

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a Workers' Government!

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Firefighters first in line in cuts battle

BY DARREN BEDFORD

London firefighters are to be balloted for strike action this week after fire bosses began the process of mass sackings in a dispute over shift patterns. The ballot was announced at an impressive central London demonstration on 16 September that saw 2,500 firefighters march on the headquarters of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA).

In August, LFEPA issued a Section 188 notice, starting a 90 day consultation on sacking the entire London firefighting force (5,500 firefighters) in order to impose shift changes. London firefighters currently work two day shifts of nine hours, followed by two night shifts of 15 hours. Management want to change to four 12 hour shifts. Despite negotiations over the issue, the Tory-run LFEPA decided the time was right to impose the changes in an act the union has called "industrial vandalism".

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"The fire authority has refused to withdraw the sacking notices. Therefore [our] strike ballot will commence. That will be a huge yes vote as well, I'm confident of it. We won't allow ourselves to be bullied. You don't negotiate with a gun to your head. We stick together on the fire ground — and we'll stick together on the picket line as well."
Matt Wrack, General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union

Back their stand against Con-Dem cuts

MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Black men die “in custody”

BY A MENTAL HEALTH WORKER

Olanseni Lewis, a 23-year-old black student from south London, was admitted as a voluntary patient to the Bethlem Royal Hospital (South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, SLaM) on 31 August.

Within hours of admission up to seven police officers had restrained him — he struggled to breathe and was transferred to Croydon University Hospital, and was later pronounced dead on 4 September. SLaM and the Independent Police Complaints Commission have launched an inquiry.

Restraint by healthcare workers is — in theory — informed by strict guidelines and training, intended to see physical intervention as a last resort, with patient dignity paramount. Its use is sometimes necessary to protect workers and other service users from violence, but comes with high risks of positional asphyxia (when the airway is blocked due to face-down restraint) or excited delirium (when a person struggles past the point of fatal exhaustion). It also leads to feelings of humiliation and shame for the service user involved.

Concerns are growing that physical intervention is becoming more common — and some NHS trusts still practice pain compliance where service users are subjected to having their joints bent to the point before breakage to encourage passivity.

Lewis's death emphasises a worrying correlation between ethnicity, psychiatric intervention and restraint. 2009 National Patient Safety Agency statistics show people from African Caribbean communities are 44% more likely to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act and are more likely to be misdiagnosed, over-medicated and restrained once in care. The high-profile 1998 inquiry into the death of David Bennett (a 38-year-old black service-user in Norwich) during restraint by healthcare workers reported institutional racism within mental health services.

Lewis's death highlights a growing concern about the impact of police involvement on this situation. Police restraint lacks the safeguards of that by healthcare workers — involving handcuffs, batons, and police officers lying across service users. In recent years several young black men have died during police restraint in relation to psychiatric services — among others, Roger Sylvester died in Haringey in 1999 and Sean Rigg in Brixton in 2008. On the same day as Lewis's death Colin Holt, a black 52-year-old sectioned patient at Medway Maritime Hospital in Gillingham, died during police restraint at his home.

Some reports of Lewis's death have described police involvement as “normal practice”, yet SLaM guidelines suggest only involving the police if the service user has a weapon or others are seriously hurt or threatened. Reports have also emerged that workers pleaded with the police to let Lewis go as he struggled to breathe, and that they have described the restraint as “violent”.

There is perhaps a developing culture in acute services of police involvement as workers don't have the resources, training or staffing levels to deal with violent incidents, and staff support following incidents is rarely sufficient.

These problems will only be exacerbated as the impending cuts are rolled out. SLaM has already announced £3.7m of cuts, with plans to “move responsibility for health and well-being back to individuals”.

If therapeutic services and jobs are cut, violence will inevitably increase. Boredom, a lack of structured activity, and frustration at staff having no time to listen to and talk with service users are key factors in increasing violence.

When violent incidents do occur lower staffing levels will mean workers are forced to call upon police intervention. This will lead to mental health services that are less therapeutic and more punitive and distressing for both service users and workers.

Taming the beast by “consultation”?

BY RHODRI EVANS

Lib-Dem Vince Cable, Business Secretary in the coalition government, has described capitalism as a ravening beast... and proposed to tame it by severe tut-tutting.

“Markets are often irrational or rigged”, declared Cable at the Lib Dem conference on 21 September. He will “shine a harsh light into the murky world of corporate behaviour...”

“Why do directors sometimes forget their wider duties when a fat cheque is waved before them? Capitalism takes no prisoners and kills competition where it can...”

A Lib-Dem explicating Cable's speech to the *Guardian* added: “Capitalism left to its own devices just creates monopolies which... inflict severe damage on the economy”.

The banks in Britain, for example, are even more dominated by a few giant enterprises than before the 2008 crisis.

HSBC has assets of \$2.4 trillion; Barclays, \$2.2 trillion; Lloyds, \$1.7 trillion.

HSBC's stash of assets exceeds the total foreign exchange reserves of every country in the world bar China. It is 24 times bigger than the UK's foreign exchange reserves, and three times bigger than the eurozone's.

To subdue these gigantic forces of social destruction, Cable proposes... “a major consultation on takeovers and executive pay”.

Cable is explicit about not siding with the labour movement, the only social force which has the potential social power to conquer the corporate monsters.

He recently said proudly that he would “not be thrown off course” by trade-union resistance to selling off Royal Mail. “The Labour government capitulated [on privatisation] because of pressures in the labour movement. Well, we are not part of the labour movement”.

He opened his speech to Lib-Dem conference by boasting that he had “acquired a fatwa from the revolutionary guards of the trade union movement”, as well as annoying the bank bosses.

Cable's vision is one where gallant supervisors like himself stand above the big social classes, and shepherd both workers and big bosses into a harmonised, cleaned-up capitalism.

As policy, it is empty. As empty as the “trust-busting” of US President Theodore Roosevelt at the start of the 20th century, which did break up the Standard Oil combine, only to see it spawn even bigger capitalist giants, like Exxon. As empty as the notions of those who think they can deal with global capitalism by withdrawing Britain from the European Union.

Capitalism is a system with its own

logic of the strong killing the weak and the big eating up the small. Consultations and government regulations will never break that logic, if only because the big capitalists remain the dominant influence on the consulters and regulators.

The logic of capitalism can be combatted effectively only by basing ourselves on the counter-force created by capitalism itself, within capitalism itself — the working class.

The labour movement must mobilise to adapt economic life to human goals, to assert human control against the control of the profit-crazed capitalist giants, by way of a workers' government.

Cable's stance is the populist trimming to a policy trend in capitalist governments across the world since the acute financial crisis of 2008.

Despite much talk and many promises at the time, those governments are sticking to neo-liberalism. The banks have talked down the once-threatened tighter government regulation of their business to minimal levels.

In early September the world's central banks agreed on a new set of international banking regulations, “Basel III”.

The new regulations call for banks to keep a bigger stash of capital assets to underpin their deals.

But it is no bigger than most major banks already have, just to reassure the people they deal with. And, while the government tells us that cuts must come immediately, the banks have nine years' grace before the new regulations come into full force.

By that time, of course, financiers will have worked out a hundred new ways to get round those regulations.

As John Authers sums up in the *Financial Times*, “the world's financial regulation has changed less than predicted... An unrepeatable opportunity to make the world's financial system safer has been missed.”

HOUSING BENEFIT CUTS

82,000 in London could be evicted

According to research by London Councils, the coordinating body of councils in London, the coalition government's cuts in Housing Benefit could lead to 82,000 evictions in London alone.

From April 2011 the government will put a new overall cap on benefits payable, and will adjust the maximum benefit payable in each area to correspond to the rent which has 70% of flats or houses more expensive than it, 30% cheaper. At present it is set at the rent which has 50% more expensive, 50% cheaper.

These moves will hit especially hard

in inner London, where claimants congregate because of better chances of getting work but where rents are also high.

The report says: “Of the 106,000 claims affected, 77,000 will lose out by more than £10 a week, with over 36,000 households in the capital facing a shortfall of more than £20 a week and more than 10,500 households experiencing losses of more than £50 a week”.

At the same time, private rents are rising at 5% a year (averaged over the whole country).

<http://bit.ly/hb-cuts>

TUC CONGRESS

TUC calls for anti-cuts committees

At its congress in Manchester (13-16 September) the TUC voted to “encourage unions to use the impact of the Spending Review to build local campaign groups...”

It talked of building “a great campaign against the cuts — rooted in every community and with a clear national voice...”

Top union leaders told the press that they plan to delay industrial action until next spring — which begs questions about what they will do about attacks coming now, like Birmingham City Council’s decision to ask all its non-school workers to accept cuts in pay and conditions or be sacked.

But the motion passed by the TUC does talk about industrial action... some time. GMB national secretary Brian Strutton said his union would “begin preparation for national industrial action next month”.

And the decision about building local campaign groups is for immediate action.

This may mean more trade-union-official control of local anti-cuts committees, as has happened in the North-East, where local Public Sector Alliances have been set up under the control of a regional committee made up of leading full-timers from eight unions, and with a local full-time official in charge in each area.

The “Unison-PCS alliance” on cuts, announced earlier in September, may have a similar effect of increasing the weight of full-time union officials in local campaigns.

At the same time, these decisions open the way for building anti-cuts committees which draw in a very

Trade unionists and residents lobby against cuts and privatisation in Barnet council, 14 September

broad range of the labour movement, allowing groups which so far have had difficulty reaching out beyond the usual circle of regular left-group activists to become really representative delegate bodies.

The outcome will vary according to how much initiative and assertiveness local activists muster, and how much pressure there is within the unions on full-time officials to license or even encourage real campaigning.

The TUC has sketched a timetable which goes from

a rally in Central Hall Westminster on Tuesday 19 October, on the eve of the Spending Review, to “a major national demonstration in March 2011 on a date to be confirmed as soon as possible”.

Many trade unionists are unhappy about the TUC delaying until next March for the demonstration. In London, a demonstration on 23 October has been initiated by the Regional Council of the RMT rail union (11am, Unity House, Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD), and the Scottish TUC is also marching on 23 October (11am, East Market Street, Edinburgh).

Rejuvenating the labour movement

To defeat the cuts, the labour movement will need industrial action, organised by workers in particular sectors to resist cuts in jobs and services in their particular sector.

We will also need a broad and lively network of local committees in which people from trade union branches come together with community, service-users’, and tenants’ groups.

The struggle will probably not be one “big bang”, but a rolling, up-and-down series of smaller and bigger “bangs”, some national but many local.

A network of local anti-cuts committees can be pivotal for resisting the cuts, and also for rejuvenating the labour movement.

Recent decades have seen not only a decline in union activism under the pressure of setbacks, but also a bigger decline in cross-union activism. Many of the tenacious activists who have kept union branches and committees going have also “hunkered down” into their immediate sphere of union work, venturing out less into cross-union or political initiatives.

Trades Councils, the committees of delegates from local union branches which have been the basic form of local union coordination since the 1860s, have revived a bit in several areas over the last few years. However, on the whole they are still pretty weak.

The creation of lively anti-cuts committees, linked to Trades Councils, can change that. Some energetic

Trades Councils have already launched anti-cuts committees; that initiative can “feed back” to them by bringing more delegates to their regular meetings.

Anti-cuts committees should be representative, delegate bodies, where votes on policy can take place with democratic credibility. They should include delegates from community groups as well as trade unions, and encourage those delegates to report back regularly to the groups they come from.

Many local anti-cuts committees are already moving towards that model, though none as far as we know have quite arrived yet.

There are other groups which are heavily controlled by full-time union officials. For example, the anti-cuts committee in Hull meets every other week and is organising public activities.

But it is a combination of public-sector union full-timers, Labour Party organisers, some rank and file activists, and Socialist Party people wearing “Youth Fight for Jobs” hats.

Such groups need to be broadened out. It is not helpful if left-group activists instead focus on getting a niche or a corner “franchise” for their particular “front” enterprise (Right to Work, Coalition of Resistance, Youth Fight for Jobs).

Delegates from Labour Party branches and constituencies should certainly be drawn into anti-cuts committees. Some anti-cuts committees, indeed, have

been initiated by Labour Party activists.

There is an issue, though, about inviting Labour council leaders, MPs, or similar figures to attend anti-cuts meetings as “dignitaries”.

It would be wrong to demand a perfect “hard left” stance from such people before inviting them. If inviting them makes for a broader meeting, and gives a chance to put them under pressure and on the spot, that is good.

But it is certainly wrong to give such people an easy ride on the pretext of “maximum unity”.

The Notts anti-cuts campaign recently got a request to be invited to speak from Vernon Coaker, Labour MP and former minister. A minority rightly objected, not on the grounds that Labour people should not be welcome, but on the specific grounds that Coaker recently and openly called for scabbing on the NUT’s boycott of SATS, and as a result had been asked to resign from the union by his own NUT branch.

It would be macabre to have Labour council leaders who are making cuts invited to star at meetings called to campaign against those same cuts though there may be a case for challenging them to come and face debate.

“Make the labour movement fight” should be our slogan, counterposed both to flabby unity-at-all-costs and to a routine collect-the-usual-leftists-suspects approach.

OUTSOURCING

Bring Connaught back in house!

BY A HULL AWL MEMBER

The collapse of the building maintenance firm Connaught spells an anxious time for its workers while Lovells, who have taken on much of the work, decide whether to continue to employ them on their contracts with various councils around the country. Some have lost their jobs.

Last week there was a large rally to support laid-off Connaught workers and oppose the council leadership who were trying to wash their hands of them.

One worker from Hull was left a message to ring a number when she returned from work. When she rang it she found herself in a conference call with 300 other Connaught workers from around the country. The workers were told by a man from the administrators KPMG that their employment was terminated with immediate effect!

Since administration the council has done nothing to help the workers, indeed it has terminated its contract with Connaught. They could be looking for a cheaper deal from a rival contractor that doesn't recognise unions.

More than 100 workers and supporters marched from Victoria Square to the Guildhall where the council was discussing the workers' fate. The rally split into groups, each taking a door of the Guildhall in order to angrily corner councillors. Some self-selected union officials were invited to speak to council leader Carl Minns.

The campaign involves Unison, GMB and UCATT; they are demanding that the council transfers all Connaught workers to its alternative contractors. In fact, the best option for the union is to demand that housing maintenance and repair work is taken back in-house and that all workers are reinstated and issued with full council contracts.

The fight continues, and the energy created by the demonstration and the workers' will to fight has boosted the local anti-cuts campaign.

IN FOCUS

Leeds unions unite to fight cuts

BY PATRICK MURPHY, LEEDS NUT

At a well-attended meeting in September Leeds Trades Council launched a Leeds Against the Cuts campaign. Delegates from Unison, PCS, NUT, CWU and Unite were present at the first meeting.

Two events have been organised around the comprehensive spending review in October.

At 5pm on October 20th trade unionists will leaflet people in the town centre leaving work to let them know what the spending review announcements mean for them and what they can do to resist them. Local reps from public sector unions will also hold a press conference

to give our response. A bigger public demonstration against the cuts and in defence of public services is planned for Saturday 23 October outside the Leeds Art Gallery.

Like many other anti-cuts committees Leeds Against the Cuts has debated a number of issues. It has discussed how to relate to regional and national TUC initiatives and to what extent to invite Labour politicians to our events.

For now the general consensus is to plan and organise local protests and involve more local workers and communities rather than look to the TUC for a lead. Where the regional or national TUC call mobilisations which fit into this priority we will focus on them.

For instance on 23 October the

Yorkshire Midlands TUC have called a regional rally in Sheffield. The Leeds campaign was unanimous, however, in deciding that we would involve more people in our work by going ahead with a local rally.

There has been little contention also about inviting Labour politicians, including the leader of the newly-elected Labour council, to speak at the October events. Local Labour leaders have indicated that they want to work together with unions on opposing the cuts. Few of us have any confidence that this stance will stand the test of time but for now we want to test their resolve and, more importantly, draw Labour Party members, supporters and affiliated unions into a broad anti-cuts campaign.

Privatising mental health care

In Camden and Islington (and there are rumours in other London boroughs) there are plans to cut all discretionary mental health services. These are mostly in the voluntary and private sector due to years of outsourcing and privatisation.

"Discretionary services" describes pretty much everything that mental health services do that doesn't involve an element of social control. Therefore people who use mental health services (whether through choice or coercion) will have the right to a mental health act

assessment which should they become really unwell could result in detention in hospital; the "right" to take medication; the right to have a care co-ordinator (social worker or nurse) in the community. The resources that the worker would have previously accessed will be gone — no day services, employment support, college courses, self-help groups, talking therapies.

This in a climate where people's mental health will be getting worse as a result of financial stress, job loss etc.

A London social worker

LIBRARIES

No closures!

Lewisham council proposes the closure of five of the borough's eight libraries; each threatened library has its own campaign but they are beginning to come together. One ongoing debate in the local campaign is over "alternatives".

For instance the New Cross campaign literature says: "The alternative we are proposing is that the council hand over responsibility for the library building and service to the community and pay us a fixed amount every year to provide the service. There'll still be loads of campaigning to do to make sure that they give us enough money (the starting point is what the library currently costs), but at least the threat of the service completely closing is removed." That idea involves rehiring the librarians, but it does accept the fragmentation of what should be a centrally provided, well-resourced service.

There is a lobby of councillors on 23 September over the library cuts.

MERSEYSIDE

Over a thousand march against cuts

On Sunday 19 September Merseyside TUC and public sector alliance organised a feeder demonstration to a rally outside the Lib-Dem conference. The rally was organised by the Northwest TUC. There were about 1500 on the march — trade unionists and community groups.

The Merseyside Public Sector Alliance has a series of meetings planned as well as lobbies of the council in Liverpool and the Wirral in October. On Monday 1 November there will be a meeting on

how the cuts affect the voluntary sector; on Wednesday 3 November there will be a meeting on "Women Against the Cuts".

Send us your reports!

Are you involved in a local anti-cuts campaign? Is your union facing a cuts battle in your workplace? Tell us about it: email us at solidarity@workersliberty.org or ring 02072074774

HOUSING

Lambeth strike planned

Lambeth Living is the ALMO which manages housing for Lambeth council. It plans severe cuts:

- All 35 Estate Services Officers are to be sacked.
- Posts will be reduced from 468 posts to 407 posts. Lambeth Unison has calculated that front line and lower paid workers will take the bulk of the cuts.

In an anonymous poll of 95 Lambeth Living staff, 85 said these changes would make the service worse.

Lambeth Unison is saying the cuts will mean a far worse service for tenants and leaseholders and is urging them oppose these cuts and to join us in demanding that the service is brought back in-house.

The union plans demonstrations against these cuts and is also balloting for industrial action.

More: LambethSaveOurServices@gmail.com or call 07957 505 571

Support Birmingham council workers

(from back page)

All the signs are that these attacks will just be one part of a full-frontal assault by council bosses. According to the Birmingham Post, the council is also considering chopping up local government service provision and essentially privatising individual services. The Post refers to the process as a "revolution at Europe's largest public body."

The measures have also ridden roughshod over the (notional and limited) channels of democracy and accountability supposedly in place. Hughes somehow failed to mention the Section 188s when addressing a council scrutiny committee, supposed to oversee the management of council staff. Hughes defended

his unilateralism by saying "we have to work out a plan and be ruthless in implementing it."

Hughes's ruthlessness, if successful, could become a model for other sections of local government as they seek to reduce spending by selling off "unprofitable" or expensive services into private control and driving down workers' terms and conditions. In many ways Hughes's scheme mirrors Barnet's "easyCouncil" vision, in which all service-provision is effectively privately run and the elected local council exists only as a hub to auction off service-provision contracts to private companies.

Local government unions in Birmingham have already called a series of actions in response. Unite is calling an emergency members' meeting to discuss

the issues, and Unison will hold a series of actions around the city timed to coincide with the European TUC's Day of Action on September 29. Unite, GMB and Unison will also have a presence at the demonstration at the Tory Party conference, held in Birmingham on October 3, and the Trades Council will hold a city centre protest on Wednesday 20 October.

Roger Jenkins, Regional Officer for GMB Birmingham and West Midlands region, said "we will do everything in our power to protect our members' jobs, and the provision of frontline services to the people of Birmingham [...] This is simply about saving money by cutting frontline services."

For more details on the Trades Council's demo, contact secretary Dave Dutton on 07749918317.

Firefighters join tube workers in cuts battle

(from page 1)

The shift changes are a prelude to reducing night cover — the number of firefighters on duty at night, putting people's lives at risk.

The present shift pattern means Londoners have decent cover, including at night when most fire deaths occur. The 12:12 pattern would allow management to move some firefighters off the night shift to save money — but put people at greater risk of death. A leaked document published by the FBU in March showed this is exactly the agenda of LFEPA and London Fire Brigade senior management.

In response to the threat of mass sackings, which could begin in November, the FBU organised two mass meetings involving over one thousand firefighters in August. Last Friday London firefighters voted by an tremendous margin of 95% on a 76% turnout to take industrial action short of strikes in response to the threat of mass sackings.

Much of firefighters' ire is directed towards Brian Coleman and Ron Dobson, respectively the Chair of LFEPA and the London Fire Commissioner. Brian Coleman in particular is known for his profligate expense claims and his cuts-happy capering in his home borough Barnet, where he is a pioneer for the heavily-outsourced, privatisation-lite "easyCouncil" model that has brought him into conflict with other groups of workers.

The London rally was addressed by speakers from other unions currently in struggle, all of whom talked about practical solidarity. Steve Hedley of the RMT

said "if the FBU goes on strike, we will try to ensure that no tube trains move in London." Unison activists representing non-uniform fire service staff also in dispute with the Authority said they would be actively seeking to coordinate the timing of any action with that of the FBU.

For the FBU to be situating their London dispute so clearly at the heart of a broader working-class fightback against cuts is significant; if words of solidarity are turned into action, London's Tory rulers could be for a very unpleasant autumn and winter. If they succeed, and if the RMT delivers on its promises of solidarity (or if the action coincides with a future round of tube strikes), then

Coleman and co will get a very stark reminder of who really makes London move.

London firefighters' demonstration 16 September

BBC workers to strike

Trade unionists at the BBC have called two 48-hour strikes in their dispute over pensions. The first set will be on 5-6 October, the second on 19-20 October. Ironically the strikes, if successful, could disrupt coverage of the Tory Party conference and the Comprehensive Spending Review respectively. Members of BECTU, Unite and the NUJ are involved in the dispute.

UNITE ELECTIONS

Stop Les Bayliss the scab!

BY A UNITE MEMBER

Amidst the rancid misogyny and horoscopes that fill the *News Of the World*, there was recently an interview with Les Bayliss titled "Union chief slams walk-outs over cuts".

A rant by a embittered and marginalised right-winger on the eve of retirement? Not quite, sadly. Bayliss is the Assistant General Secretary of Unite and a leading contender in the election for General Secretary.

Bayliss said "Public sector strikes will only deprive the vulnerable of services the Tories want to cut." If strikes happen, Bayliss argues: "The story will get changed from government savagery to union militancy. The Tories will hit us with even more restrictive laws and working people will look away in disgust."

The BA Cabin Crew "had a good case — but the public and many of our members were so horrified they lost sympathy. If I am general secretary of Unite there will never be any strikes called over Christmas."

The *News Of The World* and other News International publications are amongst the most mendacious and persistent opponents of the right of workers to fight for decent pay and conditions. Bayliss has joined in this bosses' chorus against his own members. The very least

Les Bayliss

that you want from union officials is to publicly defend democratically-decided action in the bourgeois press; Bayliss proves he cannot even be trusted to do this.

Workers' Liberty is calling for a vote for Len McCluskey in Unite's forthcoming General Secretary election. We do not think McCluskey is a politically-adequate candidate. However the pledges he has made to fight the Tories' cuts, democratise the union and end the gravy train do differentiate him from the recipe of class collaborationism, centralism and craft chauvinism offered by Bayliss.

Len McCluskey won the overwhelming backing of the United Left grouping within the union and has managed to coalesce a lot of rank and file support in workplaces and branches.

It is these forces who will lead the transformation of the union. Their demo-

cratic decisions must have weigh with us.

McCluskey is the only candidate who has any hope of stopping Bayliss. The prospects for the left and any future rank and file movement would suffer if Bayliss won the election. A victory for McCluskey would be a limited victory for the United Left.

Some socialists are advocating a vote for Jerry Hicks. Jerry ran against Derek Simpson in the Amicus section General Secretary election last year and we backed Jerry at that time. We believe it is wrong to back Jerry in this election.

Jerry's campaign is not one capable of building a permanent rank and file movement that would outlast the election. He has not coalesced more than a small number of activists behind his campaign. His support mainly comes from socialist groups outside the union.

Hicks does stand for election of officials, and for officials on a worker's wage. However his record in resorting to using the Certification Office, and his policy of equal voting rights for retired members, count against him.

Jerry and his supporters must recognise that the danger Bayliss poses to union democracy is real, and that only McCluskey can stop him.

We call on Jerry to stand down and offer critical support to Len McCluskey, and to join with us in the fight we need to transform Unite into a rank and file led combat organisation of our class.

Essex FBU takes on lying bosses

BY WILL LODGE

Firefighters have recommenced an industrial dispute with Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) after the Chief Fire Officer refused to rule out frontline cuts.

The Fire Brigade Union (FBU) began a dispute back in June 2009 when 44 firefighters were axed and changes were made to the way specialist appliances were crewed.

Negotiations between the FBU and ECFRS began in April this year, and industrial action was suspended. An agreement was reached in July, which ignored the 44 job losses but protected against any further cuts.

However, in a meeting at the end of July when the agreement was due to be signed, the Chief Fire Officer retracted the agreed document and added an extra clause saying that no guarantees could be made in the current economic climate.

He refused to sign the agreed settlement until after the Comprehensive Spending Review announced on 20 October.

The FBU officially re-ignited the dispute beginning on 20 September, including an overtime ban and a refusal to cover staff shortages.

Essex firefighters have set a lead for other unions to follow by refusing to accept that cuts to frontline services need to be made ahead of the Tory attacks next month.

However, the union has conceded too much by accepting earlier job losses and by offering alongside Unison to work with ECFRS to find savings in so-called "desirable projects".

All unions should reject any government cuts, forced upon the working class to pay for a crisis made by bankers.

Lobby your MP to support McDonnell's bill

The United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws has launched an online lobbying tool to help people persuade their MP to attend the reading of John McDonnell's Lawful Industrial Action (Minor Errors) Bill.

The bill seeks an end to the ludicrous situation where a minor technicality can be used by employers to get a demonstrably fair ballot result overturned in the courts in order to scupper workers who vote to take industrial action.

If the same standard in regard to minor errors that applies to trade union ballots also applied to general elections, we'd probably never have a completed election. The same 'common sense' approach should also apply in industrial action ballots.

• Lobby your MP at www.unitedcampaign.org.uk/bill.php

TUBE

Overtime ban begins to bite

BY A LONDON UNDERGROUND WORKER

London Underground workers are banning overtime in their dispute with the bosses' plan to cut 800 jobs. The action is beginning to have a serious impact on the functioning of the network.

Stations including Arsenal, Lambeth North, Charing Cross, Liverpool Street, Victoria, Regent's Park and others have all been forced to close early or open late due to the non-availability of staff.

And around the combine, managers are finding themselves having to get out from behind their desks and cover station duties to keep the station open because duties are uncovered and no-one will do them on overtime. With managers having to do some actual station work, who on earth is going to fill in all those important forms?!

The overtime ban is having the desired effect — keeping up the pressure on management, keeping up the momentum between the strikes. The action short of a strike should be extended not just to an overtime ban but to other forms of action including a concerted boycott of the £5-minimum on Oyster top-ups.

It can be galling to see the very people who scabbed on the strikes now lapping up overtime in defiance of the ban — but remember, there are only a tiny minority of them, and there are lots and lots of loyal trade unionists!

It can be hard doing without overtime especially if you are in a lower-paid grade and have come to rely on it. Some union branches are setting up hardship funds to help out members facing situations like this. But remember, overtime will be the least of our worries if the jobs go!

The next round of strikes is due to begin on Sunday 3 October, effecting services on Monday 4. Workers' Liberty members are organising distribution of the Tubeworker rank-and-file bulletin both in the run up to the strike and on the day; to get involved, email: skillz_999@hotmail.com. More info at <http://www.workersliberty.org/twblog>

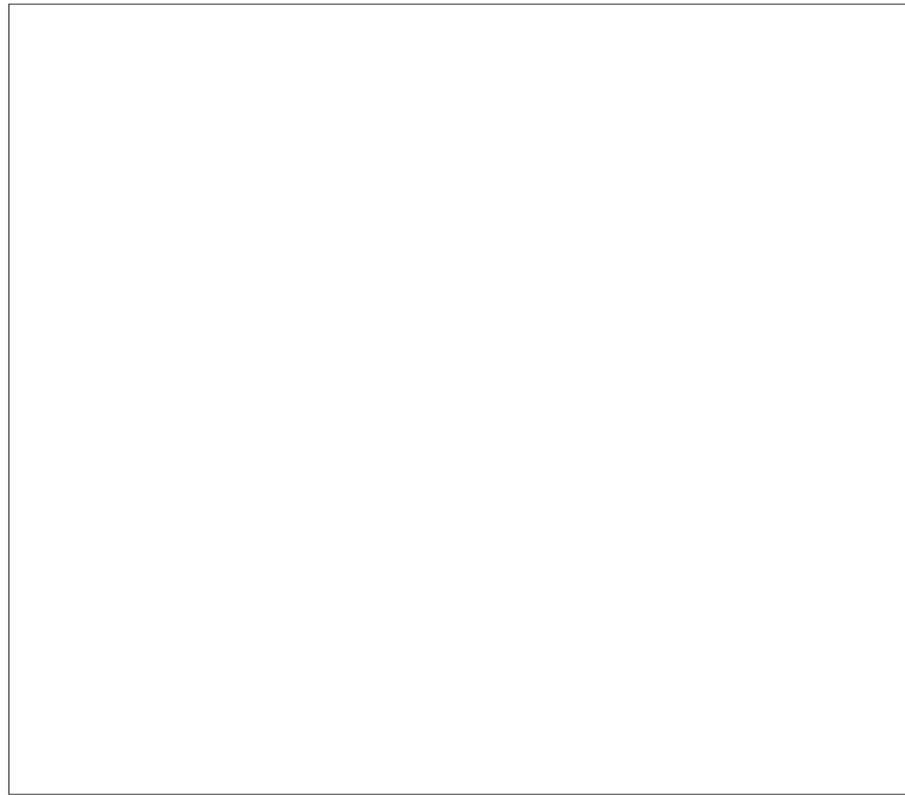
Managers — what are they good for? Absolutely nothing!

The strike was a brilliant illustration of the parasitic and useless role that managers play in society.

Stations were kept open almost entirely by managers. Anyone who dared to enter the system on strike day reported seeing only a sea of white shirts and suits. Basic routines of running the stations just didn't happen, because a five-minute tick-box familiarisation would not equip a manager to fully inspect a station.

There were also some serious safety incidents. Central Line managers were desperate to run some kind of service, but were forced to tip out a train at Leytonstone. The station had no staff and was padlocked shut. Hundreds of passengers were trapped inside. Some had to climb over fences, others were led out by managers through the drivers' accommodation. You couldn't make it up! The strike shows us who really does the work in society. We do! Just look at the chaos on the one day we didn't show up.

Is the left ready to fight the cuts?



SWP's Right to Work campaign pulls a stunt

BY IRA BERKOVIC

As the Tory-led offensive against our class gathers pace the left will be tested, but its weaknesses are already being thrown into uncomfortably sharp relief. Here we examine some of the initiatives that revolutionary organisations are pushing

RIGHT TO WORK

In principle it's fine for revolutionary groups to set up campaigns to fight on particular issues in unity with people who agree with some basic class-struggle politics but don't share a full revolutionary programme. A demonstration at Tory Party Conference, such as RTW is organising on 3 October (12 noon, Lionel St, Birmingham B3), is not a bad stunt to organise.

However the Socialist Workers' Party's mania for setting up and operating through such "campaigns" represents a grotesque caricature of the united front method.

Right To Work is the latest in a litany of similar campaigns (Globalise Resistance, Stop the War, Unite Against Fascism, Campaign Against Climate Change, Hands Off My Workmate, Another Education Is Possible, Education Activists Network — the list goes on and on and on...) that all share some characteristics. They are "facades", signboards with no real structure behind them, fronted up by figures from the trade union bureaucracy and/or the liberal establishment and usually push the crassest lowest-common-denominator politics.

SWP members pretty much sew everything up and prevent the development of anything approximating to a democratic structure.

You're most likely to encounter Right To Work in your local anti-cuts campaign or Trades Council, where affiliation to Right To Work or support for its latest demo will be proposed by SWPers as the one single thing that your campaign absolutely *must* do if it wants to have any impact on anything.

Questions about what kind of demo-

cratic stake in the running of Right To Work such an affiliation will entitle your campaign to are likely to be met with an icy response.

Right To Work has had a couple of sizeable conferences — fair play, it's always nice to get lots of people in a room — where SWPers told the rest of us that people in their workplace were "very angry!" and that needed to "build the resistance!" (By... affiliating to Right To Work)

Its moment in the sun (well, sort of) came when a spectacularly ill-judged invasion of ACAS talks between Unite and British Airways bosses massively backfired and saw it denounced by many as arrogant and substitutionist, with contempt for workers' own agency. Some polemics were probably a little unfair, but the stunt was pretty dumb.

Beyond this, RTW has no life on the ground. There are no structures for anyone to get involved with.

If a Right To Work affiliation motion comes up in your union branch or Trades Council and you don't fancy the aggro of opposing it outright then try proposing some amendments to demand a bit of democracy and accountability within the campaign. Good luck!

<http://sites.google.com/site/righttoworkconference/>

COALITION OF RESISTANCE

This peculiar formation is the baby of Counterfire, a wayward and disinherited rebellious child of the SWP.

But Counterfire are almost politically identical to the SWP — distinguishable only by being slightly savvier about using Facebook and Twitter and stuff, having a slight squirming discomfort about the notion of the Leninist party (get some backbone, guys!) and wanting to prioritise work in one of the SWP's fronts (Stop the War) rather than others.

Given how much political DNA they share with the organisation from which they recently split, it's unsurprising that they have set up CoR as "their" version of Right To Work.

CoR has attracted a layer of celebrity support. Tony Benn and Terry Jones are signatories. I say "signatories" rather

than "people involved with the organisation" because at the moment, CoR exists only as a written statement.

An "organising conference" is planned for 27 November but there is no information about how this conference will be organised, what kind of mandate it will have and what is intended to come out of it.

Apparently there will be "an opportunity for all to have their voices heard", so why not go along and raise yours? I suggest saying something like this: "hey guys, instead of sitting in this utterly banal conference overburdened with top-table speakers we've all heard a million times before, why don't we start building broad, open and democratic anti-cuts committees in our local areas?"

Let's put the Counterfire comrades' new-found passion for touchy-feely organising methods to the test and see how we get on ...

<http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk>

NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS

NETWORK

NSSN has its origins in motions passed through conferences of the rail union RMT (supported by AWL members in the union) mandating the union to call conferences on working-class political representation.

The conferences did take place, but the RMT leadership had decided they would be talking-shops rather than bodies empowered to take any practical decisions. Eventually RMT leader Bob Crow declared at one of the conferences that he wanted to go for a shop stewards' network, rather than a political initiative, and the Shop Stewards' Network was founded at a conference in July 2007.

In many ways, the model of the NSSN fits the objective situation rather well (and certainly better than RTW or CoR). Coordination between the directly-elected representatives of organised workers could play an important role in catalysing further rank-and-file mobilisation and the building of a counter-pressure to the nullifying influence of the trade union bureaucracy and Labour Party structures (particularly at the level of local government) on anti-cuts struggles.

However, NSSN in its current form leaves a little to be desired. Despite more-or-less open elections to a steering committee, the organisation has been effectively taken over by the Socialist Party, who now run it in only a slightly less front-mongering fashion than the way in which the SWP runs RTW.

The steering committee has not been re-elected.

In some areas, the SSN operates fairly democratically and plays a positive role. In other areas it is simply a badge of convenience for the SP.

The only organised counterweight to the SP within NSSN itself is the syndicalist IWW, understandably looking for a vehicle through which to command more influence than its small numbers would otherwise allow.

But greater involvement by independent socialists, rank-and-file activists and indeed AWL members in NSSN might make sense. It still has a level of profile and a potential reach amongst militants and, if given some real life and democratic structures, could play a valuable role.

<http://www.shopstewards.net>

Prepare the fight!

BY EDWARD MALTBY

In the next few weeks student anti-cuts campaigns at campuses across the UK hold their first meetings of the new term.

This term, the battles over cuts in education that raged last year will be taken up again — but they will develop faster, and the stakes will be higher.

Student campaigns should link up with campus trade unions and labour movement anti-cuts committees. They need to co-ordinate their activities regionally and nationally. It's not enough to take on management on individual campuses — the movement needs a national, political voice.

Grassroots student activists will have to build a national network themselves, since NUS is failing to provide the movement with the leadership we need.

The cuts in education are part of the Tory package of cuts in society at large — students' fight to protect themselves and their courses is part of a general labour movement fight.

Universities and colleges around the UK are still dealing with the £500m education spending cuts that Peter Mandelson decreed last year, at the end of New Labour's time in office. University administrations will still be implementing these cuts when the Tories announce the full scale of their new cuts in October.

An article in the *Financial Times* on 22 September reports that the government is considering cutting the University teaching budget by 75%.

It is already expected that well over 150,000 applicants will find themselves without a university place this year.

The aim of Mandelson's cuts was to transform education, not to save money. Mandelson's plan was to allot funds to the universities that best tailored their courses to suit business leaders' needs.

The Tories too will use funding cuts to re-shape education. They will turn it into a paid-for commodity rather than a public service; a tiered system, where working-class students go to bottom-rung

universities and get know-your-place vocational training, while learning for its own sake becomes a luxury available only at more expensive, top-flight universities.

Lecturers' workload and class sizes will increase, as resources are funneled away from quality teaching into business-driven research.

And, whether through a graduate tax or through increased fees, students will be made to pay more for their education. A report from the London School of Economics calculates that the "full price" of a history degree at an English university is now £7,631 a year.

In order to stand up to these attacks, students need to organise anti-cuts campaigns. Campaigners should use the first few weeks of term making students aware of what is coming.

They should contact local staff unions, and offer support to staff in their disputes. They should send representatives to labour-movement anti-cuts committees or trades councils.

They should prepare students for mass

direct action to disrupt business-as-usual on their campuses, learning from the tactics of occupations like that at Sussex last year.

Student Unions should direct their considerable resources to organising these campaigns. Where a SU executive is unwilling to take up the task, grassroots campaigners should do the job themselves.

These campaigns need to build mass support amongst the body of students and avoid winding up limited to pre-existing activist cliques trading under new names. This means knocking doors in halls of residence, keeping up a high tempo of activity, and being imaginative in the first few weeks of term.

Student campaigns and those Unions prepared to fight need to co-ordinate their activity nationally. The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) is setting up regional meetings, where activists can share experiences and plan joint action.

More details: www.anticuts.com; email againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com

AWL news

At the end of August 40 members and friends of South London AWL met for a barbecue at a community centre in New Cross.

The children played cricket and ran about while comrades drank wine and discussed the case for socialism. We also showed a film about the history of the socialist anthem, the Internationale.

At a recent South London public meeting half a dozen people whom we have met selling the paper on estates in Southwark came to hear Jean Lane speak about her experiences as a woman building worker — "Woman in a Man's Job".

The branch is stepping up efforts in local anti-cuts campaigns and selling *Solidarity* door-to-door.

This week Hull AWL welcomed its fourth new recruit of recent months. The AWL branch is still small, but has grown in those months from a starting point of just two members.

Branch organiser Stephen Wood reports: "The branch's growth has made organising paper sales, leaflets, interventions and our own meetings much easier and helped us turn outwards.

"Our branch meetings, which were pretty informal and held irregularly, are now held weekly at the same time. We have gone through several different educational with different contributors each time: the third camp, trade unionism, Poplar and the local government left..."

"We are now beginning a series on anti-Stalinist left movements... Weekly paper sales outside the council building, and leafleting in town, are now regular."

Sixty people attended a London Workers' Liberty meeting on 21 September to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Trotsky's death.

Speakers included Kim Moody, Yvan Lemaitre from the New Anti-Capitalist Party of France, John McDonnell MP, Farooq Tariq of the Pakistan Labour Party, and Jill Mountford and Sean Matgamna from AWL.

North East London AWL is following up with a series of discussion sessions on Trotsky's ideas within its weekly organising meetings.

Liverpool AWL is setting up its activities for the new student term and the start of large-scale activity against the government cuts.

Bob Sutton reports: "We are holding eight public meetings between now and December, as well as two four-week reading-group programmes."

TUESDAY 5 OCTOBER

Students against the cuts. Hull University AWL meeting, 7pm, Hull University Union. Details: wideload.wood@gmail.com

Also...

THURSDAY 7 OCTOBER

"Kala Tara: the story of the Asian Youth Movement". Film showing to launch University of Westminster SU's Anti-Fascist Society and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic campaign. Speakers include Southall Black Sisters and Sacha Ismail from the AWL. 6.30pm, Old Cinema, Regent Street campus. Details: www.uwsu.com

No cuts! Free education! Demonstrate on 10 November

Under pressure from the growth of anti-cuts activism, the National Union of Students has called a demonstration on Wednesday 10 November.

In theory the demo is a joint one with UCU. In fact the tiresomely predictable decision to call it on a Wednesday shows how (un)serious the NUS leadership is about getting workers along, or indeed getting a good student turn out. There is also, so far, no official publicity. Nonetheless it is vital that activists mobilise the biggest numbers possible.

The political message is more prob-

lematic, since NUS is weak on cuts and supports a graduate tax. The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts is working with a number of left-led student unions to organise a "Free education" bloc around the demands:

- No fees, no graduate tax;
- A living grant for every student;
- No to cuts, tax the rich.

We will be meeting at University of London Union from 11am on 10 November.

The NCAFC is also producing publicity which unions and activist groups can purchase. For more information or to order see www.anticuts.com or email againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com.

Diary: anti-cuts

WEDNESDAY 6 OCTOBER

UCL Union and NCAFC present Tony Benn speaking on why students should fight the cuts. 6pm, Archaeology Lecture Theatre, Gordon Square, UCL

SATURDAY 9 OCTOBER

Provisional date for NCAFC northern activists' meeting, Leeds. Details: chrisjmarks@hotmail.com

SUNDAY 31 OCTOBER

Conference of the SWP's "Education Activist Network" front. The NCAFC will be taking a delegation.

WEDNESDAY 10 NOVEMBER

NUS demonstration, central London

SUNDAY 5 DECEMBER

Provisional date for NCAFC open steering committee/planning meeting

FEBRUARY 2011

Conference of the National Convention

Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC)

AWL students

MONDAY 27 SEPTEMBER

"Introduction to socialist feminism". First in AWL discussion series at Westminster University. 6.30pm, the lounge next to Intermission, Marylebone Campus. Details: jadebaker@hotmail.co.uk

TUESDAY 28 SEPTEMBER

Meet Sheffield AWL students at the first in a regular discussion series. 12 noon, Coffee Revolution, Sheffield University Union. Details: 07528 381 868.

THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER

Tory cuts: get ready for class war! Liverpool University AWL meeting, 7.30pm, Liverpool Guild of Students. Details: bobsutton1917@gmail.com

THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER

Fighting the cuts! Get ready for class war! Sheffield University AWL meeting 5pm, Sheffield University Union. Details: sheffield@workersliberty.org

"Women at the Cutting Edge"

Saturday 30 October
The Arbour, 100 Shandy Street, London E1 (Tube: Mile End or Stepney Green)

A conference hosted by Feminist Fightback, open to people of all genders.

Participatory workshops on:

- What's going on? Mapping cuts and campaigns
- Who do the cuts affect? Why are cuts a feminist issue?
- What does it mean? Demystifying the "economics of the crisis"
- What do we want? Fighting within and against the state

For more information please see www.feministfightback.org.uk or email feminist.fightback@gmail.com or call Laura on 07971 842 027.

Free creche available: please email feminist.fightback@gmail.com to confirm a place.

DEATH PENALTY

Mumia Abu Jamal still needs our support

BY STEPHEN WOOD

"There is something wrong in this country; the judicial nets are so adjusted as to catch the minnows, and let the whales slip through." Eugene V Debs

In February this year new evidence came to light in the case of US death row prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal. Photographs published by a freelance photographer contradicted evidence used in Abu Jamal's original trial for killing a police officer. His supporters are now calling for a retrial.

Mumia Abu Jamal has been in prison since 1981. The journalist, former member of the Black Panther Party and civil rights activist was arrested after intervening in a confrontation between his brother and some Philadelphia police officers. Abu Jamal was shot but so was police officer Daniel Faulkner. Accused of the murder of Faulkner, Abu Jamal's

trial was a travesty of justice. He had no choice over his lawyer, many of the jury expressed racist views and, most damning of all, the judge called for his conviction on the basis of his former membership of the Black Panthers and their belief in violent armed struggle. Abu Jamal was a prominent local critic of the Philadelphia police.

In 2008 the Appeals Court challenged the death penalty and asked that the case be looked at in light of new evidence. This appeal failed in the Supreme Court which also refused any further appeal.

Unfortunately elements within the death penalty abolition movement want to stop supporting and promoting Abu Jamal's case. Representatives of the American Coalition Against the Death Penalty circulated a secret memo saying that support for Abu Jamal was, "dangerously counter-productive to the abolition movement in the US" and would alienate organisations like the Fraternal

Order of Police. This is a group claiming 325,000 police officers who have a policy of refusing to work with any organisations advocating the innocence of Abu Jamal. They also call for the death penalty to be carried out in almost all cases where a police officer is killed.

Instigators of this shift in policy walked out of the World Congress Against the Death Penalty in Geneva, Switzerland on 4 March when Abu Jamal spoke to the conference from prison by a telephone link to his lawyer Robert Bryan.

Many other organisations reacted furiously to the undemocratic and reactionary aims of the "oppose Abu Jamal" memo and have countered with their own petition (<http://mumialegal.org/node/93>) and pledges of their continued support. They see this blatant conservatism as an attempt to depoliticise the idea of death penalty abolition.

Unions, community organisations and radical legal groups have all continued to campaign for Abu Jamal's release and to end to the undeniably racist (as well as inhumane) death penalty imposed on many black and Latino prisoners in the US. 42% of death row inmates are black and 80% of the victims in death penalty cases are white. Yet in the US black peo-

ple make up almost half of all murder victims.

Amnesty International has calculated that since 1976 20% of black inmates executed have been tried by all-white juries. And 90% of defendants charged with crimes that carry the death penalty cannot afford legal representation and thus get overworked and inexperienced lawyers.

Mumia Abu Jamal is the most high profile death row prisoner in the US, a victory for him would be a significant step forward for death penalty abolition, we must continue to call for his freedom and an end to this barbaric system.

<http://www.freemumia.com/>

Strike in Cambodia

As *Solidarity* goes to press on 22 September, 10,000 garment workers in Cambodia are defying a court-ordered deadline to return to work.

They are continuing a strike called to win reinstatement for more than 50 union representatives who were sacked after a big industry-wide strike over wages in mid-September.

Union leaders called off the industry-wide strike on 16 September after the government called for a meeting to discuss extra "benefits" payments for workers earning the minimum wage. (The minimum wage is set by the government at \$61 a month; the workers were demanding \$93.) But employers then victimised many union representatives.

According to the *Financial Times*, there is "a trend that has seen substantial pay increases among some of Asia's lowest-paid workers."

"Growing labour unrest is hitting low-wage industries across Asia, with widespread strikes in China, Vietnam and Bangladesh as well as Cambodia..."

Large crowd for Pope protest

The organisers claimed 20,000 people joined the "Protest the Pope" march in London, from Hyde Park Corner to Downing Street, on 18 September.

One of the organisers, Peter Tatchell, said: "Among the marchers were Catholics and other Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and people of no faith. The protest was not against the Catholic church or Catholic people. It was against the Pope and his often harsh, intolerant teachings; especially his opposition to contraception, women priests, gay equality, abortion, fertility treatment, embryonic stem cell research and the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV."

A few AWL members were there, pretty much the only presence from the organised left. (Two SWPers came to petition about cuts, but did not want to discuss the Pope, the Catholic Church, religion, etc; there were a few members of the Anarchist Federation there.) *Solidarity* had a brisk sale, the AWL comrades there selling all the papers they'd been able to bring.

Unfortunately there were many more thousands in Hyde Park of Catholics who had come to join a "Prayer Vigil" with the Pope...

Photo: Andrew West, British Humanist Association.

More: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/humanism>

Speculators starve the poor

Corn prices have gone up since 40% since July. The European wheat price has doubled since April, and the United Nations says that "global meat prices are already at the highest in 20 years".

The UN's overall food price index is up 15% over the last year, and the odds must be that further price rises will work their way through from the rise in price of animal feed.

In Britain, these trends will squeeze living standards of the low-paid, and people losing their jobs. In large parts of the world, they mean desperate hunger, malnutrition, or even starvation, as happened during the previous world food price spike in 2007-8.

In Mozambique, a 30 per cent rise in bread prices has already triggered riots in which seven people had been killed and 288 wounded.

According to experts, very little of the price rises is due to sheer shortage of

supply, or even to the diversion of cropland to biofuels. The biggest driving force is speculation.

Economist Joachim von Braun writes: "[In 2007-8] the setting of [food] prices at the main international commodity exchanges was significantly influenced by speculation that boosted prices..."

"Food and financial markets have become intertwined — in short, the 'financialisation' of food trade. There are increasing indications that some financial capital is shifting from speculation on housing and complex derivatives to commodities, including food..."

To stop hungry people becoming the victims of rich speculators, we should fight for workers' governments which will bring high finance under public ownership and democratic control, and regulate food distribution on the principle of social provision rather than profit.

No Trident!

Rumours and hints are circulating in the press that the government may delay replacing Britain's Trident nuclear weapons system until after the next general election in 2015.

The original plan was to begin the replacement in 2014, but the government is under pressure to stave off costs (at least £20 billion and perhaps much more) and avoid a political row just before the election.

This hesitation is despite the complete lack of a campaign from the labour movement — and certainly from the Labour leadership candidates, all of whom except Diane Abbott support Trident replacement. Ed Miliband has condemned the Tories for considering putting off the decision.

We can see why the capitalist class, with its concern for the prestige of Britain as a world power, would want to maintain a so-called nuclear deterrent. The idea that the working class has any interest in such a thing is ludicrous. Why would we want our rulers to spend billions of pounds on preserving their ability to threaten mass murder across the world?

Time for a serious labour movement campaign against nuclear weapons — and a fight to impose this policy in the Labour Party.

Essex evictions

On Tuesday 7 September, bulldozers moved in to destroy seven traveller pitches on an unauthorised site — Hovefields — near Basildon, Essex. Some residents had to be forced out, and the evictions were delayed by protests from travellers and their supporters.

Basildon council is also preparing to clear the bigger Dale Farm site.

For the latest news and advice on how you can help resist the evictions, see <http://dalefarm.wordpress.com/>

Racism against the Roma

BY SINEAD ASH

In which British newspaper did the following defence of French president Nicolas Sarkozy's decision to deport Roma travellers from Eastern Europe appear?

"...They are parasites on a state of civilisation, material and cultural, they have done nothing to build and could not reproduce..."

"Deportation could well produce an eternally revolving population as deportees try to make their way back. But should French tax-payers have to pay for schools and services and training to yank Roma families up to minimally acceptable French living standards?"

In a BNP or UKIP publication? In the habitually and shamelessly chauvinist and racist *Daily Express*?

Well, yes. It appeared in the *Express* under the big headline: "Sarkozy is quite right to deport the Roma from France".

But the *Daily Express* reprinted it. It first appeared in the *Independent*, one of Britain's self-proclaimed progressive and liberal broadsheets! The article was signed by Mary Dejevsky.

The word "racism" is, these days, often thrown about too loosely, and as a result has had much of its meaning and force blurred. But surely this is racism!

The article oozes chauvinism against the people abused as "parasites" who are in their nature antagonistic to "our" "civilisation".

They have "done nothing to build" our civilisation and culture, says Dejevsky. You are to understand: "unlike us". Our forebears built the civilisation and culture being attacked by these parasites.

The Roma, or their descendants, can do nothing valuable for the future, either: they could not "reproduce" "our" civilisation and culture.

They have no possible contribution to make, either as workers or as the bearers

of elements of civilisation that could enrich the places they come. They are vicious, anti-social parasites.

Their forebears were that, and their descendants will be too. So? Drive them out of Western Europe!

The Nazis used similar idea about the Roma to justify mass murder. They put them in concentration camps and killed maybe a quarter of a million of them, a quarter or more of the entire Roma population of Europe at the time.

Ms Dejevsky is too busy spewing hate to notice that she contradicts her basic case when she rhetorically asks: should French taxpayers pay to educate the incomers?

So, where necessary, the Roma can be integrated in that way? Here she buttresses her racist depiction and condemnation of the Roma with exclusivist chauvinism: why should the settled French — or the British — taxpayers pay for their education?

In hard times like ours are shaping up to be, minorities come in handy to the ruling class and their press for channelling frustration with the capitalist system onto scapegoats. "Outsiders" by their often (not invariably) nomadic way of life, the Roma (and the non-Roma Irish "travellers") are easy targets for hate and vilification.

Problems and frictions inevitable in their interactions with old-settled neighbouring communities are treated not as a problem to sort out, but as justification for bulldozing their settlements, beating them up, driving them out (often by vigilantes) — and occasionally for the chanting of hate even by a mainstream bourgeois "liberal" paper such as the *Independent*.

For what this frequently leads to on the ground, see the picture accompanying this article of a recent legal levelling of a traveller site in Basildon.

FRANCE

Sarkozy and the Roma

Jerome from the New Anticapitalist Party spoke to *Solidarity* about the French government's attacks on Roma people.

The correct term is Roms (and the adjective Rromani). Their specificity is that they can be French or foreigners.

Among the foreigners, the majority are in a regular situation. Part of them are European citizens from Romania and Bulgaria, while most come from former Yugoslavia.

Gypsies have been in France since the early 15th century. Most travellers would speak French, and they have no other language or cultural basis. Some of them are only partially settled down.

The problem isn't that they're foreigners, it's that they are perceived as nomads. That is what the current problem hinges on, it's this perception as nomads, which makes them unacceptable to the powers that be. They don't have a condo and a dog.

Many difficulties arise from botched attempts to assimilate travellers into French society. These attempts are often well-meaning, but done in culturally inappropriate ways. It requires a thoughtful approach to allow traveller communities to find their niche in French society — and Sarkozy is not capable of that thoughtful approach. These botched approaches wind up making pariahs of travellers.

Police harassment has long been a problem. When the police break up camps, they often destroy all of a family's possessions, destroying their ability to make a living.

Many gypsies have been part of France since before even Nice became part of France. Then there are travelling communities who are not gypsies or Roma, there are sedentarised gypsy families, then there are the Roma. There are all these very specific, different parts of the travelling population with their own special conditions. Sarkozy has just lumped all of these people together and said, "we're getting rid of all of them".

Earlier this year, when Sarkozy made his big speech announcing his new attack on Roma, a man was killed by police, sparking riots in St Aignan.

Gendarmes shot a gypsy man for no reason in the passenger seat of a cousin's car. His extended family came

and attacked the commissariat in revenge. This man and this community have got nothing to do with the Roma. But for Sarkozy it's all one big mix.

"Sarkozy" is a Hungarian name, and also the name of several Rromani families from Hungary. There is a kind of weird self-hate thing here that no-one wants to go into.

The gypsies were the second great population group to be exterminated as such in the Nazi genocides, after the Jews.

The French collaborationist government was much more anxious to provide the Germans with gypsies than they were to provide Jews. They gave away foreign or undesirable Jews, but they gave away French gypsies and foreign gypsies wholesale, sent the whole lot to Hitler.

Gypsies have always been considered to be without nationality. That's one reason why the government's attacks have provoked such outrage.

The protest march on 4 September was very interesting. Pension rights demonstrators are fighting for self-interest, in a way — but the huge Roma solidarity demonstrations were different, fighting for the rights of a persecuted community. It was inspiring.

In all France, 180,000 demonstrated in 137 different towns across France. This was at very short notice, because the government went on a racist rampage in late July, and by the end of August there were protest marches organised in over 100 towns, right after the holidays, at short notice. It was very impressive, a nice surprise.

Sarkozy's mode of politics is always "flight-forward", rushing headlong into trouble. He has a talent to pile provocation upon provocation and make his latest provocation make you forget about the last one.

With this Roma business, this provocation, instead of providing a welcome distraction, has backfired and is combining with the pension reform business and other scandals. Any gap in the pensions struggle is filled with a mobilisation around Roma oppression. He has too much on his hands. This could be the time when Sarkozy's initiatives are starting to backfire on him.

The 4 September demonstrations were an attack on Sarkozy's entire political legitimacy. There is a strong idea now that the whole Sarkozy-Fillon government is illegitimate.

Phil Woolas election probe

Phil Woolas, the former Labour immigration minister, faces accusations of trying to exploit anti-Muslim feeling in his successful campaign to retain the seat of Oldham East and Saddleworth. He won narrowly (103 votes) over Lib-Dem candidate Elwyn Watkins.

Woolas had alleged in election literature that Muslim extremists were backing Wakins against him. Woolas says: "My strategy was to mobilise mainstream Muslims and the white community against the extremists and to do that I had to highlight it to the white community."

Pope Benedict and his “Red” Army

By JOHN O'MAHONY

For much of the 20th century, in large parts of the world, the Stalinist movement on the one hand, and the Catholic Church and its political and social movements on the other, were the great antagonists.

Yet the Stalinist movements and the Catholic Church were, as was often pointed out, in many respects similar, parallel in their mindset and organisation.

It now turns out that they were similar in their attitude to mass rape by their “soldiers” in the field.

In 1945, when the gruesomely misnamed “Red” Army advanced into enemy countries in Eastern and Central Europe, the soldiers of Stalin’s army raped vast numbers of women. In Berlin and Vienna alone, many tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of women were raped. Being raped was a common experience for that generation of German women.

Where American soldiers in Europe were hanged for rape, the attitude of the Russian government and of the army leaders in the field was to give their soldiers tacit licence for it. They regarded it as a right of the conquerors.

The ultra-chauvinist and even racist anti-German propaganda in which the soldiers had been educated prepared them to do what they did and to take an indulgent and collusive attitude to what others did.

Has the attitude of the Catholic hierarchy, up to the Pope, to the mass raping of children, over decades, by Catholic priests, and to the child-raping priests, been any different?

Everywhere the Church hierarchy covered it up, protected paedophile priests, actively worked to stop them being exposed. When scandal began to grow around the head of a paedophile priest in his parish, the hierarchy moved him somewhere he wasn’t yet known. That is, they moved him to where he had a fresh crop of child victims to prey on!

That is the most astonishing thing — that the hierarchy did not see child rape as something they would work to stop. They routinely moved known paedophile priests to fresh territory.

In a Church notorious for its savagely repressive attitude to sexuality, all sexu-

ality, very large parts of the hierarchy tolerated, and by their silence colluded in, the practice of a sexuality that is vicious and indefensible, not according to the laws of some imaginary God but according to the most basic values and instincts of everyday decent humanity.

Hypocrisy, certainly, but surely more than that.

Psychologically the great mystery is how those who regarded themselves as moral people could do what they did, and do it over years and decades.

Pointing to the parallel between the Pope’s priestly army and Stalin’s raping “Red” Army is not unfair to the priests. If anything it is unfair to the “Red” Army.

They were soldiers who had come hot from fighting tremendous battles, who had experienced and seen the devastation of the Ukraine and Russia by Hitler’s armies. They had been brainwashed to regard Germans as evil in their “warlike” nature.

The priests? Both the rapists and the Church-hierarchy colluders operated over many decades — centuries, most likely. They had abundant time to think about it.

Maybe the psychological explanation is that if all sexuality is dirty and sinful, then the moral sensibility weakens and becomes half-blind. The horror of this indefensible sexuality becomes indistinguishable. The Church’s hostility to sex produces a form of moral colour-blindness.

Pope Benedict cannot have been unaware, as he worked his way up the Church hierarchy, that many priests routinely raped children. It has been alleged that he himself was involved in one cover-up operation.

In any case he is the Fagin of the priestly army that still has many child rapists in its ranks. It is one of the crimes — and not the least one — of the Blair-Brown government that they invited him to visit Britain.

On workersliberty.org
25 articles on religion:
including Lenin, Trotsky,
Luxemburg; on the Salman
Rushdie affair, more on the
Catholic Church.
www.workersliberty.org/node/15042

Presiding over a church that stood by as children were abused

OLYMPICS

Property deals superprofits...

How your sports gear gets made

Sports fan and sports coach Daniel Randall attempts to chart a socialist course through the polluted sea of jingoistic triumphalism and exploit-yourself trickery surrounding the run-up to the 2010 Olympic Games...

FESTIVAL OF EXPLOITATION

The organisational infrastructure of the Olympics has a long and inglorious history of reaction. The International Olympic Committee’s former chairs have included Juan Antonio Samaranch who, prior to taking up his role with the IOC, was a prominent member of Franco’s fascist government in Spain.

The enmeshment of the Olympic “machine” with some of the most notoriously-exploitative multinational corporations in the world (McDonald’s, Nike, Coca-Cola...) is evident just from looking at lists of the Game’s prominent sponsors.

But every Olympiad is necessarily predicated on a much more direct degree of exploitation; the Beijing and Athens Olympics were dogged by controversies surrounding the unsafe conditions on stadium construction sites in which a number of workers were killed or injured. While construction-related injuries have been less prominent in London, a huge amount of exploitation is taking place on the Olympic sites.

A comprehensive and extremely useful report compiled last year by the syndicalist group Industrial Workers of the World documents a series of workers’ rights abuses on the Stratford City site. It said that the Olympic Development Agency (ODA)’s basic commitments, which included paying the London Living Wage of £7.05 per hour, were frequently violated by subcontracted employment agencies.

The report also noted: “a widespread lack of resources for ensuring that workers are safe at work. A number of workers have been seen with insufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), including some of the most basic pieces of equipment. In some work that requires extra PPE, such as cutting, grinding and digging, workers have been allowed to work without dust masks, high-impact goggles and other essential protective equipment. Furthermore, many workers often must carry weights over the legal limit without the appropriate lifting equipment.”

The Games will require London’s trans-

With just under two years to go until London 2012, the fanfare’s surrounding the games is getting pretty deafening.

In a recent *Daily Telegraph* article, headhonocho and Tory toff Sebastian Coe said: “There are two years to go until the Olympic Games begin and we want everyone to start planning their once-in-a-lifetime experience in 2012.” That’s pretty intense: the Olympics is meant to be a “once-in-a-lifetime experience” for us all and we’re supposed to start planning it now?

There’s similar rhetoric from London’s clown-cum-mayor Boris Johnson. “Everyone knows this is the most exciting thing we are going to do in London in our lifetimes”, Bojo says. Mass suicide following the Games is starting to look an attractive option; if it’s really going to be this good, surely everything can only get worse for all of us?

Alongside the “it’ll be the single-most amazing thing ever”, there’s also a strong message about how much better London’s going to be after the games.

There is talk of thousands of new jobs and homes being created as a result of the games, and a mountain of vaguer promises about the “legacy” of the Games. A 2007 list of government promises included a commitment to “transform the heart of East London” (how? for who?). And to “demonstrate the UK is a creative, inclusive, welcoming place to live in, visit and for business”. (Ah *business*, one did wonder how much that had to do with it).

But what will the experience of the Games actually be like for the working-class people who will make it happen — the construction workers, the transport workers and the sports-apparel industry workers. What will it be like for the working-class people in economically-deprived East London? Is it possible to have a Marxist “line” on the Olympic Games?

s, sportswear oh, and some sport



port workers to work substantial amounts of overtime to cope with massively-increased footfall during the course of the Games. The expectation to work a lot harder will undoubtedly cause more than a little resentment amongst workers in a public service currently facing 800 job cuts. And despite the absolute centrality of these workers to the success of the Games, much of the advance media coverage of their role has intimated that they are scheming wreckers out to sabotage everyone else's good, clean, sporty fun.

A recent *Sportsbeat* article focused on union "claims" (can't trust a mere "claim", remember) that the Games "won't be held to ransom", but reminded readers of an RMT strike which disrupted tube travel on the night of an England game (they did it once, they could do it again).

Casting workers in this light fits far better into the media's virulently anti-union and anti-strike agenda than acknowledging the possibility that if transport workers can't deliver top-quality services if 800 jobs are cut. With other vital public sector workers, such as firefighters, also facing massive cuts, the Olympic aristocracy — Johnson, Coe and the rest — need to know that they can't have their cake and eat it; they can't slash and burn their way through London's public sector workforces and then expect everything to be tip-top come 2012.

The exploitation extends well beyond the M25 (and indeed the shores of Britain).

The Olympics, and in fact the whole multi-billion pound professional sports industry, relies for the production of its basic commodities (primarily apparel and equipment) on some of the most naked, brutal exploitation that takes place in the world today.

Apparel manufacturers such as Nike, Adidas and Reebok — whose logos and insignia will be inescapable throughout the Games — have been repeatedly exposed as sweatshop employers. The Playfair 2012 campaign (www.playfair2012.org), a well-intentioned if politically limited effort headed up by various union bureaucrats, lists countless testimonials from workers

(mainly in the global south) working for big-name sportswear brands who face slave wages, 12-hour shifts and union-busting bosses.

Given the integral role played by companies like Nike and Adidas in an event like the Olympics, and the centrality of hyper-exploitation to those companies' production, Playfair 2012's noble aim of a "sweat-free" Olympics is a bit like wishing for an "exploitation-free capitalism". Sweatshop labour is built into the DNA the modern Olympics, under globalised capitalism.

"...TAKING OVER THEIR ESTATES!"

Recent YouTube viral sensation "Being A Dickhead's Cool" tore into East London's burgeoning "hipster" community, and included the immortal couplet "I remember when the kids at school would call me names/Now we're taking over their estates!"

There is a danger that the "legacy" of the Games will be to accelerate increase the process of working-class people being priced out of the area so young trendy types (cooler, more economically mobile, whiter) can move in.

Mortgage Solutions reports sharp rises in property prices in many Olympic boroughs: "Four areas recorded average property prices increasing above the Greater London average of 36%. The Hackney districts of Homerton and Shoreditch have seen average property prices rise by 69% and 53% respectively, while Dalston and Clapton both increased 39%."

For those people lucky enough to already own their own house, this could be good news; sell up at an above average-price and move to the palace that this kind of money can buy you outside of the capital.

But if you're, say, a young working-class family looking for a bigger place, or a migrant worker looking for somewhere to live, or a future council-tenant living in a world in which David Cameron's speculative plans about kicking people out of their council houses after a certain amount of time have become a reality,

then this is going to fuck you up a bit.

This process has often been called "gentrification". On a certain level, there's a lot to be said for it, given that it involves taking what are usually pretty run-down and unpleasant parts of town and making them a bit more pleasant to live in. The problem is that this process isn't owned by and managed in the interests of the current residents of those areas and intended to improve their quality of life — it's owned by private property developers and managed in the interests of profit.

Activists campaigning against the negative social impact of the Olympics have also commented on the physical effect it's had on space in working-class boroughs.

Despite the promises of regeneration and countless benefits to be reaped by communities in Olympic boroughs, the process so far has been the erection of huge security fences keeping people out of large areas of their own neighbourhood, and a massive increase in CCTV surveillance. Presumably a certain amount of this is "necessary" for safety and security reasons (there are large, dangerous construction sites), but as the IWW's report notes, the construction bosses are hardly consistent health and safety champions:

"There is also a widespread lack of safety signage around the site. Although there is a good level of signage around the perimeter of the site, where the general public can see it, inside the site there is generally insufficient signage except near the UCATT trade union offices. Related to this problem is the lack of barriers on site to guard against dangers such as deep excavations. Combined with unclear pathway systems, failure to erect barriers in these situations can have potentially fatal consequences."

The situation has left many local workers wondering whether they'll still be locked out of the arena when the circus leaves town...

OUR ALTERNATIVE

The attitudes one finds to sport on the revolutionary left are extremely varied. They range from outright opposition to all competitive sport (seeing competition in any form as inherently capitalistic) to the "reclaim the game"-type politics behind projects such as FC United which see many sports — particularly football — as essentially working-class pursuits that need to be taken back out of the hands of big business.

With the Olympics, many socialists also oppose the national element and the chauvinism that often accompanies it — for example, the Soviet Union did not participate in the two Olympics which took place during the years in which one might still have reasonably characterised it as a workers' state of some kind — 1920 and 1924.

Personally I don't think we have any business being snobbish about competitive sport (either participating or spectating) in general or the Olympics. Anyone who can watch Usain Bolt run the 100 metres and only think about gentrification or corporate globalisation should learn to appreciate the potential of human endeavour. But, unlike football (and even there the case is arguable), there is nothing to "reclaim" in the Olympics.

The entire Olympic project, in its

ancient and modern forms, have been inextricably bound up with the military and financial prowess and prestige of states. That project, like those states, is something we should smash — not reclaim.

My political conscience won't be troubled by watching and enjoying the Games any more than it is when I buy clothes at Primark or shop at Tesco; modern, globalised capitalism is something we have to go through, fighting as we go. We can't got around it (or, worse, run backwards from it). But I'll watch the Games with an awareness of what the "Olympic dream" has meant, and will continue to mean, for the workers who've made the Games happen and the working-class communities for whom the Games might not deliver very much at all.

We should be putting pressure on local government and the Olympic authorities to turn some of their empty demagoguery about the benefit the Games will bring to local communities into reality and fighting for the immense wealth the Olympics will generate to be distributed democratically.

The struggles of workers' and community rights activists "against" the Olympics are entirely legitimate and should be supported. If they carve out better working conditions on Olympic construction sites or manage to keep rents down in an area that would otherwise be hit by gentrification then that's immensely positive. But the negative impacts of the Olympics can ultimately only be fought as part of a working-class struggle for a world where sport is organised for pure enjoyment rather than for profit and the needs of workers and our communities come first.

Refusing to turn on the telly for two months in the summer of 2012 probably isn't going to help that struggle very much.

• The IWW's report is available at <http://tinyurl.com/iwwolympics>

Will you help the socialist alternative?

With the new government's cuts beginning to bite, we need to step up our work to create a socialist voice. We have no rich donors or "captains of industry" to finance our work. We want to raise £25,000 in the course of this year and it can only come from donations from people who agree with our ideas and think our work is valuable.

Our fundraising total stands at £13,419. Over the summer we raised £773.50 from work done at Glastonbury (thanks to everyone who did that) but raised just £157 in donations and new standing orders.

With less just four months to go we have a lot of money to raise.

• Could you take a few copies of our paper to circulate at work or college? Contact our office for details.

• Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).

• Donate directly, online — go to www.workersliberty.org and click on the donate button.

• Send cheques made payable to "AWL" to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, or make a donation directly through internet banking (to "AWL", account number as above);

• Contact us to discuss joining the AWL



Admire their achievements, but remember who is getting exploited

LABOUR CONFERENCE 2010

Will Labour open up?

Colin Foster previews the Labour Party conference, which will start on Saturday 25 September with an announcement of the winner in the leadership election.

Big mouth strikes again

Blair's poodle yaps

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

Dennis Skinner, one of the ghostly superannuated "leftists" in the Parliamentary Labour Party, has come out in support of David Miliband for Labour leader.

He calls on others to back "the man the Tories fear most".

Skinner, a one-time miner, has been an MP for 40 years. Unlike many of the career "leftists" in the old Parliamentary Labour Party, Skinner had real left-wing credentials.

He knew which side of the class divide and the class war he was on. He backed strikes, and backing them was more than a matter of policy and calculation: it was something he felt in his guts.

Politically, though, Skinner was of the old Labour left, and not untypical of it. Politically, Skinner was not really left.

He was an overt reactionary on some issues — a shameless little Englander, for instance, denouncing all moves towards European unity. Just like most of the would-be left, reformist and revolutionary alike, then — and much of it still.

Skinner's idea of socialism was to go back to the sort of state-controlled economy Britain had in World War Two. It was nationalist.

His socialism, like the Communist Party's and the official Labour Left's, was a species of utopianism. Cutting across the grain of the real historical tendencies, it was a regressive, reactionary utopia.

Like virtually the whole labour movement, Skinner moved in the Thatcher years and after towards focusing everything on "kicking out the Tories". Never mind the politics — getting rid of the Tory government became a self-sufficient policy.

By 1997 the Labour Party that finally got rid of the Tories was hard to distinguish in policy from the Tories. It had become a neo-Thatcherite party. Direct industrial action by workers was at a historical low point.

Skinner became a Blairite! A "left" pet of the Blairites and of Blair himself, who reportedly used to "consult" Skinner, that is, test the political temperature by the responses of this extinct little volcano.

It was a degrading and shameful role for Skinner to play. Seemingly, he relished it.

Now Skinner backs the candidate for Labour leader who is most clearly identified as Blair's heir — who is to Blair what Blair was to Thatcher, whose essentials he accepted.

Skinner's advice should be treated with contempt and derision. Yap on, little poodle!

All the Labour leadership candidates — even David Miliband, who is obviously the 'Blairite continuity' candidate — have promised a more open Labour Party, campaigning against the Tory cuts.

But will any of them deliver? Or, more to the point, will unions and local Labour Party activists be able and willing to push them into delivering?

Labour Party democracy campaigners fear that the desire to smooth things for a new leader will push the unions into letting the Blairite Old Regime continue, even under a leader (David Miliband) whom they explicitly did not want.

The argument will be that we should do what the leader wants, or else we create divisions which help the Tories.

There are three simple answers. First, the Labour leader should do what the Labour party wants, rather than the party doing what the leader wants.

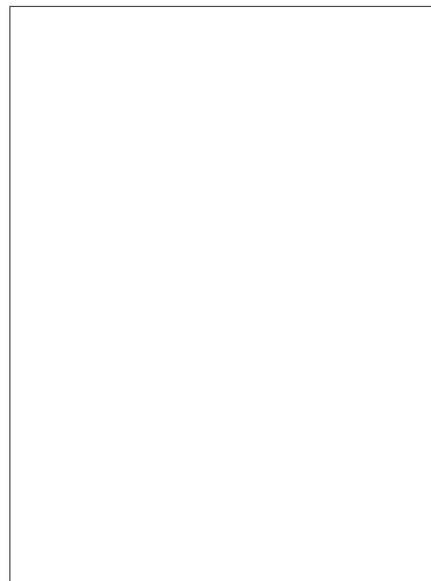
Secondly, a live Labour Party with real internal democracy and thus a real responsiveness to the concerns of working-class people is much more likely to build a strong movement against the Tory cuts — a diverse one, with sparky internal debates — than a continuation of the New Labour approach which millions of working-class people despise and resent, even if they still vote Labour.

Third, we want a new Labour government in five years' time, not just to carry on where Cameron and Blair left off, but to get improvements!

In advance of the conference, there are many warning signs.

- At last year's Labour Party conference, the leadership promised an all-up-for-grabs review of Labour Party structure and the undemocratic changes pushed through by Tony Blair in 1997 ('Partnership in Power'). But still no specifics are available.

- In the run-up to the conference, a raft



Both Milibands want to make "community organisers" the core of future Labour organisation

of rule changes submitted to the 2009 conference and remitted for debate to the 2010 conference have been declared 'out of order' by the Conference Arrangements Committee on spurious grounds.

- It seems definite now that this conference will once again debate and vote on contemporary "motions" from unions and local Labour Parties, reversing the 2007 decision whereby unions and Labour Parties could submit only "issues", to be discussed but not voted on. But there are rumours that the Executive may try to proceed by just admitting motions in practice without formally changing the 2007 rule.

- Both David Miliband and his slightly-less-Blairite rival Ed Miliband talk of making "community organisers" the core of future Labour organisation.

"Community organisers" sounds very bright and breezy and Obama-ish. But it could mean sidelining local Labour Party democracy even further, in favour of control by "community organisers" trained and controlled by the Party hierarchy.

It is not clear whether the Milibands envisage these "community organisers" as paid full-timers, or if so how they'll find the money to pay them. But David Miliband's leadership campaign, at least, has been run mainly by employees rather than volunteers.

That is how the Milibands' thinking works. That is their basic conception of a 'campaign' — a grant, an office, a computer, a smart young careerist to run and control it, and then perhaps a few plebs to make a crowd for photo-opportunities and the like.

We could end up with something like what happens in some unions, where branches and committees are eclipsed by paid organisers appointed by and accountable only to other paid officials.

Matthew Taylor, Tony Blair's 'Chief Adviser on Political Strategy' until 2006, is worried that the 'community organiser' idea could 'backfire', from a Blairite point of view.

"David Miliband quotes the success of [Labour MP] Gisela Stuart's campaign in Edgbaston as evidence of the power of strong community-based organisation. But local activists have said that their ability to mobilise behind the MP was also related to her record of voting against the [Labour] Government whip on controversial questions [surprise, surprise — though actually Stuart's rebellions were rare and minor]..."

"If a party runs the local authority but local branches then campaign against its unpopular decisions (and let's face it there's going to be plenty of them in the years to come) it undermines party unity..."

If we get 'community organisers', we will have to work for them to 'backfire' as Taylor fears. In any case we must work to reconstruct Labour Party democracy, and reopen the valves of accountability shut down by Blair, without being blackmailed by calls to 'back the leader'.

Contact: labourdemocracymission@gmail.com. Check out frequently updated information at <http://www.grassrootslabour.net> and <http://www.leftfutures.org>.

Views from Labour activists

Labour conference must regain policy-making power

Maria Exall, a member of the CWU Executive and the TUC General Council, spoke to *Solidarity* in a personal capacity.

The political challenge is how we resist the cuts from the Conservative/ Liberal government. For the Labour Party to be able to lead the political fight, we need improvements in party democracy, so that the voices of trade-union and Labour activists can be heard. Labour conference must become a real policy-making body again.

Not entirely sewn up

Pete Firmin, a CWU activist and joint secretary of the Labour Representation Committee spoke to *Solidarity*

I don't think anything is entirely sewn up. I think we've got a window for restoring at least certain elements of Party democracy before the machine gets itself sorted with the new leader and

starts sitting on things.

The unions have an opportunity to assert themselves for a brief period.

Whoever gets elected will probably have a lot of goodwill. There will be a lot of 'get behind the leader' from most people. Most of the candidates have made vague, insubstantial commitments on democracy.

The biggest issue is the right to amend National Policy Forum documents. If we don't get that, we're still stuck with this ridiculous all-or-nothing system for voting on NPF documents. The question is whether big unions swing behind that right. If they don't it will fall flat.

Union leaders have not woken up yet

A union delegate to Labour Party conference spoke to *Solidarity*. She was speaking anonymously because the union has instructed delegates that they should not speak to the press without authorisation from the top union leadership.

At the Labour Party conference I hope we'll see that Diane Abbott got a good vote, because, despite many shortcomings, she has been the only candidate even to begin to address the real concerns of the labour movement.

And I hope we'll see a wider understanding that the Labour Party now has to change fundamentally. Unfortunately the union leaders don't seem to have recognised that yet.

Unison has submitted a "contemporary motion" to the conference on public sector cuts. It opposes the cuts and calls for a review into the effects of privatisation. However, it's not very sharp. I can't imagine that there's anything in it that will cause the incoming leader or Labour's National Executive any qualms.

As a delegation, we have had very little briefing in advance. Obviously it's expected that we will vote for any changes that are in line with union policy, but we don't even get to look at the conference agenda or other detailed documentation until we arrive in Manchester on Saturday 25th.

CUBA

Raúl Castro's "Chinese road"

Cuba's Stalinist government has said it will put 500,000 workers out of state employment next year. This interview* with Sam Farber explains the background. Farber is the author of numerous articles and books about the country.

What's the background to the announcement?

SF: I think it's important to place this in the context of the Cuban regime being in decline, and that decline being accelerated because of the terrible economic situation.

It is the result of a combination of factors. One is the irrationalities and crises generated by the bureaucratic system itself. Another is the world recession, which has had a very negative economic impact on the Cuban economy.

For example, while the number of tourists to Cuba has continued at more or less the same rate, income from tourism is down. And income from nickel production, which has been even more important than tourism for the last several years, really fell dramatically because of the big drop in commodity prices — though the price has recovered somewhat.

So the economic crisis is very severe, and for a couple of years the regime has been talking about how there are one million excess state workers — not half a million, but *one* million. So this is what I imagine could be considered a "compromise position" — of laying off half a million people, instead of one million.

Of those half million, 250,000 are supposed to be given licenses for self-employment, and another 200,000 are supposed to be placed in non-state jobs — by which they mean many state businesses are going to be converted into co-ops. This is what they've already done with taxis, and barbershops and beauty parlors. They want to do that with a lot more occupations and industries.

The official announcement of the layoffs from the main trade union federation — and by the way, shouldn't that be the function of the employer? — left 50,000 workers unaccounted for, perhaps because they will be given new different state jobs.

This is certainly not the regime's first step in this direction, is it?

SF: I would call this move an important milestone in a process that's been going on for some time.

A couple years ago, the government began to lease land — in 10-year renewable contracts — to farmers after the sugar industry almost completely collapsed, and the land was going to waste. The idea was for the farmers to become private farmers. But they aren't owners. They pay rent to the state to use previously idle land, and they must sell most of what they produce to the state at prices determined by the government.

The majority of the people who were given land hadn't previously engaged in agriculture. They were people from the cities who were so desperate to improve their economic situation, they took this opportunity.

However, it has been very difficult for those people to acquire the tools they need. By tools, I don't mean high-tech scientific equipment or tractors — I mean quite basic agricultural tools. The state has done a very inadequate job, to say the least, in helping these people with the basics. So the results so far have been far from impressive.

I expect that similar problems will take place with these new private businesses. For example, one of the occupations that will be shifted into self-employment or co-ops is auto repair. So a previous state employee becomes an auto mechanic. Where is he going to get spare parts? Where is that auto mechanic going to get the appropriate tools, except from the state?

Here's where the problem of corruption comes into play. Corruption in Cuba is absolutely pervasive, and people are driven to steal in order to survive. At the most basic level, this takes place because you simply can't survive on a monthly government ration that only covers two weeks. The ration book is being cut down all the time, and even sharper cuts are imminent.

So people carry out theft from the state as a way of surviving. I suspect that if somebody becomes an auto mechanic, they'll have to engage in even greater theft

Raúl Castro

to be able to survive as a small businessperson.

People may also get help from outside Cuban capital, particularly from South Florida. The consequences of allowing in outside Cuban capital on any scale are uncharted territory.

[The investment] is illegal under American law, but there has always been a section of the American political establishment that thinks it's important to provide money to private enterprises in Cuba to the extent that it can enter the island. Now, the Cuban government will probably allow it, and this will place heavy pressure to modify the US economic blockade to make it possible.

In Marxist terms the Cuban government is in a classic contradictory situation. It has to take these actions, and yet if it does, all kinds of outcomes that could potentially subvert the system arise. They are between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Before this latest move, there were 591,000 people employed in private businesses. That includes the struggling farmers, but it also includes 143,000 self-employed in the cities. This is going to add another 250,000 people to the self-employed, plus 200,000 people in co-ops. There will be 450,000 private farmers, plus 400,000 self-employed people who will be legally allowed to hire other people. We're talking about 850,000 people out of a labour force of five million — that's 17 percent.

They are creating a legal petty bourgeoisie in Cuba — and I say legal because a lot of people have been doing this illegally for some time. What consequences this will have is uncertain because there hasn't been a situation like this since the sixties.

Is Raul Castro responsible for this new direction in economic policy? Does any of it extend back to when Fidel Castro was in charge?

SF: All of this — back to the initiative around private farming — has taken place under Raúl Castro. Raúl Castro took over de facto in 2006 and officially in 2008. It's unclear what role Fidel Castro has played in setting policy during that time, and what role he will play in the future.

[These measures] can be explained in part by the fact that Raúl Castro has been a great admirer of the Chinese model — since long before he took power. But even more important is the severity of the economic crisis affecting Cuba.

The media largely describes what is taking place in Cuba as a turn to capitalism — away from socialism. But is that accurate — to describe what has existed in Cuba for the past 50 years as socialism?

I have always maintained that what existed in Cuba had nothing to do with socialism. But unfortunately, large sections of the left have confused state ownership with socialism.

When we talk about socialism, we should be talking about rural and urban workers — and their class allies, like the peasantry — running society together. That has never existed in Cuba.

It is true that for long periods of time, the regime was popular because it was able to deliver significant improvements in standards of living for the poorest people and it provided a great deal of social mobility,

which is something that is sometimes underplayed in terms of the popular support for the Cuban regime. The massive emigration of the petty bourgeoisie, the big bourgeoisie and professionals from Cuba alone allowed for a great number of people to take over those jobs.

But socialism, in our view, is not state ownership of the economy, because the question then is: who controls the state? Certainly, working people in Cuba don't control the state. Rather, it is a bureaucracy, organised around the Cuban Communist Party, that does.

So it isn't socialism that is being replaced. A bureaucratic state ruling class has decided to incorporate as a very junior partner in the economy a newly created petty bourgeoisie — some of whom will be successful, and may become a new group of private capitalists, which has not really existed in Cuba since the 1960s.

The bureaucracy will share power with this new group — economic power, at any rate — and a situation like China may eventually develop. But there is also the question of political power, and the central bureaucracy isn't going to share power with newly minted capitalists unless they totally assimilate into the ruling bureaucracy. But this has also happened in China; you have capitalists joining the Communist Party and becoming a part of it.

What are the implications of that analysis for what socialists should say about the US blockade of Cuba?

This is something that needs to be said over and over again, quite independently of the crisis in Cuba and independently of the crimes and misdeeds — and they are numerous — of the bureaucracy. We should continue to insist that the criminal economic blockade of Cuba must come to an end.

There is a matter of principle here: the United States has no right to intervene in the internal affairs of Cuba and try to use its economic might to force its preferred capitalist system to be installed in Cuba. This is the principal reason for our continued opposition to the blockade — to reaffirm the principle of national self-determination and stop the domination of US imperialism.

But there is also a practical reason. The fact of the matter is that the Cuban regime has used the US blockade for years and years as an excuse to hide its own dictatorial nature and economic incompetence.

What will the effect of the state layoffs be in Cuba? Will they spark a new resistance?

I think a lot of people are going to be left out in the cold, because a lot of these enterprises will not have adequate access to the resources they need to succeed.

The so-called co-ops will be created from above. They won't be co-ops created as a result of a surge in the workers' movement, as has taken place, for example, in the UK and the Scandinavian countries, where a co-operative movement developed as an ally of the nascent labor movement. Co-op members in Cuba may have neither the access to resources nor the political motivation to succeed.

Many of these co-ops and private enterprise will be failures for the reasons I was talking about before.

What is going to happen to those people? Emigration from Cuba has been a safety valve for quite some time. But it's bureaucratically difficult and quite expensive to emigrate — there's no legal right to travel in Cuba — so this won't be sufficient.

Up until now, discontent and disgust with the political system has, to some extent, been directed into criminal activity.

Most promising in terms of the breadth of alternatives about what goes on in Cuba is the tremendous youth alienation that is taking place, particularly among black youth. There is a hip-hop movement in Cuba that expresses the disgust of young black people, specifically against police harassment and brutality.

So youth frustration and alienation may express itself in political protest. This is possible, though we can't be sure. I don't want to be like so many people on the left and say that this is going to happen because we want it to happen. Unfortunately, things don't work out that way.

But the objective possibility of a radicalisation and a higher level of struggle will be considerably increased with the kinds of measures that the regime is taking. I have no doubt about that.

* Taken from the US Socialist Worker website. Published on 20 September 2010.

THE ORIGINS OF THE PLEBS LEAGUE PART 5

The “Plebs” go on strike

THE FINAL PART OF A SERIES BY COLIN WAUGH

As Ruskin students and their contacts amongst former students became aware of the drive by people in the Workers' Educational Association and University Extension movement to take control of Ruskin, they began to organise themselves against it.

During the “strike” that followed the enforced resignation of their principal Dennis Hird, a qualitative change occurred in their strategy, as a result of which 29 of the current students, again supported by former students, threw their energies into creating a new institution, the Central Labour College.

From the early days of Ruskin Hall onwards, its working-class students had been forced from time to time to defend themselves against “the university” — that is, gangs of upper class students — and to fight in the most literal fashion for the working class's right to freedom of speech and assembly.

For example, Ruskin students had held street meetings propagandising for socialism at the Martyrs' Memorial in Oxford. These meetings could involve physical conflict with university students. On one occasion at least this led, in the words of the miner Jack Lawson, to a “free fight, flying Ruskin men and the windows of the College being smashed with bricks”.

Conflict like this also broke out when Ruskin students arranged for people like James Keir Hardie, Arthur Henderson and James Connolly to speak in Oxford. Or again, in 1907 there was a fist fight in the town hall when stewards tried to stop Ruskin students putting questions to the visiting speaker, Lord Carson.

In the more complex struggle against the WEA/extension bloc, the students took their first major step in October 1908, by setting up The League of the “Plebs”.

This title tells us several things about their approach. It was their way of saying that they too knew about things like Roman history, and that workers were not dependent on people like (new vice-principal) Charles Sydney Buxton for such knowledge. It also reflects the influence of Daniel De Leon's ideas, and specifically the fact that the students set a priority on workers developing their capacity to think for themselves. Lastly, it suggests that they were prepared, if they judged it necessary, to “secede” from Ruskin College, as in 494 BC the plebs had walked out of Rome.

Secondly, they published later that autumn the first edition of *The Burning Question of Education*. That was their answer to *Oxford and Working-Class Education*. (The title echoed De Leon's *The Burning Question of Trade Unionism*.)

Thirdly, in February 1909 they launched *The Plebs Magazine* as a monthly journal. (This was printed at the start by T J Fox, a former Ruskin student who was now a partner in a local printing business.)

Fourthly, they organised the “strike” itself. Although Hird actually resigned on 12 March, he did not tell the students that he had done this until the morning of the 26th. In a meeting later that day, 46 of the 54 students agreed to take action, starting at once, to get him reinstated. This action, in which all 54 eventually took part, continued until 6 April. It consisted of a boycott of official lectures and their replacement by classes run by the students themselves.

The 26 March meeting passed this resolution:

“1. That all lectures in the Institution be boycotted, with the exception of Mr Hird's.

“2. That all house duties be carried on as usual.

“3. That the Committee be instructed to form classes among the students in accordance with the present curriculum.

“4. That should any student, or number of students, be victimised by any Member of the Faculty, or by the

Executive Council, all the students, now in residence at Ruskin College, will leave in a body.

“5. That Mr. Dennis Hird's resignation be withdrawn, and the resignations of Messrs. Buxton and Wilson be tendered instead.

“6. That no student shall allow himself to be interviewed by any Member of the Faculty or the Executive Council. All matters between the students and the staff [to] be carried on by correspondence.

“7. That the Working Committee be instructed to draw up a circular re present situation, and send copies to Trade unions, Labour and Socialist organisations, the Press and past students.’ (The students signed this as a round robin.)”

A special supplement on Hird's resignation was added to the third (April 1909) issue of *Plebs Magazine*, which had been due to go to press on 23 March. The anonymous author of this supplement commented that: “As a matter of fact the Principal of Ruskin College is the only individual in the institution capable of maintaining order. Only he does not carry about with him a pocket edition of the Czar of Russia. He realises that he has to deal with men, and not undergraduates or schoolboys, and therefore he acts accordingly. It is the people with schoolboy minds that want schoolboy order... He is as far removed from the other members of the lecturing staff as a mountain is from a mole hill...” A little further on, the writer adds in italics: “And the only man who can secure order is he who has been compelled to resign, because he is said to have failed to maintain order.”

Moving on to speak of the students' response to Hird's sacking, the supplement's author wrote: “The students stand united to a man, and they look for the same united support from the Labour Movement... The clock has struck for finality of action, and every man is at his post filled with a chronic enthusiasm which goes up as a sheet of flame. Fellow-workers, we are looking to you! Do not fail us! The next few days will be of moment and of memory. Let it be a memory of triumph.”

Finally, the students moved from resistance to the setting up of an independent working-class adult education system. This had two aspects: the formation of local classes and the foundation of the Central Labour College. Although they had taken some steps towards the first of these aspects in January 1909, they took the final decision about the second during the strike itself.

The strike was given national press coverage from 31 March, some of it fairly sympathetic. However, almost immediately after this, the secretary of the college council (i.e. the governors), the Rev. A J Carlyle, called the students together and told them that the council had confirmed the executive's decision to demand Hird's resignation. The “strike” continued till 6pm on 6 April. The students called it off after the executive, having decided to close the college for two weeks, agreed to pay boarding expenses and/or fares back to their home areas.

During the two weeks when the college was closed, the students who returned to their local areas used the time to build support for classes there, both by strengthening study circles which already existed and by organising new ones. The classes in each area were known collectively as its “labour college”. The editorial in *The Plebs Magazine* issue 3 explained the thinking behind

this drive as follows: “The establishment of working-class Colleges throughout the country, owned and controlled by the workers themselves, will do more to hasten the hour of economic deliverance than anything else we know of.”

At the start the main centre of such classes was south Wales, followed by the north east. However, classes quickly took root in many other areas. For example, one of the Ruskin strikers organised so effectively in the WEA stronghold of Rochdale that, between October 1910 and April 1911, IWCE classes were being held there seven times a week, and 150 people were taking part in them.

This was not something temporary. By the end of 1917, for example, about 50 trade union branches were affiliated to the Plebs League's northeast region, where 16 classes were running, while a newly established Plebs League branch in the Glasgow area already had 20 classes. By 1926-27, across England, Wales and Scotland, 1,201 classes were in operation (now under the title of the National Council of Labour Colleges), with 31,635 students. Even in 1936-37 there were 764 classes with 15,018 students.

Writing in 1967 the historian Michael Woodhouse concluded: “...there is little doubt, from an examination of the reports in *Plebs Magazine* over the period 1910-1920, that the [IWCE] movement established itself firmly in a number of important industrial areas, London, Lancashire, North-East England and West of Scotland included, and exercised considerable influence in forming the outlook of some thousands of militants. The widespread influence of the Labour College movement is worth emphasising, for it meant that...it acted as the main institution for the propagation of Marxism among advanced workers.”

The decision to set up the Central Labour College was taken in a “referendum” held amongst Plebs League members at Ruskin in the period between Carlyle's announcement and the calling-off of the strike. In this referendum, a majority decided to put their energies into preparing the ground for a separate Central Labour College (CLC).

We can work out what arguments were put for this during the strike from what Sims and Ablett had already said, and also from what was written in *The Plebs Magazine* after the decision had been taken.

In the beginning the League's main emphasis had been on bringing about “a more satisfactory relationship between Ruskin College and the Labour Movement”. In practice this would have meant building rank and file pressure on union leaders to fund Ruskin. However, the editorial in the May 1909 *Plebs Magazine*, which must have been written towards the end of April, announces that: “Ruskin College has ceased to fulfil whatever useful function it did perform for the Labour Movement. Henceforth the object of the ‘Plebs’ must be to assist in the establishing of a new educational structure definitely controlled by organised Labour”.

The author then combined this with the argument against bogus “impartiality”, arguing that: “the worker is either robbed or not robbed; Labour is either paid or unpaid. To ask the workers to be neutral is both insulting, and absurd. The ‘impartial education’ idea has its source in a very ‘partial’ quarter, and so long as the control of education comes from that quarter the working-class movement will be poisoned and drained. In this light, Ruskin College stands condemned.”

Except for a short verse quotation, this editorial eventually concludes: “Working class education is the powerful stimulating force that alone can build up efficient working-class organisation, and to this end we must press forward.” The fact that classes were starting in local areas must also have strengthened the case for a Central College to train teachers.

Ten students left Ruskin after the “strike” and the governors excluded some others shortly afterwards. Some of those who went back accepted what the college management had done. However, a good many actively supported the Central Labour College project. During the strike, the governors had written to Dr Salter and persuaded him to withdraw George Sims's scholarship. Sims remained in Oxford and led the activity that made the CLC possible.

By the time the editorial for the June issue of the mag-

**Independent
working-class education
How can we rebuild
the tradition?
Discussion meeting
2-4.30 pm
Saturday 13 November
Rutland Arms, Brown Street,
Sheffield
(2 minutes from Sheffield station)
Free entry. All welcome**

* See www.workersliberty.org/node/14617 for previous parts.

This article is a version, edited and abbreviated by *Solidarity*, of a 28-page pamphlet published by *Post-16 Educator* in January 2009 to mark the centenary of the “strike” by students at Ruskin College in 1909. For the whole text, visit the website www.post16educator.org or send a cheque for £3, payable to “Post-16 Educator”, to: 221 Firth Park Road, Sheffield S5 6WW.

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THE LACUNA

Trotsky in life and in history

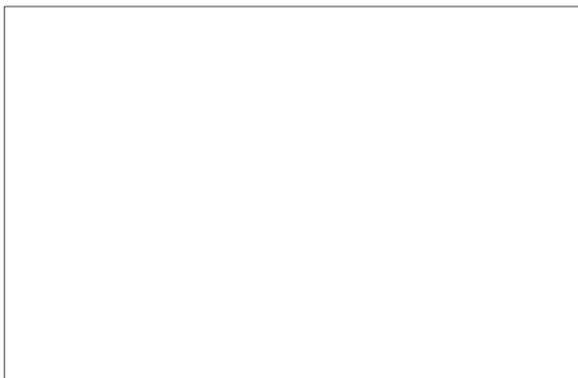
Stuart Jordan reviews Orange Prize winning book *The Lacuna* by Barbara Kingsolver

As resistance to the public service cuts grows, and the labour movement reconstitutes, it will have to relearn the lessons of the past. This is no easy task given that much of history of 20th century is written by the anti-working class forces that crushed and defeated our movement — on the one hand the bourgeoisie, on the other the Stalinists.

The legacy of Stalinism — the lies, distortions and terror — have been a cancer on working-class struggle for the past 80 years. We will need to restore the reputation of Leon Trotsky as one of the greatest working-class militants of the twentieth century. This task will be made easier by Barbara Kingsolver's book, which presents a de-Stalinised portrait of Trotsky.

The Lacuna is a memoir of a fictional character, Harrison Shepherd, who works in the house of artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera and later with Trotsky. After Trotsky's assassination Shepherd moves to the US, where he lives a quiet life until faced with Cold war-era McCarthyism. Kingsolver writes a refreshingly truthful account of a much falsified chapter of our history. Her fiction makes no claims to historical accuracy, yet it is far from the pernicious fictions of the Stalinists or the "howlers" in the bourgeois press.

Kingsolver paints a very human picture of Trotsky, reflecting the man we get a sense of in his "last testament". Despite his exile and persecution, despite the murder of all his closest comrades and family, Trotsky remains doggedly optimistic to the end. This optimism is both personal and political. Even when he is finally exiled in the barren Mexican desert, Trotsky finds joy in collecting cacti and feeding the chickens. As war



Kingsolver's depiction of Trotsky is unfalsified and human

engulfs Europe and anti-Stalinist socialist forces are weak, Trotsky is writing theory and corresponding with comrades all over the world, occupying the time of a whole retinue of staff in a tireless battle with Stalin.

Trotsky's optimism is based in a faith that the web of lies and falsification will eventually give way to truth. At some point in the future, when people are less cowed and terrorised, the truth will emerge and, importantly, people will have a desire to hear it. At this point that the working class will "cleanse [life] of all evil, oppression and violence, and enjoy it to the full".

Shepherd holds to a belief that "God speaks for the silent man." "God" here is not some omnipotent interventionist being. Nor is Shepherd advising silence or inaction in the hope that God will do his thing — Trotsky, Shepherd, Kingsolver are all very verbal. Rather it is a belief that the truth will finally out, even against powerful adversaries who dominate the media outlets and write the official histories. This belief is an

act of revolutionary faith in times of falsehood and darkness. It is a faith that the people of the future will right the injustices of the past.

The title of the book, *The Lacuna*, refers to a geological feature found on Isla Pixol off the coast of Mexico. It is a sea cave, accessible only at times of high tide, leading to a saltwater lake in the jungle. Kingsolver also describes the Lacuna as the "hole in the story" — it's the key to understanding. The dictionary definition is "a missing gap in text", "amnesia about specific events" or a "lexical gap in language".

The story of Trotsky and the Trotskyist account of the Russian Revolution is the "hole in the story" for the movement of today. As the tide of class struggle rises, the movement needs this "lacuna", an unfalsified, un-Stalinised history of our class, a channel to lead it back to working-class, Marxist politics.

The AWL is such a "lacuna", a small band of revolutionaries who attempt to be a living memory of the class, throughout all the defeats, set-backs and falsifications of the past 80-odd years.

Kingsolver's book points towards a final tragedy of Trotsky's life: the Trotskyist organisations since Trotsky's death. Post-Trotsky Trotskyism is largely a story of political degeneration, sectarianism and insanity. We only need look to the Workers' Revolutionary Party selling the names of Iraqi Communists to Saddam Hussein or the Socialist Workers Party forging links with militant Islamism to see how far these "Trotskyisms" have sunk from the high optimism and breadth of vision of their originator.

Kingsolver's book does a greater service to the memory of Trotsky than many of these sects. It will hopefully allow people to look at Trotskyism in a fresh light, and encourage a new interest in the revolutionary organisations that remain true to his tradition.

Why we should switch our computers off

Martin Thomas reviews *The Shallows: how the internet is changing the way we think, read, and remember*, by Nicholas Carr.

A friend recently told me about her 17-year-old daughter's homework habits. She will habitually be watching a DVD on her computer and chatting by instant message with number of friends while simultaneously writing an essay for which she will get top marks.

The internet has brought boons by vastly speeding communications and access to information. It develops new mental skills. The 17 year olds of previous eras lacked the mental as well as the electronic equipment to "multi-task" like that.

Habitual internet use also tends to train our brains into permanent skim-reading mode, into operating in a permanent flurry of distractions, and to train us out of quieter, deeper, more meditative reading and thinking.

The comedian Gary Shteyngart summarises: "In America, everyone is writing all the time — emails, tweets, text messages. But no-one reads".

We can read serious writing on the internet, with sustained attention. But usually we don't. In practice, most people can't unless they first print the text off and then read from paper rather than a screen.

Carr reports research which "found that hardly any [readers] read online text in a methodical, line-by-line way, as they'd typically read a page of text in a book.

"The vast majority skimmed the text quickly, their eyes skipping down the page in a pattern that resembled, roughly, the letter F. They'd start by glancing all the way across the first two or three lines of text. Then... they'd scan about halfway across a few more lines. Finally, they'd let their eyes cursorily drift a little farther down the left-hand side of the page..." People who "read" text online almost always read 18% of it or less.

We are being trained to improve our skim-reading skills — which are essential: we would be crippled if we had to read every road sign, manual, or email in the same deliberate way as we'd read Marx's *Capital* — but also to degrade our deep-reading skills.

Carr argues that prolonged habitual internet use changes the chemistry and anatomy of our brains. It is not just that we get out of the habit of reading and think-

ing quietly and deeply, in a sustained way; we lose the neural connections that equip us to do it.

A life saturated with internet use may also damage our brain's capacity for empathy and compassion. These "require a calm, attentive mind... [They] emerge from neural processes that are inherently slow".

How solid Carr's arguments about brain chemistry are, I can't judge. His book bears the marks of writing researched on the internet: a flurry of snappy references to research, none of it critically examined in any depth.

I can't dismiss his arguments out of hand. And even if the internet's push towards permanent skim-reading operates only on the level of habits, not of physical brain structure, it should concern us.

It must concern the left especially. We have to do more than offer new baubles to minds which are a magpie's nest of glittering trinkets. Our business is to get people to think about the large structures of society and a longer view of history, to mobilise the emotions of empathy and compassion on a scale beyond the anecdotal and immediate. To invert Marx: if the point is to change the world, we must first understand it "philosophically".

For the serious left, the internet is very useful in making snappy information, and more serious texts to print off, available quickly, cheaply, easily, and widely. It is comparatively inefficient, and in some ways a source of problems to be overcome, for the indispensable work of "making converts" and of getting new activists to acquire, not just a few slogans and quick-fire arguments, but a whole solidly-founded structure of thinking independent of the flurry around them, and habits of sober and reflective thought.

The revolutionary party must be, as Trotsky put it, "the memory of the class". That involves the party activists personally, in their heads, having stable memories of political facts and arguments. But, Carr argues, the internet trains us to "google it" rather than remember, and to keep "rather little deep knowledge" in our own heads.

In the earlier years of the internet, there was some enthusiasm on the left for the idea that internet-based communication could replace the older modes: meetings, face-to-face conversations, printed newspapers, pamphlets, books. You could get great outreach as a revolutionary activist from the comfort of your own computer-desk. Carr's book explains why that was a fallacy.

Internet communications, skim-read as they almost always are, have insufficient intellectual and emotional weight and depth. They tend to distract rather than to focus. The political "heavy lifting" still has to be done by face-to-face talking and by printed literature.

The main strand in left politics which the internet has revolutionised is sectarianism. Before the internet, to be an active sectarian, at least you had to go out to the pub. Now, so long as you can write snappy snipping snippets, you can become a widely-read (or, rather, widely-skimmed) "left blogger" without going outdoors much at all.

On the face of it, the internet ought to improve intellectual life inside socialist organisations, by making communication quicker and easier and enabling us to refer to archived documents by a click of the mouse. In fact, it seems to generate a layer of activists who feel themselves fully "involved" but whose reading is dominated by skim-reading of emails and blogs.

What to do about it? On the level of the whole society, technologies like the iPad may help people turn back to more deep, quiet thinking and reading. (Carr thinks not, but his evidence is only one anecdotal account of someone reading from an iPad and finding herself as frequently distracted as on the Internet.)

Schools and universities could certainly reorganise themselves. In place of the current drive to have more computers in schools, we could have a drive for fewer; in place of university courses where almost all the reading asked for is online, we could have courses organised around books.

The school where I'm currently working is one of the few to have its rebuilding go ahead under the new Lib/Tory government. The rebuilding includes a larger library. But in the architect's initial plan, the new library had space for only 3000 of the 12,500 books which the school library currently has. The bulk of the space would go to computers. The teachers objected, and the plans may be revised. Such battles can change things.

In our own sphere, I think, socialist organisations have no alternative but consciously to push against the tide, consciously to push our activists to set aside time to switch their computers off to read and to meet each other, and interested people around us, for face-to-face conversation.

WALTER SCOTT

A reactionary anti-capitalist

Stan Crooke reviews *Scott-Land: The Man Who Invented a Nation* by Stuart Kelly

Even during his own lifetime Walter Scott was simultaneously lionised and lampooned. Goethe described Scott's *Waverley* as a novel which "stood alongside the best things that have ever been written in the world."

Fenimore Cooper adopted Scott as his model. Mary Shelley put him on a par with Shakespeare. Heine called him "Britannia's greatest poet". And Stendhal described him as "our father" who "invented us all (i.e., historical novelists)." But such admiration was not universal. Kelly writes: "Scott was satirised at the beginning of his career as an upstart, unknown novelty. Towards the end of his life he was satirised as a predictable, conventional, all-too-well-known author."

One example of the latter was Thomas Love Peacock's parody of Scott as Mr Chainmail in his novel *Crotchet Castle*: "He is deep in monkish literature, and holds that the best state of society was that of the twelfth century, when nothing was going forward but fighting, feasting and praying, which he says are the three best purposes for which man was made. He laments bitterly the invention of gunpowder, steam and gas, which he says have ruined the world."

Scott remained a controversial figure in the decades following his death. The Scott Monument — the world's largest monument to an author — was erected in Edinburgh. The city's main railway station was named after *Waverley*. Hardy claimed that Scott's early poetry was superior to that of the *Iliad*. And Swinburne described him as the only writer who could seriously be compared with Shakespeare.

On the other hand, the criticisms of Scott became less satirical and more vicious. In the midst of a diatribe which claimed that Scott's influence on the Confederate states was "in great measure" responsible for the American Civil War, Mark Twain wrote: "(Scott) set the world in love with dreams and phantoms, with decayed and swinish forms of religion, with decayed and degraded systems of government, with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society. He did measureless harm, more real and

lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote."

Nor has the controversy about Scott died away with the passage of time. The substance of the controversy has changed, but not its intensity.

Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese Stalinist who ordered the murder of his Trotskyist compatriots but also led the struggle for independence from US imperialism, was a great admirer of Scott. So too was the Marxist literary theorist Georg Lukacs, for whom Scott was the pioneer of the genre of the historical novel.

"Although Lukacs readily admitted Scott's 'personal, petty aristocratic-conservative prejudices'," writes Kelly, "he argued that Scott's novels embodied a Marxist view of history: the clash of cultures led inevitably to bourgeois progress; feudalism gave way to emergent capitalism; history was driven by class struggle, not the whims of great men."

For Lukas, Scott was the Scottish equivalent of Balzac. Both were hostile to emergent capitalism but reactionary in their personal political opinions. Their "critique" of capitalism therefore took the form of a romanticisation of a pre-capitalist past.

A more recent, but non-Marxist, admirer of Scott is Tony Blair. Reading Scott's *Ivanhoe* at school made such an impact on that he never really "savoured" another novel thereafter. Failing entirely to understand what the novel was actually about, Blair describes it as "one of the greatest love stories in British literature."

But while Lukacs was praising Scott, writers of the Scottish Renaissance such as Edwin Muir were damning him (and Burns) as "sham bards of a sham nation". Bringing the story up-to-date, Kevin Williamson, editor of *Rebel Inc.* and publisher of Irvine Welsh, has dismissed Scott as "not a great Scottish patriot nor even a particularly good writer — his prose is stodgy — but he was an arse-licking royalist, a falsifier of Scottish history and a Tory cunt of the worst order."

So, was Scott a great writer or a churner-out of literary dross? Has Scotland benefitted or suffered as a result of his influence? Was he really the man who invented a nation? If so, which nation? Scotland — because of the impact of the *Waverley* novels and the King's Jaunt? England — because of the impact of his

English historical novels? Or some British nation which transcended its Scottish and English components?

And if Scott-land is a sham country, are the alternatives on offer any better? According to the review of Kelly's book in the *Economist*, for example: "If Scott-land is a sham country, so too is the new-nationalist, Burns-burnished alternative, a nation forged of feel-hard-done-by Braveheart movies, Celtic lettering on tawdry signs and synthetic rage at ancient clearances."

Kelly's sympathies lie with Scott. While not being backward in criticising him, Kelly also writes of Scott as "the successor to the most daring writers of the eighteenth century... He is not just still readable, he is enjoyable and even breath-taking.... Scott changed world culture. ...That the novel would become the primary mode of literary production is Scott's most lasting legacy."

Kelly is critical of the emergence of Scott-land in the sense that it involved a series of historical travesties which found their ultimate expression in the King's Jaunt of 1822, when Scott arranged the celebrations for George IV's visit to Edinburgh.

At the same time, Kelly sees the Scott-land and Scottish identity which arose out of those historical travesties as something positive: "Scott-land has allowed a sense of identity to persist through dramatic, painful and significant social, political and industrial changes. ...Every incarnation (of Scottishness), from the most naive patriotism to the most kitsch adoption, makes Scottishness stronger by making it more plural."

Kelly also points out that the criticisms made of the pageantry of the Royal Jaunt could equally well be made of the Scottish Homecoming celebrations of 2009. How can Scott be condemned for his invention of Scott-land when it is that very Scott-land which is still being celebrated two centuries later?

The basic problem with Kelly's book, however, is that it does not amount to anything approaching a serious analysis. Despite the book's title, Scott-land was not the invention of one man and could not have been so.

Scott may have 'invented' the themes which eventually constituted a particular Scottish identity. But he cannot have been responsible by himself for their permeating popular consciousness. Other — broader, social, political — forces must have been in play. But of those one finds little or nothing in Kelly's book.

The "Plebs" go on strike

From page 14

azine was being written, a timetable had been laid down for setting up the CLC. Referring to the date fixed for the first annual "meet" of the League, and responding to "those who would swing the reactionary rod over the mental life of the working class", the editorial says: "The second day of August will witness the Declaration of Working Class Independence in Education, a declaration which will express the fact that the workers prefer to think for themselves... free from the spell of a servile tradition and a slave philosophy, and to look at the facts as they see them from their standpoint."

By this stage, each issue of the magazine was carrying an advert for the League. This advert defined the League's "object" as: "To further the interests of the Central Labour College, for working men and women, at Oxford, and to assist in the formation of similar institutions elsewhere, all of the institutions to be controlled by the organised Labour bodies."

On 2 August, two hundred prominent socialist and labour movement backers came to the first annual "meet" of the Plebs League in Oxford. They ratified the decision to establish the CLC, and approved the arrangements which Sims had put in place.

On 8 September the CLC opened in premises hired by Sims, with Hird as warden. There were 20 residential students, some of them former Ruskin strikers and some sent by unions which transferred their scholarships to the new institution. The CLC had 15 students in 1910-11, 22 in 1911-12, 17 in 1912-13, and 9 in 1914-15. Nearly all these students were sponsored by the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF).

CONCLUSION

The Ruskin students saw the need for the working-class movement to produce for itself its own thinkers and organisers.

University extension was a movement conducted by Christian socialists which, under the guise of reforming the universities and reaching out to the poor, in fact aimed at creating a layer of compliant spokespersons amongst the working class. By 1899 this was clearly failing, because workers were rejecting it.

Ruskin College when founded was a mixture of socialist education centre and utopian colony. Once the founders left, it was faced with becoming either part of the extension movement or a labour college backed by the unions. The students wanted it to be a labour college, but under the control of rank and file union members rather than bureaucrats. Either way, it was attracting and retaining working class students.

Albert Mansbridge was a working-class product of the Christian socialist and extension movement. He saw that extension was failing to hold working class people because it was not providing dialogue between them and university tutors.

The class character of the dominant English universities meant that, unlike on the continent, there was not a layer of people with higher education who would throw in their lot with the working-class. This forced activists to do their own theorising.

Mansbridge now argued for tutorial classes. A group of young Christian socialist tutors at Oxford aligned themselves with him. In 1907 part of the establishment threw their weight behind this. Oxford and Working-Class Education was produced.

The Ruskin students had developed their own conception of education.

Once some tutorial classes were running, the

WEA/extension alliance began to take control of Ruskin. The students understood what was going on. They organised against it and for their own project.

By 1910 both sides in the Ruskin struggle probably thought they had won. The WEA/extension alliance had taken control of Ruskin and absorbed it within their project. They had also succeeded in setting up tutorial classes in many areas and these were, for the moment, attracting high levels of working class participation. The Plebs League had set up a big network of local classes and the Central Labour College.

Further historical research can and should throw light on which side, if either, was right. But the essential struggle between them is still going on, and in the end only we, by our actions, can settle it.

Select bibliography:

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There is a much fuller list of sources in the pamphlet.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The story of Clay Cross

In 1972, the Tory government told local councils to implement the "Housing Finance Act", designed to claw in a bit of extra money by increasing council tenants' rents. The context was in some ways similar to that of today — an aggressively pro-profit, anti-worker Tory government seeking to make working-class people pay for economic instability created by capitalism itself.

There was significant working-class resistance to the Act, with several Labour councils initially stating that they would refuse to implement it. We reproduce below articles from *Workers' Fight* (the paper of the forerunner of *Workers' Liberty*) no.36, 17-30 November 1973, telling the story of two of those councils — Clay Cross in Derbyshire and Bolton in Lancashire.

We believe they contain important lessons both in how Labour councils can be pressured to resist Tory cuts, and also in how they can betray working-class communities <http://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5387/2286>.

An article on the same topic, from *Socialist Register*, may also be of interest: <http://bit.ly/clay-x>.

CLAY CROSS DID NOT IMPLEMENT THE ACT...

For well over a year and a half now the "rent rebel" councillors of Clay Cross have been holding out against the attempts of the Tory government to bludgeon and force them into implementing the so-called "Fair Rent" Act.

The defiant stand of the eleven councillors has been an oasis in the desert of capitulation to this attack on the working class. Labour council after Labour council up and down the country gave in when the pressure became too great — and many did not even bother to put up a token resistance.

Despite the fact that the councillors were only carrying out official Labour Party policy, the Party refused to back them and they were left to fight the Tories more or less on their own — though help and support on an unofficial level has come from other tenants and from the working-class movement.

The stand that Clay Cross has taken, though apparently quite isolated, has had its impact on whole sections of the working class. Even the Labour Party has been forced by rank and file pressure to declare support for the eleven councillors. At the last Labour Party conference a whole string of resolutions was put through criticising the National Executive [NEC] for their position on Clay Cross. Under such pressure even the sell-out merchants of the Executive were forced to put on the appearance of supporting the Councillors.

But as a measure of how much, or how little, the Labour Party NEC actually intend to support Clay Cross, it has only to be noted that they are refusing to put up a fighting fund for the rebel councillors. As usual, paper support costs nothing and at least gives the impression that something is being done.

Now the Tories have admitted defeat in their attempt to bully and threaten the Council into implementing the Housing Finance Act. Some five weeks ago, a Housing Commissioner was sent in to "take over". Many other councils, after an initial refusal to implement, caved in when threatened with the Housing Commissioner. But, as Geordie Barclay found out when he went to Clay Cross to talk to one of the eleven, Councillor Dave Nuttall, the Housing Commissioner is in fact nothing like the unbeatable figure so feared by such fainthearts. What Clay Cross has shown in the last few weeks is that if you are determined to fight, then there are ways around each new obstacle.

Despite the fact that a fair amount of publicity was expended on the arrival of the Housing Commissioner (the capitalist press having previously said little or nothing about the struggle at Clay Cross), his arrival has made no difference to the functioning of the Council and has not affected at all their determination to continue to fight the Rent Act.

Nuttall was adamant about this. The Commissioner had been refused all facilities, and Nuttall thought this, for a start, would make his job impossible. "He can hardly do the job from Henley on Thames" (where he has an office now). Under no circumstances would the Commissioner be given an office, a phone, staff or any

facilities or help in Clay Cross. As far as the council is concerned, the only thing that the Commissioner can do is to look at the books, as these are public property open to anyone who wishes to look at them.

When the Housing Commissioner arrived, one of the first things he was reported to have said was that "lots of tenants were paying more rent than they need to because some of them could claim rent rebates." But Nuttall told me he had an idea where these figures came from. The Commissioner had only been in Clay Cross about 10 minutes when he made this statement.

"Not only could he not have had time to look at the rent records, but he certainly couldn't have known the incomes of the tenants — which is necessary to calculate rebates under the Housing Finance Act. The man is either a genius or a complete bluffer. If he had taken time to look at the rents he would have found that the average rent is £1.50 [about £16 in today's money]: at this level of rent, only a very tiny number of people could qualify for a rebate".

Nuttall thought that in any case the councillors had a simple answer to these splitting tactics — "as the Housing Commissioner thinks our rents are too high for lots of tenants, we are seriously considering giving all tenants a decrease. That should keep the Commissioner happy and no doubt it will please out tenants."

Could the council be bypassed? I asked what would happen if the Commissioner instructed the rent collectors to collect the increase? Nuttall emphasised that the rent collectors are council employees and would be instructed by the council to collect only the rent which the council decided.

The council is still being fully supported by the mass of tenants: in the recent total rent strike called by the councillors, 84% paid no rent at all. During the strike, street committees were set up, with attendance of 30-70 people per street. The Housing Commissioner, a Mr. Patrick Hillington, has a pension of £5,000 a year, and on top of that, for each day he attends at Clay Cross, he gets £40. This must make him one of the highest paid robbers in history — with the possible exception of Sir John Donaldson of the NIRC. But Nuttall observed that the Tories must think it worthwhile "seeing as the total amount of rent owing (according to the Commissioner) is now about £91,000 — about £90 per tenant".

Nuttall thinks that the situation in Clay Cross could easily have been avoided "because if other local authorities, even a minute number like 6 or 7 and one or two big boroughs, had refused to implement, the Tory government would have been in real trouble because the Housing Finance Act would have become a non-entity."

And so, it seems, would the pay laws if everyone followed the example of Clay Cross. The council has just given its employees a rise of between £3.50 and 5 a week. "We're treating the Pay Board in exactly the same way as the Housing Finance Act."

I wondered how the strain of being up against the

Mass demonstration to defend Clay Cross councillors

Tory system was affecting the councillors. Each faces a surcharge of around £7,000 — a tidy sum for these 11 working people — and the prospect of being banned from future office. But Dave Nuttall seemed quite unconcerned. Would he try to pay the fine? "Don't be bloody silly, Geordie — I've got no money". Did he fear going to jail? "No. I've got too much faith in the trade union movement for any fear on that score. Besides, I doubt whether the Tories would risk trying to jail us — they haven't yet forgotten the Pentonville Five and are hardly going to want a Clay Cross 11".

So, the message coming from this north Derbyshire village is that the fight goes on — fines, Commissioners or whatever. If Dave Nuttall is anything to go by, the leaders of this fight are in a relaxed and confident mood. Their slogan is as true today as it was at the start — we will not implement the rent act!

...BOLTON'S LABOUR COUNCIL DID

BY NEIL DUFFIELD, SECRETARY, BOLTON TENANTS FEDERATION

The rent strike in Bolton is now 12 months old, and the handful of tenants who are still refusing to pay the "Fair Rent" increase are more than £40 in arrears.

What happened during the course of those 12 months is fairly typical of what happened up and down the country, and is worth looking at in some detail. Prior to last October, only one estate in the town was organised. Even this was difficult enough to achieve, as local Labour councillors were loudly boasting that they would go to jail rather than implement the Act, and therefore the town had no need of Tenants Associations.

Labour in Bolton came to power very largely on the strength of these boasts, yet they backed down at the last minute with all the other Labour councils, leaving the tenants only two or three weeks in which to organise the other estates. By October, after an intensive campaign of marches, petitions and rebate form burning, seven tenants associations were operating and more than five hundred tenants (by official figures) withheld the rent increase.

Many Labour councillors reacted immediately by saying that they could not support public "lawbreaking", and the Labour council as a whole declared their intention of "helping" Bolton's tenants by "lessening the effects of Fair Rents." They appealed for a special dispensation and succeeded in getting the original £1 a week increase reduced to 75p, which they then treated as an average increase, keeping some increases at £1 and reducing others to as little as 20p, with a whole range of different levels in between. The immediate effect of this was to split the tenants movement in half, dividing the tenants in newer property, paying the big increases, from the ones in older property, whose

LITTLE RED SONG BOOK

The preacher and the slave

Long-haired preachers come out every night,
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right,
But when asked about something to eat,
They will answer in voices so sweet:

Chorus:

You will eat bye and bye,
In that glorious land above the sky.
Work and pray, (work and pray),
Live on hay, (live on hay),
You'll get Pie in the Sky,
When you die, (that's a lie!)

And the starvation army they play,
They sing and they dance and they pray,
Till they get all your coin on the drum,
Then they tell you when you're on the bum:

Chorus

If you fight hard for the good things in life,
They will tell you to stop all the strife,
Be a sheep for the bosses they say
Or to hell you are surely on the way!

Chorus

Workingfolk of all countries unite;
Side by side we for freedom will fight
When the world and its wealth we have gained,
To the grafters we will sing this refrain:

Last Chorus:

You will eat, bye and bye,
When you've learned how to cook and to fry;
Chop some wood, 'twill do you good
And you'll eat in the sweet bye and bye.
(That's no lie!)

Joe Hill was born in Sweden and migrated to the US. In 1910 joined the Industrial Workers of the World. Over the next five years he campaigned for many working class causes and became popular song-writer — the Wobblies were well-known for their songs. In 1914, during bitter struggles over free speech in Utah, Joe Hill was framed on a murder charge. Joe Hill was executed on 19 November 1915. His body was taken to Chicago, where over 30,000 people attended his funeral procession.

increase was now reduced.

Next came an intensive "You may be eligible for a rent rebate" campaign which split us up even further — those getting rebates and those paying full rent. By Christmas the numbers had dwindled to around 150. Then came the Council's Provisional Fair Rent Assessments and a public campaign by the Labour Party for tenants to "appeal" against their particular assessment. The Tenants' Associations managed to fight off support for this manoeuvre within their own ranks, but some damage had been done; and when the predictably low assessments were published the rent strike dwindled even further as many tenants mistook the provisional assessment (set by the council) for the actual Fair Rent (yet to be assessed by the Government's Rent Scrutiny Board).

Throughout all this period the Tenants' Associations had conducted a continuous campaign, publishing leaflets and information, holding meetings and organising rent office pickets. All the major trade union branches were circularised and their offices invited to joint Trade Union-Tenants meetings. None ever came.

In fact the local secretary of the AUEW [now part of Unite] is himself a council tenant, yet at no time did he respond to appeals for solidarity action from the tenants, nor did he himself go on rent strike. An application by the Tenants Federation to join the Trades Council was greeted with the curt reply: "Tenants Associations are not eligible for affiliation to the Trades Council." By the spring, only six tenants were left on rent strike and the Authority felt strong enough to act against them. Bailiffs appeared without warning at the homes of the six tenants and furniture and other goods were confiscated to pay off the arrears.

The bailiffs did their job enthusiastically, taking far more than was needed to pay for the arrears, and in one case confiscating everything the tenant had. But even then the local officials had underestimated the fight still left in the tenants movement. Within four days a demonstration was organised and attended by 500 tenants. The case attracted TV and press coverage, and by the following week the officials backed down and the goods were returned.

At the time, Labour councillors were quick to assure tenants' leaders that it was not their agitation or their demonstration that had caused the officials to back down, but the action of "sympathetic" Labour councillors behind the scenes. This of course was said in private. But at the next council meeting an altogether different story emerged. The Tories accused Labour of putting pressure on local officials. Very much rattled those very same "sympathetic" Labour councillors couldn't deny the charge strongly enough, and announced themselves to be opposed to all rent strikes.

In fact they went even further and claimed that "had it not been for their responsible action earlier in the year the situation could have been far worse." For once they were telling the truth.

Labour's action right from the beginning had had the effect of stabbing the tenants' movement in the back. The eventual outcome of their "lessening the effects of Fair Rents" will be negligible, yet its immediate result was to kill off the one chance tenants had of throwing out "Fair Rents" lock, stock and barrel.

Mass demonstration to defend Clay Cross councillors

Whether tenants could have succeeded in doing this without widespread Trade Union support remains doubtful. Yet with a strong and militant tenants' movement organising effective rent strikes throughout the country, the Trade Union movement would inevitably have been drawn into the struggle whether its leaders wished it or not.

The villains of the piece emerge clearly. On the one hand the Labour Party — both locally and nationally — and on the other the trade union bureaucracy. The Tories are probably content enough to establish "Fair Rents" in principle for the moment. Their success in holding down wages reduces the immediate need to increase rents. But as long as the Act is there it represents a threat and the Tories will not hesitate to use it to increase rents to unheard of limits the moment they feel the need to do so.

The job of Tenants' Associations should now be to form long-term links with organisations of rank and file workers with a view to breaking the monopoly of the Labour Party/TUC coalition on working class politics. Difficult as this is to do, it is now more important than launching into another series of rent strike campaigns for next October. Whilst Tenants Associations maybe effective to do this in certain areas where trade union support has already been achieved, in most areas further rent strikes will only serve to demoralise tenants even more.

A start in the right direction was made in Bolton on May Day when tenants joined AUEW pickets outside the factories and striking members of Equity staged a street theatre which included a scene on Fair Rents. Much more similar action is needed before all the lost confidence can be restored and widespread rent strikes can once more be effectively campaigned for.



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“The cause she fought for will become the cause of millions”

BY DANIEL RANDALL

Around 80 of Pat Longman’s friends, family and comrades gathered in central London on Saturday 11 September to commemorate her life.

Pat was a Trotskyist for 44 years, and a member of the AWL tendency for most of 39 years, until her death on 2 August from chronic liver disease.

The attendance and the speeches at the event reflected Pat’s life and spoke of a woman who was a committed revolutionary, for whom Marxism was far more than a passing teenage fad, and who was kind, compassionate and caring as a person.

John Bloxam chaired the meeting: “Pat was a revolutionary; she wanted to overthrow capitalism and replace it with a system based on the principles of solidarity and human need. That was a cause to which she devoted 44 years of her life — the great majority of it. She didn’t waver from that conviction. She held those ideas as firmly at the point at which she died as she did when she first developed them in her teens.

“Pat also had tremendous warmth and sympathy. She was a very kind and considerate person.”

Jean Lane, who joined Workers’ Liberty’s predecessor organisation as a young woman in the 1980s, reminisced on her experiences of staying with Pat in London. “I used to go back from those visits with my head buzzing. I thought ‘who are these people who

spend their lives doing politics, and don’t define themselves by who their boyfriend is or what music they listen to or what kind of clothes you wear?’ That had been my life until that period and it was a profound experience for me to meet those people. Pat made me think about myself and my role in the world.”

Talal Karim, who had been a Labour councillor in Islington with Pat in the 1980s, also spoke from the platform, as did Martin Thomas from Workers’ Liberty. “One of Pat’s most striking traits”, said Martin, “was the range of her human sympathy. She’s the only person I’ve ever known who I can never remember being peevish or sulky... All those qualities explain why Pat was so well-liked and well-respected, both inside the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty and well outside it.” Martin also remarked on Pat’s “stubbornness” in her politics, particularly in refusing to go along with the sell-out on Islington Council where her fellow Labour councillors caved in and refused to side with working-class communities or council workers.

Martin, like many other speakers, emphasised Pat’s exceptional commitment and conviction; she was one of the diminishing few among those activists who came into the revolutionary movement in the late 1960s and early 70s who had stayed the course, bringing continuity and memory to new revolutionary generations.

Martin quoted Percy Shelley’s epitaph for Robert Emmett, which talks of the future when the “day-beam” of his revolutionary cause would shine through the passing storm clouds brought by those “caressed by fortune”. “The cause that Pat fought for when it was the cause of thousands will become the cause of hundreds of thousands and millions. We don’t know when that will happen — in five years’ time or in 25 years’ time — but it will happen. What we can do now to remember Pat is to organise to carry forward the cause she fought for and to speed the time when the ‘day-beam’ of working-class struggle shines again.”

The meeting also heard from people whose main experience of Pat was as a friend rather than a comrade. Those people, too, emphasised how strongly Pat’s political ideas flowed through who she was as a person.

Izzy, who knew Pat in Nottingham, said: “Pat influenced me a lot in terms of political ideas. But she was also exceptional in practice.” Izzy related the story of an occasion when Pat intervened to assist and support a woman distressed after domestic violence, potentially saving her life. “What I remember so well about that is how clear Pat was about women’s rights. She was unflinching. She saw that this woman needed help, and she did what was needed. That’s the kind of woman Pat was, and I feel lucky to have known her.”

Pat’s close friend Sally shared memories and experiences of her time working alongside Pat for a women’s training scheme in north Nottinghamshire. “To put it euphemistically, most of the employers had a fairly traditional view of women. It’s a real tribute that over the time she was at Nottinghamshire Women’s Training Scheme she found employment and work placements

SEAN MATGAMNA

Pat Longman had strength and stubbornness in the cause in which she enlisted before she was 16 and worked for all of her life.

Of the sizeable number of people who have travelled part of that road with AWL, Pat was one of only a few who travelled the distance with us as we confronted the problems and contradictions of the would-be left and tried to find consistent revolutionary socialist answers.

More gregarious than some of us, she would have felt our isolation and unpopularity. But Pat was sustained by our belief that the beginning of all revolutionary wisdom is to tell the truth and go on telling it — no matter what. As Marx said, in Dante’s words, at the beginning of *Capital*, “follow your own course, and let the people talk.” Pat will be greatly missed.

Pat Longman

as plumbers, joiners, electricians and motor-mechanics for hundreds of working-class women in the Bassetlaw area. That was no mean feat.” Sally spoke of Pat’s role as a shop steward in their workplace, “thwarting many attempts at reorganisation” before finally leading workers and service-users in a six-week occupation against closure. Although the occupation was ultimately defeated, Pat had staved off redundancies for six months.

“Pat was passionate,” Sally said. “She was caring — both on an individual level and in terms of caring about her causes; the causes of working people’s fight against oppression, against capitalism. She always sought to involve as many people as possible in that fight; she drew people in and made sure they took part and understood what the fight was about. I trusted, admired and loved Pat as a colleague, a comrade and a friend.”

The meeting closed with the singing of the Internationale, the traditional anthem of working-class socialism, and took a collection for the Pakistan Labour Relief Campaign — a working-class effort to gather aid and solidarity for victims of the Pakistani floods. The message of the memorial was clear — that Pat Longman was a woman whose immense natural resources of human sympathy and compassion led her to dedicate her life to the cause of revolutionary socialism, a cause from which she never wavered despite setbacks and defeats. Hers is an example from which we can all learn.

FRAN BRODIE

I knew Pat as a comrade in the Trotskyist movement and the women’s movement in the 1970s.

Pat’s work on *Women’s Fightback*, the Working Women’s Charter and *Women’s Voice* was politically indispensable, trying as we were to link the working-class fightback against the Tories and the 1974-9 Labour government with the women’s movement. We were trying to make inroads politically into the women’s movement and to link that movement with the struggles of working-class women. We did it with some success, until all the movements went into retreat with Thatcher’s victories.

Pat was very involved in such battles as those to stop the closures of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital and the Royal Northern Hospital, and the Grunwick strike.

We could always rely on Pat to be there and intervene; very quietly, but she did it. She was once described by a comrade as a “foot soldier”, and she was — but in the good sense. She contributed as a thinker and a writer to our aims and strategies, but she never left the practical work to others.

She carried on and on, and she would have carried on for many more years but for the illness which killed her. She was a fine comrade, and she will have died with — as Trotsky put it — “unshakeable belief in the communist future” and in the working class.

Martin Thomas (speaking); Nadine Finch, one of the meeting organisers; Talal Karim

JEREMY CORBYN MP

I first met Pat Longman in the early 1980s. She immediately struck me as a dedicated, sincere and committed socialist. We became good friends through many struggles at the time.

She was elected to Islington council on a landslide in the 1982 local elections and took up her duties in St George’s Ward with great gusto and commitment. Dedication to people and community were her watchwords. In an echo of current times, the government tried to impose huge cuts by restricting funding to local councils. Pat was a huge part of the resistance to this.

The miners’ strike in 1984-5 was a seminal moment for the whole labour movement; like many others, Pat campaigned for political and industrial solidarity with the miners. In Islington we collected over £100,000 and council staff would voluntarily donate from their pay.

Pat made sure that many of the then-advanced policies on positive action, discrimination and social justice were pursued by the government.

As a union activist, Pat campaigned for print-workers’ jobs and conditions and opposed News International in the enormous dispute at Wapping in 1986-87. I want to thank Pat for her dedication, her principles and her activity. She did well for Islington and its people, for her union and its members, and for the cause of socialism.



CUTS

Birmingham city workers fight back

ing. Given the rising cost of public transport and the increasing reliance of many workers — particularly women workers who are statistically more likely to have domestic and childcare responsibilities — on flexible working, these are hardly minor attacks on trivial perks. They are, very plainly, part of the great historical project of the capitalist class: make us do more for less. Even though the council claims these measures will help avoid job losses, Chief Executive Stephen Hughes has been quoted as saying that he expects 30% of all administrative jobs to be gone by 2014.

Continued on page 4

Birmingham council workers' successful "single status" strike, 2008

BY GERRY BATES

Birmingham's Tory-Lib Dem council has become the latest in a string of public sector employers to interpret the so-called "need" to make cuts as an excuse to take a sledgehammer to their workers' pay, terms and conditions, and indeed their jobs.

26,000 workers (the entirety of Birmingham's local government workforce, in fact, excluding education workers) have been issued with Section 188 notices. Section 188 is a notification of

intent from an employer to make a number of workers redundant; it is not a formal notice of specific redundancy, so not every worker who receives one will necessarily lose their jobs. It is likely that the mass issuing of the notices is a warning shot from bosses which indicates a coming attack on terms and conditions. The notices are a signal of intent that, if the workers don't accept the new terms, they will be out the door.

The council claims that the notices are simply part of "efficiency measures". They propose to attack car allowances, staff parking permits and flexible work-

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see page 12

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