europe so that production all across the EU can be done according to a single system of standards of regulation, labelling, and so on, and the products can then move freely and without checks across borders.

The Customs Union is a common set of tariffs on items imported from outside the Customs Union area. Customs Union membership, or partial-membership, rules out negotiating trade deals with other countries distinct from those the EU may have with those countries. That is the Tory right’s stated reason for opposing Customs Union membership, though in fact their promises of quick and easy trade deals with non-EU states to come with Brexit has proved empty.

Turkey is (partially) in the Customs Union, but not in the Single Market; Nor-

way is in the Single Market (for sectors other than fisheries), but not in the Customs Union.

The EU has bundled freedom of movement for people together with the Single Market. That is good. From an anti-racist, democratic, internationalist, or socialist point of view, the free movement of people (obviously unworkable without the free movement of trade) is the greatest prize of European unity, though we also value the elements of economic integration and the limited elements of social levelling-up.

The Labour leaders are evidently scared of annoying Labour voters who are pro-Brexit and anti-migrant. Few of those voters are hardened racists. Many could be convinced by an honest, respectful argument.

Even if they are not fully convinced, most of them will stay with Labour if a pro-free-movement, anti-Brexit stance is integrated with a social program to restore the NHS, renationalise utilities, repeal all the anti-union laws, raise the minimum wage, and so on.

Already, a clear majority of voters say that, even if they don’t positively support free movement, they would prefer the package of Single Market with free movement to quitting the Single Market. A 68%-19% majority of Labour voters want a referendum on whatever Brexit deal the Tories produce. A 50%-34% majority of the whole electorate also wants a referendum before a deal can go ahead.

For workers’ unity across Europe! For unity of migrant and British-born workers! Against re-raised barriers between peoples! For open borders!

UCU strike part of a wide

By Dan Davison, NCAFC Postgrads and Education Workers Co-Rep

On Monday 19 February, Theresa May launched the latest funding review for higher education.

Acknowledging that the UK now has “one of the most expensive systems of university tuition in the world”, May put forward that the review would “examine how we can give people from disadvantaged backgrounds an equal chance to succeed”. This followed Education Secretary Damian Hinds’ suggestions that students might be charged variable tuition fees according to their specific degree’s economic value. Indeed, the themes of “meritocracy” and greater “value for money” infused May’s speech, which floated such options as adjusting the repayment period for graduates and bringing back maintenance grants, but excluded abolishing fees altogether.

These shifts in position from Government figures almost certainly reflect pressures brought first by the student movement in 2010 and later by the Corbyn-led Labour Party, which has committed to abolishing fees, reintroducing grants, and setting up a

new National Education Service to allow people to access education throughout their lives. Nevertheless, such concessions from the Conservatives mean little without directly tackling the underlying problem of marketisation. In other words, such tinkering around the edges of tuition costs and debt repayment not only comes across as a “too little, too late” gambit after years of slashed funds, course closures, and fee hikes, but also explicitly reinforces the very education-as-commodity logic that gave ideological cover to this systematic gutting of the sector.

Education is far more than a financial investment in one’s future: it provides a substantial benefit to society as a whole by fostering skills and knowledge, as well as individual fulfilment by allowing people to seek new personal and intellectual horizons. One cannot reduce this worth to a price tag based on whether the private sector happens to consider a given skill or field of knowledge vital for its internal operations. Whilst many students’ experience of the current system may well be a monotonous grind to gain a set of numbers on a sheet of paper that will hopefully find them a job, the only manner in which we can break people free from such a life-sapping existence is by radically alter-



Above and right: Architecture students at Cambridge University chained a red picket fence to the gates of the University Senate House in solidarity with the strike.

ing the way we have come to conceptualise education itself. It calls for us to be able to see and treat education the way we see and treat healthcare: as a public good that everyone is entitled to access, supported by the redistribution of wealth.

We most clearly see the spectre of marketi-

sation lingering above the funding review when we consider it alongside the ongoing strikes by UCU members to defend their pensions. The proposed changes would make final pensions depend on investment performance rather than workers’ contributions, effectively spelling the end of guaranteed

Support staff back the UCU

By a Unison member

Most university support staff — admin, repairs, gardeners, cleaners, caterers, security, etc — are not in the USS scheme but in various inferior schemes.

We are not involved in the strike, but we are certainly supportive. At our university, Nottingham, UCU were the guest speakers at our Unison branch AGM. A handful of admin workers are also in the USS pension scheme and some of them are also taking action, including my line manager! The university is certainly quiet. A lot of the students have gone home for a long weekend after their lecturers told them they would be on strike.

The UCU branch here has supported the campaign for a living wage, and championed the cause of the Operations and Facilities staff who have far inferior terms and conditions to the rest of the staff. It is time for us to repay their support.

Unison nationally has sent out advice that we must not take solidarity action, i.e., join the picket lines (although we may visit the picket lines out of work hours), and we should not cover for work that striking staff would have done. Our Unison branch has voted to donate to the local strike fund.

We have found ways to show our support in our individual workplaces: from my office we have been taking thermos flasks of hot water out to the pickets and stuff to make hot drinks because it’s freezing on the picket lines. If the strikes carry on longer we

will be discussing other ways we can help.

Staff morale at our university is rock bottom; a recent staff “engagement survey” showed alienation across all job roles. I’m not surprised that people are seizing the chance of the strike to express their discontent.

I hope UCU will organise a rally or a march around the campus: it would be well supported by all sorts of people who work at the university.

Birkbeck solidarity

Some library workers at Birkbeck University have been refusing to cross UCU picket lines, with the library closing as a consequence. Solidarity spoke to a Unison member from the library:

“This is by a long way the best and most actively supported strike we’ve had at Birkbeck for years. Picket line rotas which in the past might have been covered with a few “usual suspects” have been filled by a much larger group of staff who understand quite how huge an attack this is. Unison has been supporting the UCU in taking this action, as we know that if this is allowed to happen further attacks are likely, including to our pensions and other working conditions.

“It’s been really great seeing Unison members, including part-time lower paid library workers, taking action in solidarity.”

UCU members’ confidence

Jon Fanning, Lecturer in International Management Strategy and University of York UCU Executive (pc), spoke to Solidarity.

At York we have four regular pickets, given the spread-out nature of the campus.

We picket from 8am to 10am. At 10am we move towards Hetherington Hall, the senior administration block and have a bit of a rally for 10-15 minutes, to let the VC see how many people are there. On the first day, and on Monday, after the email went out to keep the pressure on, the pickets were big — over 100 people! People have been taken by surprise at how big the pickets have been.

On my campus, there were representatives

of all campuses on the picket line. In the past, people have been reluctant to strike, saying “this one-day strike won’t mean anything, why are we doing it?” Now they are coming out because they can see that this action will have an effect. The strike is solid, it’s spread across the university, and I have not met any students prepared to speak out against the strike: students are very supportive.

There is a movement for students to demand their money back. That can go either way, but at York the people who set it up have done it as a way of showing solidarity, putting extra pressure on management. I know the woman who set it up, who is actually a student from China, who wanted to support the strike. It can be seen as critical of the lecturers but up here it is meant as a way of criticising how students are treated as cus-

Cambridge students’ rally giv

By a Cambridge UCU member

At Cambridge, the first two strike days had pickets on five different sites across campus. Compared to typical UCU picket lines, the numbers were really good.

Student support was visible and vibrant with an SU-led rally of several hundred in front of the University’s Old Schools. Speeches underscored the joint nature of staff

and students’ struggles in the face of marketisation. Activists from Cambridge Defend Education then led over 200 enthused demonstrators through the streets in an impromptu march, which sustained incredible energy with solidarity chants. After coming full circle to the Old Schools site, roughly 100 marchers rushed to occupy the lawn of the Senate House building. The sit-in provided the space for an assembly between UCU members and students about the teach-outs

er fight

pension benefits. The significance of this dispute cannot be overstated. Academic staff are posed to lose up to 40% of their retirement income and other pension schemes will almost certainly follow in USS's wake.

The role of marketisation in all this is simple: the reforms to USS are driven by the felt need to shift as much financial risk as possible from the universities to the individual workers, which in turn is driven by the felt need to make universities more attractive to commercial investors. In other words, senior management are cutting staff pensions in order to maximise profits. This means that student hardships, such as extortionate rents, rising fees, funding cuts, and overcrowded campuses, and staff hardships, such as the proliferation of casual employment contracts and the stripping of pension guarantees, are symptoms of the same underlying problem.

Until and unless we overhaul the entire education system to prevent managers from running universities like businesses, May's promises will continue to ring hollow.

• Abridged from the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts at bit.ly/2CLp7OB

ence is high

tomers.

I have heard it reported that the actuaries who work for the USS are afraid to speak out, but apparently they all think that what USS is doing is really bad, and abusive to workers. So the USS actuaries are supporting the strike!

The UCU's negotiators' confidence is sky-high. It sounds like they are expecting a big victory. At York, we are also looking to push back against a contract that management have signed with an American Higher Education corporation that would allow them to do quality control over, and confirm, degrees and other courses.

If we can push back on that, and get the Board of Studies to reject the contract, that would be a big first step to stopping this stuff.

ves support

to be hosted during strike days. Energies remained high on Friday with a mass picket that descended on the Old Schools, but an increasing number of students were willing to cross picket lines compared to the first day, when student non-attendance turned the Sidgwick Site into a ghost town.

The need for political education about the importance of solidarity action is therefore clear.



Students occupy in support of strike

On Monday 26 February, a group of Southampton University students stormed their Vice Chancellor's office and demanded that he answer for his obscenely high salary and participation in the board of UUK. For more information on their protest see @sotonstudentsagainstunicuts on Facebook. Ben Seifert from the protest spoke to *Solidarity*.

What we're trying to do is support and show solidarity with our university staff.

That includes UCU members involved in the national dispute. But down here there are also attacks on the non-academic staff PAS-NAS pension scheme. This movement is supporting the strike, but it was built in opposition to staff cuts earlier this year. That's what our coalition came together around: Southampton Students Against University Cuts.

I'm the Chair of the Labour Club, and the Labour Club has contributed to the cam-

paign. We're a significant part of it. In terms of the occupiers from yesterday, about half of us were from the Labour Club. It is a coalition. The Marxist Society are Labour supporters. And Socialist Students, we've done a lot of work with them – and there are even one or two Tory students who have been helping us... So it's an odd little coalition.

UCU members thought the occupation was absolutely brilliant. Some of the UCU members came to our de-brief and chatted to us. They were really happy. I've spoken to the local UCU branch vice chair and they were totally behind the action. Obviously we weren't able to alert them to the action before it took place, but we've been working very closely together. They've been really pleased with the support and solidarity between students and staff over the last few weeks.

This is the first occupation at Southampton in a long time. To students elsewhere planning occupations, I'd say: it's a lot less scary than you thought. We had a lot of people

who were very worried about ramifications, and a lot of people who did take part were pretty nervous before we went in. And actually we got a good result.

If I had to give one piece of advice I'd say: focus less on planning for worst-case scenarios, and think about what happens if you are successful! Don't predict a riot.

Occupation news ...

As *Solidarity* goes to press students are in occupation at Liverpool University and University College London.

Students are getting organised on other campuses, and students have been organising demonstrations and joining picket lines.

Get involved! Follow the action on Twitter @occupation_hub or facebook.com/NCAFC

NUS should fight for free education

Ana Oppenheim, LSE student and candidate for NUS Vice President Higher Education spoke to *Solidarity*.

I am standing for VPHE because Higher Education is facing continuing attacks from the government.

Across the country we've seen students marching for free education, going to picket lines, occupying, and getting out the vote for free education in the election.

But NUS has been very reluctant to even talk about its free education policy in the election; and it has not been there on the ground with students in their fight for free education, lower rents, living wage and so on.

I am standing so that the NUS will be on

the side of students in their struggles, so we can have a democratic movement which wins the fight for a democratic, publicly-funded, education system.

I am at the UCL occupation today in solidarity with the UCU strike. Academic staff across the country are on strike to defend their pensions against a cut of up to 40%. We demand that UCL takes a public stand and comes out against the proposed reforms.

There were dozens of us here last night, mostly UCL students but also students from other universities supporting the occupation. There are also actions taking place at Warwick, Sheffield, Southampton and other places.

I am on the leading committee of NCAFC. We have played a central role in these fights,

passing motions and pushing NUS; we've been in the media, making the arguments; we have been in the media, making the arguments for solidarity and free education; and we've been helping people take action. NCAFC supporters been central in kicking off the occupation here at UCL; we have activists here, in Liverpool, and in many other places where occupations are being planned.

We are co-ordinating and giving advice to new activists in many areas around the country, helping them to take action on their campuses too.

• National Campaign against Fees and Cuts is also standing Sahaya James for NUS president. Find out more: facebook.com/Sahaya4President

The Pankhursts: bravery, autocracy, folly

Part two of Jill Mountford's series on the history of the struggle for women's suffrage. Part one of this series was published in *Solidarity* 462 (bit.ly/2FxyrP3). Part three of this article will look at the work of socialist feminists and working class women in the fight for Votes for Women.

By Jill Mountford

Women's suffrage history is dominated by the militant campaign of the WSPU, led by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, set up in 1903.

It is, in part, an inspiring story of wild bravery and passion, but it is also a very incomplete story of the battle for votes for women. The story of the WSPU itself is often told in a one-sided way. Many feminists celebrate the bravery of the suffragettes, while turning a blind eye on the warts of the organisation, its politics and tactics. Blanking out the autocratic leadership, its exclusivity and repugnant degeneration, means ideas are not challenged, lessons are not learnt, and tens of thousands of women who also played a crucial role in the battle of votes for women are hidden and forgotten.

The WSPU was a relatively small organisation. It had between 4000 and 5000 members at its peak, compared to 53,000 members of the NUWSS. It was founded by the Pankhurst women (including Sylvia and Adela), and a few other women in the Independent Labour Party (ILP). In the early years, various socialist feminists, such as Dora Montefiore and Charlotte Despard were involved in the organisation.

In 1906 Emmeline and Christabel moved their campaign from Manchester to London (Sylvia was already there studying art) and quite quickly the organisation fell under the autocratic rule of Christabel. In 1907, on Christabel's instruction, the WSPU abandoned its constitution, denying its own members the right to vote! She issued a press statement saying the WSPU made no distinction between the Conservative, Liberal and Labour Parties. The Pankhursts left the ILP, breaking their ties to the labour movement.

The lack of democracy in the WSPU led to a split in 1907. Charlotte Despard, Teresa

Billington Grieg and Edith How Martyn, along with 75 others, left to form the Women's Freedom League. Dora Montefiore left and got involved in the Adult Suffrage Society. Increasingly the WSPU became rigidly concerned with votes for "some" women as the militant campaign gathered pace.

More and more the WSPU refused to work with men, particularly, labour movement men. The organisation's newspaper, *Votes for Women*, was openly against strikes and workers fighting for their rights. Christabel wrote "We would ask the Government if they propose to make the organisation of strikes punishable by law". They excluded women who were not prepared, as Christabel put it "... to march in time with the WSPU". She complained, "it was as though in the midst of battle the army had begun to vote on who should command it and what the strategy should be". In 1912, increasingly frenzied, Christabel Pankhurst wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Great Scourge*, claiming that 80% of all English men had venereal disease and were consciously infecting English women. Their newspaper adopted the slogan "Votes for Women, and Chastity for Men".

Later that year Emmeline and Christabel "removed" Adela Pankhurst from the WSPU, giving her £30 and one way ticket to Australia. The next year Christabel, in self-imposed exile in a palace in Paris, summonsed Sylvia and expelled her too. Sylvia's expulsion followed a long list of misdemeanours dating back to 1907 when Sylvia spoke at a by-election rally where she announced to the crowd that she was a socialist, and ending where she shared a platform with James Connolly, among others, at a rally for the Dublin strikers and the imprisoned Irish Transport and General Workers Union leader, Jim Larkin, in 1913.

At the outbreak of World War 1 the WSPU abandoned its militant struggle and fell in line behind the British government in support of the imperialist war. They took a £2000 grant from the government to organise a mass demonstration of women in support of the war. Clad in their white dresses, symbolising their "purity", they wandered the streets of London handing out white feathers to young men not wearing uniform. In their new gung-ho role they changed their paper's



A drawing from a WSPU poster showing force feeding of a suffragette

name from *The Suffragette* to *Britannia* (it had changed from *Votes for Women* in 1912 after two long-standing central members were expelled, Emmeline and Frederick Pethwick Lawrence, for raising a disagreement about the arson campaign). In June 1917 Emmeline was encouraged by Prime Minister Lloyd George to go to Russia to bolster Russian women's support for the war and against the revolution. In 1927 she stood as a Tory candidate for Parliament. Christabel became a rabid Second Adventist (linked to the Plymouth Brethren) in California, and was rewarded for her work with a Damehood in 1936.

BRAVERY

The militant campaign began when Christabel Pankhurst was arrested and detained overnight for spitting in the face of a policeman after she and Annie Kenney were ejected from a Liberal Party meeting for causing disruption.

For the next nine years, until the outbreak of the First World War, the militant campaign escalated and more than 2000 women were arrested. They marched in their thousands; vigorously lobbied the government; heckled and disrupted the political business of Parliament; were consistently betrayed on promises made by politicians; threw rocks and smashed windows; burnt Royal Mail post boxes; and damaged art in the public domain.

In 1909 Marion Wallace Dunlop, an artist, member of the Fabian Women's Group and activist in the WSPU, was the first hunger striker. Imprisoned for a month after refusing to pay a fine for wilfully damaging the stone work in St Stephen's Hall with a rubber stamp and indelible ink, she wrote to the governor of Holloway demanding to be considered a political prisoner "as a matter of principle, not only for my own sake but the sake of others who may come after me, I am now refusing food until this matter is settled to my satisfaction". Marion was released after 91 hours on hunger strike because the authorities feared making a martyr of her.

After this act of bravery many women went on hunger strike when imprisoned for suffrage activity. In 1909 the Liberal government introduced forcible feeding, claiming it was "ordinary hospital treatment" to preserve the lives of women. Sylvia Pankhurst's account of forced feeding is one of the most

graphic and disturbing. She refers to the feeling of going mad and expresses in detail what a horrendous violation the process is. Fanny Parker, an irrepressible suffragette in Scotland, went on hunger strike many times and was once brutally forcibly fed through her rectum, a violation akin to rape.

In 1913 as hunger striking peaked and the Liberal government, fearing a suffragette martyr, introduced the "Temporary Discharge for Ill Health Act", known widely as the "Cat and Mouse Act". It meant imprisoned women on hunger strike would be released from prison on licence to get well and once recovered would be rearrested to serve the rest of their sentence. Many would go on hunger strike on their return to prison only to be released again under licence and so it went on.

Socialist feminists today, as at that time, rightly take issue with the politics and many of the tactics employed by the WSPU in their militant campaign. But to fail to see elements of their campaign as brave, even heroic, is to miss an important point about how direct action and militant protest have an essential role to play in our fight for equality, justice and liberation. The WSPU was overwhelmingly made up of middle class women, of bourgeois feminists, like most suffrage campaigns and organisations at that time, but the WSPU did attract and involve many working class women and, for a period, socialist feminists. Some left labour movement politics to commit their time entirely to the WSPU. Others were inspired by women, regardless of their class, who were making their voices heard, who were expressing their anger about inequality and were willing to fight for improvement.

Annie Kenney was the most prominent working class woman in the WSPU. She was one of twelve children born in Yorkshire. She had very little formal education and became a millworker at the age of ten. Annie joined the WSPU in 1905 after hearing Christabel speak. They became intimate friends and allies and worked closely together from 1905 to 1915. Other working class women passed through the WSPU. Some went on to join other women's suffrage organisations, leaving over disputes about tactics and lack of democracy.

Some joined adult suffrage campaigns and got involved in broader labour movement battles around the minimum wage, equal pay and rights at work for women.

Socialism Makes Sense

Ideas for Freedom 2018

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Pulling it down: No gods, no cults

By Dan Katz

In his piece in the anthology *The God That Failed* the anti-Stalinist socialist Ignazio Silone tells of a conversation in Moscow with Lazar Schatzky, a leader of the Russian Communist Youth.

They were in Red Square, not far from the tomb of Lenin, in the late 20s: "[I] pointed to the tomb, which was still made of wood at that time, and before which we used every day to see an interminable procession of poor ragged peasants slowly filing... 'You must admit with me that this superstitious cult of his mummy is an insult to his memory and a disgrace to a revolutionary city like Moscow.' I suggested to him, in short, that we should get hold of a tin or two of petrol and make a 'little revolution' on our own, by burning the totem-hut.

"I thought [Schatzky] would laugh about it; instead of which my poor friend went very pale and began to tremble violently. Then he begged me not to say dreadful things of that kind, either to him or still less to others."

And yet Silone was, essentially, right. The cult of Lenin — from our point of view, the revolutionary Marxists — is absurd, unpleasant, dangerous. The dead man was raised above the living movement, by Stalin, as a political artefact — unable to answer back — in the fight against Trotsky, the opposition and the workers.

LENIN

There was no Lenin cult when Lenin was still alive. He lived in a small flat built for a palace servant.

He wrote a letter — not intended for publication — in opposition to an attempt to increase his modest wages (he lived on the wage of a skilled worker). And when the Party decided to celebrate his 50th birthday he protested, then walked out during the speeches praising him.

Lenin's authority derived from his political record, his political role, and his ability to win a political argument.

Lenin would have hated the renaming of Petrograd as Leningrad, on 26 January 1924, five days after his death. Streets were renamed after him. Museums were created, busts produced and statues were built.

According to the *New York Times*, in 1991 there were at least 5,500 statues of Lenin, built by Stalinists, in Ukraine. The dead Lenin had become a symbol of those that oppressed Ukraine — of the people who were responsible, for instance, for the Ukrainian famine of 1932-3 in which, perhaps, three million people needlessly starved to death as Stalin wiped out the potential threat of Ukrainian nationalism.

So, today, not one single Lenin statue is still officially standing in Ukraine. Of course those that pulled down Lenin from his plinths were not Ignazio Silone or, probably, socialists of any type. Nevertheless, a sort of necessary purging had taken place.

Of course Lenin knew the value of statues and memorials — only not of himself. In 1919, when the revolution looked as if it might be defeated by a combination of foreign intervention and White terror, Lenin was eager that in villages and towns tributes to the October revolution were built. If the Reds were defeated he wanted as many permanent reminders to exist as possible, to live on in the collective memory.

But, of course, statues can be pulled down. On occasion Stalinists have even destroyed their own iconography. In 1962 an enormous and spectacularly ugly monument to Stalin was demolished in Prague. Completed in 1955, two years after Stalin's death and just a year before Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" revealed to the orthodox Stalinist world some of the crimes Stalin committed in the name of socialism. It took 800kg of explosives to remove the 17,000 tonne monstrosity which had taken five years to build and had dominated the Prague skyline. The "reform" Stalinists had become embarrassed by High Stalinism — but they were so touchy they banned photographs being taken as the effigy came down.

Good riddance. But better was the destruction of the 25 metre Stalin statue in Budapest during the 1956 Hungarian workers' rising. A Stalinist journalist — a real toad, evidently — remarked on its completion in 1951, "[Stalin] will watch over our work, and his smile will show us the way. In Moscow it is customary to pay a visit to Comrade Lenin in Red Square before beginning, or after finishing, an important task, either to report or to ask his advice. Undoubtedly the same will occur here with the statue of Comrade Stalin." A mystical cult of Stalin had been built.

The 16-point manifesto issued by Hungarian students on 22 October 1956 included (point 13): "We demand that the statue of Stalin, symbol of Stalinist tyranny and political repression be removed as soon as possible." The students wanted a statue to their own heroes, "a monument in memory of the martyred freedom fighters of 1848-49."

The next day a massive crowd celebrated as workers with metal cutting equipment, steel cables and trucks pulled down and chopped up the statue. All that was left on the limestone base were Stalin's boots.

It is not of no consequence who pulls down a particular statue, and why.

REJOICED

When US troops ran a cable round Saddam's statue in Bagdad, in 2003, and the local population rejoiced and, laughing, beat the toppled statue with their shoes, in contempt, it was possible to see both imperial arrogance and joy at the death of a tyranny.

When the Stop the War campaign attempted to mirror the event by pulling down a giant model of the Statue of Liberty in Trafalgar Square it was great theatre, but bad socialist politics. Was the Statue of Liberty simply a symbol of thuggish American imperialism? That's ridiculous. To the refugees and migrants who passed the Statue in New York harbour it was and is a sign of hope. And the Chinese pro-democracy demonstrators, the students and the workers, had erected a Statue of Liberty in Tiananmen Square in 1989 as a symbol of freedom and liberty.

At the end of Ryszard Kapuscinski's book about the Shah of Iran, *Shah of Shahs*, there's the story of Golam who made his life's work to pull down the monuments of the Iranian Shahs.

Golam studied the matter scientifically and started in 1941, with his father: "I remember when the old Shah stepped down. Everyone ran out to smash his monuments.... In '53 [during the British and US sponsored coup against Mossadegh] when democracy ended



A Lenin statue being pulled down in Bucharest, Romania, on 5 March 1990

and the Shah's regime began I recall the radio said the Shah had escaped to Europe [before the army put him back in place]. By the time the Shah came back there wasn't a Pahlavi monument left. But he started right back in putting up monuments to himself and his father... Many times we nearly gave in. If we pulled down one, he'd set up three."

By the 1970s Golam had his own set of special ropes for pulling down the dictator's statues, "We hid our stout sisal hawser at a rope sellers in the bazaar. It was no joke. If the police had picked up our trail we'd have gone to the wall." Golam's work was dangerous. By this time the Shah's secret police, SAVAK, had a fearsome reputation.

By the Islamic revolution of 1978-9, which replaced one brutality with a clerical one, Golam had become very scathing of amateurish attempts to destroy the Shah's cult. He watched as statues were erected, "That was the best chance [to work out how it could be pulled down] — to see how it was built, whether the figure was solid or hollow, and, most importantly, how it was attached to the pedestal and how it was reinforced... It wasn't work it was a duty..." It was not clear what Golam made of the Islamists.

POWER

Of course erecting statues to oneself is the work of someone with state power. The purpose is to project permanence, grandeur, great dominance and authority. And to create veneration and devotion around the individual who demands power and control without accountability.

On the British far left Gerry Healy — thankfully — never held state power and consequently had no statues. But he did take the power and act like a tyrant inside his group, the WRP. And Healy's cult was a violent and criminal one. The WRP had even bought Trotsky's death-mask which it put on display, back-lit, treated as a religious icon as part of the WRP's bizarre political cabaret.

Jeremy Corbyn has no statues but he does have garden gnomes (£23), "I love Jeremy" mugs (£7.99), underpants (100% cotton, £15) and his own Lego figure (hours of family fun, £12). He has an anthem and groups of adoring fans.

Of course some of this Jezmania is silly and harmless. Corbyn is not a Stalin nor a Shah, nor anything like it. Nevertheless the Labour Party has a single leader — rather than a collective leadership — fitting into the standard, bourgeois model of how political parties are expected to behave, which allows excessive focus on the individual leader and their personal qualities, at the expense of politics.

And now, when many on the broadly defined left are so very desperate to see a socialist alternative to New Labour and the Tories, it seems that many have had their critical faculties numbed or partially dismantled. Even Jon Lansman's coup in Momentum — an overturn designed to prevent left criticism of Corbyn — gained little overt, open opposition from Momentum's 30,000 members.

The radicalisation that found its expression in the Corbyn leadership victory and a mass return to Labour took place at a time of little direct class struggle. The Corbynistas were born from discontent with post-2008 capitalism, memories of the 1970s and 80s, and the wearing out and discrediting of Blairism. The Corbyn movement is not a movement full of debate — some are passive, voting on the internet but not involved in the living movement; some are new to politics and join at a time of a low political culture.

Putting Corbyn in place, on a pedestal, and expecting him to do the job for us, without our critical participation or the active working-class movement, won't end well.

The great American socialist, Eugene V Debs, who won 900,000 votes on the Socialist Party ticket in the 1912 US election, put the matter like this:

"I am not a Labour Leader; I do not want you to follow me or anyone else; if you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of this capitalist wilderness, you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into the promised land if I could, because if I led you in, someone else would lead you out. You must use your heads as well as your hands, and get yourself out of your present condition; as it is now the capitalists use your heads and your hands."

Indeed. We must use our heads, think, fight militantly, and rely on no great leaders.

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

Saturday 3 March

Leeds Universal Credit campaign workshop day
10.30am, New Burley Club, Burley Hill Drive, Leeds LS4 2SZ
bit.ly/2FC8DeC

Wednesday 7 March

Saudi Prince Not Welcome — protest Mohammad bin Salman visit
5pm, Downing Street, SW1A 2AA
bit.ly/2o3cc57

Friday 16 March

Debate: Socialism or the free market? Workers' Liberty London Forum
7.30pm, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont St, London WC1N 1AB
bit.ly/SocDebate

Saturday 17 March

March Against Racism — UN Anti Racism Day
Noon, Portland Place, London W1B 1LY
bit.ly/2GbepCR

Saturday 17 March

Marxists and national questions: AWL day school
11am, Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL London
bit.ly/mx-nq

Saturday 24 March

Reimagining Local Government
Noon, Portland Place, London W1B 1LY
bit.ly/2oumcWe

Have an event you want listing? Email: solidarity@workersliberty.org

More online at www.workersliberty.org Workers' Liberty @workersliberty

National Policy Forum row

LABOUR

By Keith Road

The 17 February meeting of the Labour Party National Policy Forum (NPF) saw a row over electing a new chair.

Created as part of the Blairite process of blocking internal democracy, the NPF substitutes itself for the fully democratic policy-making conference that is needed.

Abolition of the NPF as one of the aims of the democracy review would be a welcome step.

So what was the row? Former National Executive Disputes Committee Chair, and previous member of the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance slate for the NEC, Ann Black looked like she had the votes in the room to become the chair of the NPF.

There was then outcry from MPs and others when the meeting was informed that the election of the



Ann Black

NPF chair was a matter for the National Executive and in any case, not enough notice had been given of the election. The current chair attempted to carry on and was blocked.

Ann Black is a known quantity, not particularly left wing but with broad support from across the spectrum of the party. Being

blocked is no doubt an extension of her removal from the Disputes Committee by the new pro-Corbyn majority on the NEC.

If elected Ann Black would have rejoined the NEC Officers' Group, and the so called "moderates" would have hit back at Momentum.

A pointless row with helpful tabloid press coverage has failed to deal with any of the political issues that may have been discussed.

One area completely ignored throughout was Brexit, while thousands of members want Brexit to be debated openly. The NPF prior to meeting went as far as to ban specific discussion of Brexit. Reports suggest it was mentioned merely as an ongoing issue affecting other areas.

If both annual conference and the NPF are blocked from discussing a key question affecting the movement, we will be seriously hampered in trying to get Labour to oppose Brexit.

Labour Students left challenge

This year's Labour Students national conference will see the strongest left challenge since the Corbyn surge began.

The strongly-entrenched Blairite faction has run Labour Students as its fiefdom for many years, and has fended off pro-Corbyn challengers since 2015 with bureaucratic manoeuvres, disaffiliating leftwing clubs, and bending its own rules to fight the red menace — aided, it must be said, by weaknesses on the left.

This year, Workers' Liberty students are supporting the left slate fielded by Momentum support-

ers, which has an excellent chance of finally unseating the right-wing faction which is holding back the progress of the left in the student movement.

A motion to this conference from Aberdeen Labour Students calls for the implementation of One Member One Vote in Labour Students national elections. Labour Students national conference voted in favour of OMOV in 2016, but the Labour Students leadership has sat on that decision and not implemented it. We have long-standing criticisms of OMOV as a system in labour

movement elections. But it is fundamental to democracy in our movement that decisions made by conference be implemented!

Hopefully a move to the left in this year's elections at Labour Students national conference will open the doors to discussing genuinely left-wing, bold socialist policies in Labour's student wing, instead of the managerial half-way measures that LS has supported in the past.

• More on OMOV: <http://bit.ly/2EWXC6G>

Young Labour elections

From Monday 19 February to Friday 16 March, voting will be open in the Young Labour elections.

It is important that the left prevents the Labour right from making any further inroads into the Labour youth movement.

But it is also important that Young Labour is run by a left which is democratic as well as radical. We also want a left that fights for freedom of movement in international politics, at a time when borders are being strengthened.

Workers' Liberty will support the following candidates:

Chair: Leigh Drennan
NEC rep: Lara McNeill
BAME officer: Mohammed Abraar
Women's officer: Fatima Diriye
Disabled members' officer: Ellen Morrison
Under 19s officer: Lauren Stocks
Ordinary Rep: Annie Maloney
International officer: Rachael Ward.

Minnie Lansbury — a different sort of Labour councillor

**A meeting organised by Lewisham Workers' Liberty
Wednesday 28 March, 7.30, Amersham Arms, New Cross**

Minnie Lansbury was only 32 when she died in 1922, but she had a full and inspiring life.

She was one of the Poplar Labour councillors who carried out extensive reforms in the interests of the borough's working class and, when the council began to struggle financially, led a mass campaign for poor boroughs to receive more funding. Defying the Tory-Liberal coalition government, she went to prison as a result along with 29 other councillors (including four other women). They won!

Before that she was assistant secretary of the East London Federation of Suffragettes, led by Sylvia Pankhurst. She was a member of both the Labour Party and the Communist movement.

The speaker Janine Booth is author of *Guilty and Proud of It!*, a book about the Poplar council rebellion, and the pamphlet *George Lansbury, Minnie Lansbury and Modern Feminism*.

In November 2016, Janine gave the fourth annual George Lansbury Memorial Lecture, on the subject of George Lansbury, Minnie Lansbury and their relevance to modern feminism.

The text of the lecture has now been published as an A5 pamphlet by the George Lansbury Memorial Trust.

• Buy it for £2.50 per copy + p&p. At bit.ly/2Fb8KzU



School workers' anti-academy strikes

By Patrick Murphy, NEU National Executive

A major industrial and political battle against academy status is under way in Newham, East London.

The campaign started when staff and parents at Avenue Primary School united to fight plans to academise their school. They are demanding a simple yes/no ballot for staff and parents before any school, not just theirs, can embark on a process of academisation. As part of the campaign NEU members were balloted for a programme of strike action. Later staff and parents at another Newham school, Cumberland Primary, set up their own campaign to oppose academy plans and NEU members there were also balloted.

The action ballots in both schools were successful, giving a huge boost to anti-academy campaigners across the authority. This mattered a lot as there were further plans for academy conversions in other schools. This school term a third



school has joined the fray. Keir Hardie Primary School in Canning Town was due to convert to academy status and join a newly formed academy trust, the Agate Momentum Trust, from January 1st 2018 together with two other local primaries (Hallsville and Scott Wilkie). Building on this success an action ballot to oppose academy conversion was carried and won overwhelmingly.

The most recent result of these developments was a day of co-or-

dated action across all three schools on Thursday 22 February. By that time Avenue Primary staff were on their seventh day of strike action and Cumberland on their third. Supplementing the strikes has been a political campaign to commit Newham Labour Council to oppose the academy plans. This may well turn out to be crucial. As with many Labour councils, the pressure of the Corbynite surge in the Labour Party is giving rise to growing internal opposition to academies. It was significant that the picket lines and strike rally on 22 February received a strong message of support and solidarity from Corbyn himself.

On 26 February the anti-academies campaign organised a march and lobby outside a full Newham Council meeting. As a result the Council meeting passed a motion from two Labour councillors supporting a parental ballot over transfer proposals and calling for existing academies to recognise unions and apply national terms and conditions "until such time as the government abolishes the academy system".

The campaign against academy conversions in Newham is of huge importance, especially as it comes at a time when the prospects of a serious fight to halt this project seemed to be wilting on the vine. The local campaign has not yet won and has much to do, but it is rich with lessons for anti-academy campaigners everywhere.

Most significantly the industrial action and parental campaigning have been massively strengthened and enabled by a new leadership in the local NUT section of the NEU and by a serious focus on challenging support for academies in the Labour council.

Teachers strike for a civilised school

By a Southwark teacher

Teachers at the City of London Academy Southwark will strike on 1 March, then on 7-8 and 13-15 March and further until they get a settlement.

In a postal ballot members of the National Education Union (NEU) voted 100% to zero for strikes, on a 77% turnout.

The dispute is about the "performance management" system in the school, which they see as an increasingly unfair and punitive system, based on unrealistic targets and evaluations which teachers don't trust.

Thanks to the union pressure, the school management has now conceded that the big majority of the cases of teachers failing "performance management" in the last round were unfair, and has reversed those assessments. Now the union wants to fix the system for the future.

CoLA was one of the first "Blairite" academies, sponsored by the City of London Corpora-

tion. It is now part of a growing City of London Multi-Academy Trust. In recent times the school regime has become more punitive both for staff and for students. Student detentions are running at tens of thousands a year, with an effect of making the school less rather than more orderly. The management's answer is to double up by adding Saturday detentions.

The changes are correlated with the MAT appointing a CEO (the former boss of City Academy Hackney), who says openly that he considers the thought that education might be about more than exam grades mere middle-class affectation, and a new Head of School at Southwark.

Some academy bosses are happy to run schools with a revolving-door of teachers, because Newly Qualified Teachers are cheaper and more easily intimidated.

Teachers at CoLA mean to stop the school going that way.
• Messages of support to neu.cola.swk@gmail.com

Housing workers' victory in pay battle

By Gemma Short

Unite members at housing repair contractor Mears in Manchester have ended their strike with a victory.

Workers have had over 80 strike days since May 2017 in their fight to end pay disparity with workers doing similar work for other contractors. In some cases workers

were paid up to £3,500 less.

The deal, supported by a ballot of Unite members, increases pay across the board by 20%. The deal will also equalise pay within and across trade groups; equalise pay with similar organisations in the sector; and get rid of the so-called "sackers' charter" which would have changed workers' contracts to make it easier for bosses to sack people.

Unite regional officers Andy Fisher said: "This is a victory for solidarity and direct action. Our members have stuck together through thick and thin.

"The strike has brought the workforce closer together as a workforce.

"They will be primed to push back against the employer if fresh industrial relations issues develop in the future."

Daily Mail cleaners strike

By Peggy Carter

Cleaners who work in the offices of the Daily Mail newspaper are preparing to strike over low pay.

The cleaners, employed by outsourcer Mitie, are paid £7.50 an hour, but are demanding the real Living Wage of £10.20 an hour. The Daily Mail has also just renewed their contract with Mitie, but demanded it cost £30,000 less a year — so Mitie sack two cleaners and make the rest work harder to get the job done for the same pay.

Cleaners, who are organised by the United Voices of the World Union, are all migrant workers. The Daily Mail is infamous for attacking migrant workers, and particularly for blaming them for bringing down wages. Yet it is clearly responsible for the low wages of its own cleaners.

UVW secretary Petros Elis said: "The cleaners are demanding a



Picture: twitter.com/UVWunion

pay rise and are willing to strike to win so they can live and work in dignity.

"We don't expect any more or less from the Daily Mail because of who they are. We just expect them to do the right thing and ensure justice for their cleaners."

• Sign the petition: bit.ly/2EUZa4R

EDF workers strike over tracking

By Simon Marcel

Smart meter installers and fixers working for energy giant EDF are striking for the third week.

270 workers voted by 92% to strike over new monitoring of workers. Despite previous agreements, EDF managers want to fit trackers to workers' vans that will monitor driving style. These same managers have refused to have the same devices fitted to their own company cars. EDF refuses to give assurances that this constant data collected on driving will not be used to discipline workers for using too much fuel or braking too

hard. This big-brother monitoring is being introduced alongside random drug and alcohol testing — which again managers will not accept for themselves.

The strike will hit the tight timetable for EDF Energy's programme of smart meter installation across London, the south east and south west. It is directly affecting the government-set target for fitting smart meters.

Picket lines have been large and lively. One striker on the Bexleyheath picket told Solidarity "This management are a bunch of control freaks, and we have had enough of it."

Tube "transformation"

By Tubeworker

The roll out of Transport for London's "Transformation" program is making life difficult for workers.

Workers are being given contradictory messages by managers, first being told their jobs are safe, then finding out they might be "mapped" into new roles, with few guarantees and protections.

Stations staff at the north end of the Bakerloo Line, where ticket offices remained open, have been

covering ticket seller jobs, and have now been told that the company intends to cut their pay and demote them when ticket offices close.

LU wants to use us to cover work when it needs us, but won't guarantee any protections during restructures. The lesson for unions is clear: we have to confront the entire logic of cuts. Scrap "Transformation" now!

• More on Tubeworker's blog: www.workersliberty.org/twblog

Picturehouse sets 8 March

By Gemma Short

Workers at four Picturehouse cinemas in London will strike on Wednesday 8 March.

8 March is International Women's Day. Picturehouse workers have chosen to strike on that day to highlight our demand for maternity pay, to celebrate the role of women

in the strike, and to honour the history of working women's struggles. This is something other unions and disputes should consider doing!

Workers at Hackney, Crouch End, East Dulwich Picturehouses and Picturehouse Central in Soho will strike.

The Ritzy cinema in Brixton is expected to strike on a different day in the coming weeks.



Solidarity

For a workers' government

No 463 28 February 2018 50p/£1

Uni pension revolt gains force

By a UCU member

As *Solidarity* goes to press, staff at 64 universities are on the fourth day of strikes over pensions which began on Thursday 22 February. Seven more universities are due to join in coming weeks.

There has been a strength of feeling on the picket lines unprecedented in recent university disputes. A thousand people joined a protest at Bristol, and at many other campuses numbers have been in the hundreds.

The University and College Union (UCU) has already processed 3,000 new membership applications, with an estimated 2,000 more in the queue. At Reading University membership is up 30%.

The strike — which involves student support staff, librarians and IT workers as well as academics — is over the employers' plan to end "defined benefit" (DB) pensions and instead impose a "defined contribution" (DC) scheme. While DB guarantees a certain level of income in retirement, DC pensions are dependent on stock market performance and could leave many staff £200,000 worse off. The bosses claim this is necessary to address a deficit in the pension fund, but their numbers assume a substantial rise in life expectancy (which is currently falling) and that they'll be paying 4.4% annual pay rises for the foreseeable future. The last annual pay rises were in fact 1.7%, 1.1% and 1%: this is a clear case of fixing the figures to get the result management wants. And had the employers not cut their own contributions from 18.55% to 14% in 1997, the

deficit (even defined on their terms) would not exist today.

The situation has been made worse by the Government's marketisation of universities: the less the universities look like a part of the public sector, the more risky the Government's own Pensions Regulator will judge their financial situation.

Although the USS pension fund in fact has enough contributions coming in to cover all its pension outgoings for the next 40 years, the Regulator insists that risk must be calculated on a scenario of the entire university sector collapsing. This did not happen when England actually had a Civil War, nor during either World War, and in the event of nuclear annihilation a pensions collapse would be the least of anyone's worries. It's a transparent excuse to shift risk onto workers.

Many members are now looking at pensions of around £10,000 a year when they might have expected double that in the current system and even more in the old final salary scheme (closed in 2016). For a long time a reasonable pension has been one of the few compensations for declining pay and rising workloads in the sector. The level of anger perhaps shouldn't be surprising.

In the face of solid strikes, almost a third of vice-chancellors at striking universities have called for talks, which will go ahead on Tuesday 27 February. But they've insisted they can't discuss the substantial issue of the switch to DC. Even the Tory universities minister Sam Gyimah has called for talks without preconditions! UCU has agreed to talk but has rightly said that the strikes stay on.



The dispute is also proving an opportunity for staff to express their anger at the wider way higher education is run. At Birmingham and Warwick Universities over two-thirds of teaching is delivered by staff on short-term or casual contracts. Across the sector 53% of academic staff are employed on insecure, non-permanent contracts. Many of them have spent (or will spend) seven years or more studying through undergraduate, Masters and PhD for these jobs, incurring massive debts along the way.

The decision on DC pensions itself seems to have involved undue influence by Oxbridge colleges, which were all allowed individual votes (on the University Challenge principle) while much larger universities with many more pension scheme members got only one vote each. A Channel 4 investigation has revealed scandalous expense claims by vice-chancellors, including one who got £1600 for the cost of relocating his pet dog to the UK from Australia. Right-wing commentators have used this as an

excuse to say universities are getting too much public subsidy. But the real comparison ought to be with rank-and-file university migrant staff who have pay thousands for their own visa costs from their own pockets: it's quite something when the VC's dog gets a better deal than the workers.

It's now clear that the deficit is a lie, and that the threat of poverty in retirement is real. Employers promised in 2011 and 2016 that cuts to pensions then would be the last: no-one is going to believe them a third time. The pay lost through sustained strikes now will be difficult, especially for the lowest paid staff, but there are both national and local strike funds to support them. It is these precarious staff, saddled with huge student debt and priced out of the housing market, who — if they stay in university jobs — have the most to lose from the pension cuts.

Support from Labour MPs, who've visited picket lines and posted solidarity messages on social media, has been excellent, and a far cry from attitudes in the party

a decade ago, although public statements have tended to focus on calling for meaningful negotiations rather than saying what they might do in power. The LibDems, typically opportunistic, have called on the Government to underwrite the pension scheme, a promise that Labour could and should better with a guarantee to match the Teachers' Pension Scheme provision for staff in post-92 universities.

The biggest danger facing the dispute now is that UCU calls off the strikes on a promise of talks but no firm commitment. In the junior doctors' dispute the bosses tried this and managed to scupper the momentum of the action. That's a big risk in universities, with limited times in the academic year when action can be truly effective.

Branches need to stay firm and make clear that the dispute will continue until the employers make an offer that doesn't mean poverty in old age.

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