

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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For a Workers' Government!

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HUGE CUTS PLANNED IN COUNCILS AND NHS

Demand that Labour defy the cuts!

BY DARREN BEDFORD

Recent government announcements have revealed just how enormous local government cuts will be, with the poorest areas suffering the most; it has also become clear how devastating “efficiency savings” will be for frontline health services.

In a move that even sections of the mainstream press are describing as “revenge”, the Tory-led coalition government has wielded the axe directly against Labour-controlled councils, in working-class areas, protecting Tory councils in richer areas from the worst of the cuts.

In London alone, areas like Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham face cuts of nearly 9%, while Richmond and Kensington face cuts of less than 1%.

The Tories plan to cut funding for local government by up to 28% over the next

four years, and are “front-loading” a big part of the cuts into 2011-2.

Some local authorities, like Barrow-in-Furness (where Labour is the biggest group on the borough council) face cuts of nearly 25%.

As well as representing an extremely savage and direct attack on workers and the poor, the government’s Localism Bill also confirms many of the worst fears about their vision for the reorganisation of local government.

Central amongst the reforms is the plan for voluntary groups, social enterprises and other similar bodies to be allowed to bid for the right to deliver local services. This is the easyCouncil model, where the democratically-elected local government body is reduced to a hub whose only role is to tender out the running of services to unaccountable organisations.

These announcements came alongside news that the NHS will also see massive

cutbacks, with Chief Executive David Nicholson estimating that the health service would “need” to make “efficiency savings” of between £15 and £20 billion pounds. Nurses’ association RCN estimates that the NHS cuts could threaten tens of thousands of jobs. Unison described the cuts as “a huge danger for services and the people who rely on them.”

Even the Commons Select Committee on health (chaired by Tory Stephen Dorrell) has described the cuts as “historically unprecedented” and admitted that they will see the NHS “tested to the

limit.”

Labour councils are still saying they “have no choice” but to make the cuts imposed by the coalition government in as mild a way as possible. But there is no mild way of making 28% cuts.

Trade union and Labour activists should take up the call by Unison in Scotland for Labour councils to decide to stand with working-class communities against the government, and not with the government against working-class communities.

Defy the cuts! Make the labour movement fight!

Scottish Unison calls on councils to refuse cuts

The Scottish Unison Council, made up of delegates from all branches in Scotland, voted on 3 December for a call that the Scottish Parliament and local councils should defy Tory cuts and set “needs budgets”.

This is the first time in the current anti-cuts agitation that a large body in the labour movement has raised the call for councils to defy the cuts. *Solidarity* has been raising the call for some time, but even the rest of the left press has so far been hesitant about it.

In the 1980s, that call won wide support, though in the end all Labour coun-

cils — even those known as “left” like Liverpool and Lambeth — first resorted to rate rises (not available as an option now) and then made cuts.

The meeting also voted, unanimously, to raise with the other public sector trade unions the call for a one-day Scottish public sector strike against the cuts. The successful motion on this said: “The public sector trade unions must now complement the community based anti-cuts work by preparing an industrial action campaign to defend services and the current level of public spending in Scotland.”

The Tories’ NewSpeak

BY A CHARITY WORKER

Iwork with a voluntary organisation in a big northern city. We offer a drop-in centre — washing facilities, food, health and housing advice — to people who are addicts, often homeless and with mental and physical health problems. Last year, we had 2000 visits from clients.

We did this on £70,000 of funding. More than half came from our local council. We got a new form from the council a few weeks ago. Can we tell them how much it would affect us if they cut that grant? 1. a bit; 2. quite a lot; 3. a lot? (Give percentages).

So we answered the question.

Answers. 1. 5% cut. No more training activities for clients. 2. 15%. No more laundry or cooked meals either. Start looking for cheaper premises. 3. 25%. Move premises, spend our reserves, but still close down (within about six months).

But just after we sent the form off today, an email arrived from the Transition Fund, which is funded by the

Office for Civil Society. It says that if we expect a cut of 30% more in our taxpayer funded income next year (that means the money from the council) it will help us to “become stronger, more agile and adjust to the new spending environment”.

The Civil Society people say:

“We expect that you will spend your grant on a number of activities that could include:

- developing and redesigning existing and new services in the public service areas;
- restructuring or moving to a different business model, including redundancy costs where necessary;
- the costs associated with moving services to or from other organisations;
- the costs of developing new partnerships, alliances, mergers and/or shared services;
- staff training;
- getting expert advice and support”.

Sacking staff or getting the consultants in, yes. Offering a service for people who need it, no. They aren’t agile enough for the Big Society.

ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE IN LUTON ON 5 FEBRUARY

Mobilise against these racist thugs!

BY CHARLIE SALMON

The English Defence League will return to the streets of Luton on 5 February for what they are billing as a “homecoming” demonstration.

The racist riot that sparked the formation of the EDL took place in the city in March 2009, as a response to provocations by a tiny group of right wing clerical fascists at a military parade. Under the banner of “United People of Luton” a small band of hardened football hooligans, organised racists and BNP members orchestrated a 500 strong rampage which attacked Asian businesses and individual bystanders. The EDL has since grown steadily into a major force on the British far-right.

Whilst the EDL consistently fail to live up to their own largely internet-bound hyperbole, they are a not inconsiderable threat. Firstly, because their populist chauvinism and racism resonates within the mainstream of society. Where the

tabloid press, right-wing Tories and commentators peddle crass propaganda against Muslims and immigrants, the EDL gives an opening for the physical and active expression of such sentiments.

Second because many hundreds do consistently turn out on their demonstrations. These people are prepared to do more than noisily carry placards and politely listen to inflammatory speeches. They come ready to confront the police, counter-demonstrators, and the local population with racist violence.

Isolated from all other considerations — and given the possibility of a vigorous labour movement wide response — the EDL would be a “manageable” problem. But not only has mainstream, “official” anti-fascism failed to consistently and effectively confront these street racists, we are now faced with a radically shifting and in some respects unpredictable general situation. We are no longer fighting the EDL on the same terms as 2009 or even early 2010.

We are now entering period of sharp class conflict. After months of bubbling anticipation, when the exact shape and speed of reaction to the Tory-Liberal government’s onslaught looked uncertain, an opening salvo has been made by student demonstrators. Whether or not this will be followed by equally militant industrial activity is unclear, but all signs point towards at least some strike action.

All such events polarise sections of society, mobilising large numbers in a fight but forcing others to harden their pro-establishment or right wing views. The shift of significant numbers of people to the right will be eased by sabre-rattling from the Tory right, sending in the police to deal with protestors, and assisted by a ratcheting-up of bigotry by the right-wing press. The EDL could benefit significantly from such tensions.

At the same time the EDL themselves are adjusting in sympathy. Whereas just six months ago the EDL appeared to be nothing more than a violent and opportunistic street gang with no coherent pol-

itics or plan, they are now consolidating themselves into a political force.

They have made formal links with leading figures from the American Tea Party movement and recently attended a London seminar on organising political action with Tea Party organisers. The prospect of a more politically savvy but equally violent organisation should be a major concern — all the more so given the parlous state of the British National Party and the base of support they created over ten years of patient work.

There is only one way to prevent the EDL from organising itself into a bigger political force: through mass, militant mobilisations that drive them from the streets and labour movement wide organisation to combat the bigotry, chauvinism and racism from which they feed. The first step in such a campaign will be effective resistance in Luton.

• For more information check the Stop Racism and Fascism Network website: www.srfnetwork.org

POLICE BRUTALITY ON 9 DECEMBER

Defend our right to protest!

Police brutality and violence matching the vicious, unrestrained ideological attacks of the Tory-Liberal government was dished out in ample portions to protesters at the student demonstration on Thursday 9 December.

Trained in the brutal arts of defending the state, wearing the best protective head gear and steel toe-capped boots public money can buy, and brandishing offensive weapons, the police lunged into crowds of protesting students, randomly and indiscriminately beating anyone in their way, including a protester in a wheelchair.

Young people, untrained, not wearing riot gear nor wielding offensive weapons, tried to push forward their march in Parliament Square, raising the demands of "No education cuts!", "No rise in tuition fees!" and "Save EMA" (the Education Maintenance Allowance.)

Alfie Meadows, a 20 year-old student from Middlesex University, suffered such a savage police beating he had to undergo three hours of emergency surgery to stop bleeding on the brain.

The demonstration mobilised 30,000 protesters on the streets of central London. It was part of the biggest wave of student protests in Britain in decades.

Inevitably, as a serious movement against the Cameron-Clegg government cuts takes shape, the strong arm of the bourgeois state — the police, the law, the secret police — will start to flex its muscles.

On 9 December mounted police were using the brute force of their horses to break up the demonstration in order to defend the interests of the capitalist class.

As on other demonstration days, thousands of protesters were "kettled", that is, "imprisoned" on the streets in freezing temperatures for hours on end.

Young school students, "kettled" by a solid row of well-kitted-out and uncompromising police officers, have had a clear lesson in the nature of the state and its police force.

As they stood around, or huddled together, victims of or captive audience to the intermittent baton charges of the police, they will have been astonished and aggrieved by what they were witnessing. Few could have left that demonstration doubting that the police are organised thugs in uniforms and that civil liberties

are under attack.

Was all the "thuggery" on one side? Yes. Eyewitness accounts confirm that the demonstration was peaceful before police started "kettling" large groups. The kettling and the baton-charging left many protesters facing the charge justifiably angry, with no choice but try to defend themselves, and provoked gestures of retaliation (almost all against property, not people).

The right to protest, along with the right to freedom of speech and the right to free association, can be found in the most mainstream, universally accepted legislation — Articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act, for instance.

Who are the real thugs?

The police thuggery and tactics like "kettling" show that the government and the state have no regard for this right.

The attacks on our civil liberties are going to get worse as resistance to the cuts develops — unless we make a stand now.

The police and the government are still stinging from the so-called "security debacle" when a Rolls Royce carrying Prince Charles and Camilla was accosted by protesters leaving the demonstration, and paint was splashed on the car.

The Home Secretary, Theresa May, has threatened to use water cannon to break up future protests. David Cameron has called for the arrest of members of the "feral mob" and said, ominously, that "it's no good to say this was a very small minority. It wasn't", thus branding the *majority* of demonstrators as a "mob" to be suppressed.

The government will deploy their laws and their police — and even, if they have to, the army — supported by their propaganda machine, to try to quell resistance to their deep spending cuts.

This wave of student protests has to be the beginning of a movement that grows to unite students and workers in defence of jobs and services, to demand that the rich must pay for the capitalist crisis, and to articulate and fight for demands that beyond what we presently have.

To begin with, we need to mobilise the solidarity of the student and labour movements behind those who have been arrested — demand that all charges be dropped!

We need to fight to defend our civil liberties — our right to protest, our right to organise together, our right to freedom of speech.

Labour should commit itself to a ban on "kettling". Labour MPs should support an early day motion calling for its banning. This issue could be the immediate focus of a campaign around civil liberties. "Kettling" is an attack on our right to organise and protest.

The Tories in this millionaires' government understand perfectly their historical role in protecting capitalism. In this they are being aided and abetted by the Liberal Democrats, who are nothing more than Tories by another name.

The labour movement has been less conscious of its historical role of defending working-class people against capitalism. But there are signs of a fight back and growing political confidence.

The students who are at the forefront of fighting the Tory/Lib-Dem attacks have the right to support and solidarity from the labour movement.

Right to Resist — against police violence and intimidation

- For the right to organise and protest
- Drop the charges against all those arrested in the recent student protests
- Stop police brutality and intimidation
- Ban kettling
- Stop the cuts

The vicious police response to the recent student protests is wholly unacceptable and totally uncalled for. The baton charges and use of 'kettling' only serve to fuel anger and frustration and in part, at least, are deliberately designed to provoke strong reactions from demonstrators.

Police brutality and intimidation on demonstrations, protests and picket lines are nothing new. As the class struggle grows in the wake of the Tory/Lib-Dem government's ideology-driven attack on public services and jobs, the role of the police in 'managing' protests will continue to grow and harden.

We demand that all the charges are dropped against all students and their supporters arrested in the recent wave of student activity.

We call for a ban on 'kettling' as a means of control and intimidation of peaceful protesters. 'Kettling' has been added to the armoury of police warfare, alongside baton and horse-mounted police cavalry charges, to intimidate protesters and dissenters.

We believe that the Tory/Lib-Dem government has no majority electoral mandate for the cuts it is pushing through. People voted for the Tory-stooge Lib-Dems on a promise that they would oppose the cuts which they are now helping the Tories railroad through.

We believe 'kettling' is arbitrary imprisonment and is a direct attack on our basic human right to protest, contravening Articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act. We call on student and labour movement organisations to actively oppose 'kettling'.

Initial signatories: Pat Smith, Hull University Students Against Fees, and occupier; Michael Chessum, Education Campaign officer, University College London Union; Jade Baker, Vice President Education Westminster University Student Union; Janine Booth, Secretary RMT London Transport Regional Council; Patrick Murphy, National Union of Teachers Executive. (All in personal capacity).

To sign up to this statement contact right2resist@gmail.com, or go to righttoresist.wordpress.com

Ban “kettling”!

The tactic of “kettling” was first used in Britain in 1999 at a protest at a World Trade Organisation meeting in London.

Developed from the “cordoning” tactic, “kettling” means detaining large numbers of protesters in chosen areas, sealing them off and immobilising them by surrounding them with thick lines of police.

Smaller groups are broken off from larger demonstrations and are held for hours on end, regardless of the weather and without food, water, or toilet facilities. Once the “kettle” has been formed, the cordon is tightened and baton charges can be used. The aim is to break up demonstrations, leaving protesters tired and demoralised.

The term “kettle” is a metaphor likening the containment of anger to that of heat and steam in a kettle. As with a boiling kettle, if there is no outlet for the steam and heat the kettle will eventually explode.

“Kettling” is used in a number of countries to impede legal protest. Some protesters have attempted to sue the police for wrongful detention, arguing “kettling” is in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights.

The House of Lords, the High Court and the European Court have all ruled in favour of a state’s right to detain protesters in this way. But how can “jailing” you on the street, just for demonstrating, not be an attack on the human right to protest?

Don’t let them scare us!

The purpose of “kettling” is to scare protesters. To make us feel so miserable we think protesting is pointless.

To think that every time we protest what’s likely to happen is being “kettled” for hours, left standing, feeling cold and tired and desperate for a pee.

Police brutality on demonstrations is about showing who’s in charge and to put us off from daring to protest in the future. Protesting and demonstrating can get you in trouble — that’s the message the police want to send out when they land a size 12 steel toe-capped boot in your back, punch you in the kidneys, charge you with their horses and plant their batons firmly across your skull.

And they think those of us who have not been kicked and “kettled”, but have seen it happen to our friends, will be sufficiently frightened to be put off protesting as well.

We should not be put off. Mobilising in

our tens, hundreds or thousands is more than important, it’s essential.

We have to build a movement to stop the Tory/Lib-Dem attacks. The student movement and the labour movement have to stand united, building solidarity across the two movements and beyond. And we have to decide individually and collectively not to be put off by police violence.

In the first place a disciplined show of strength and a forceful assertion of our rights could get the government and state to back off.

But in the end the only way public services, jobs and rights *can* be defended is through protests, demonstrations, strike action. Mass action scares the government and the capitalist class — that is why they use the police in the way they do. But when they’re scared we also know that we are on the road to winning!

Police attack students, media blame the victims

BY JAMES BLOODWORTH

The gulf between what has happened on student protests and what is reported by the mainstream media is reaching absurd proportions.

On 9 December march everyone could see the utterly contemptible behaviour of the police. But rather than focus on that, or on the fact that a Bill to make higher education all but off-limits to poorer students was passed in Parliament by those who got their education for free, the media decided that the real problem was the protesters having the temerity to stand up to the government’s ideological marketisation of and cuts to higher education.

A little jeering and paint-throwing around the car of Charles and Camilla got most attention. The profligate royal benefit claimants were treated with special deference and fanfare by the mainstream media.

Twenty year old Alfie Meadows had to have emergency surgery for bleeding on the brain after being hit on the head with a police truncheon, but the mainstream media did not highlight that.

The police claimed there were

responding to student violence. But the police went for “kettling” peaceful protesters into small areas — denying them the freedom of movement — long before the claimed student violence.

After police had surrounded students for nine hours in Whitehall two weeks previously, many protesters were obviously unwilling to be denied their basic human rights of freedom of movement and access to food and water for another nine hours without a fight.

A great deal of the police violence was caught on mobile-phone cameras.

As night fell on Parliament Square, the reinforced police lines continued to deny protesters the right to go home. Students huddled around makeshift fires in order to keep warm. From the windows of MPs’ offices, the fires were seen as another “act of vandalism”, despite the temperature dropping close to zero.

The atmosphere amongst the protesters themselves was comradely and cordial. But there was a justified anger, not just at the ideological cuts to education, but at the cuts to all services and jobs. Dotted the skyline were an abundance of literate and imaginative slogans painted onto homemade signs.

Governments across Europe are

“People could have been killed”

From an eyewitness report by Corine Dhondee (film-maker)

The riot police surged forward again... Below me a man had passed out, a woman was shouting that she had to get out because her friend was having an asthma attack, a few men and women held their arms up above their heads and were pleading with the police to help them get out.

A guy was helping the man who had passed out. Finally a riot policeman went and helped carry him out. But another riot policeman started to attack the demonstrator who was helping the one who had passed out.

The riot police below me re-formed and made a tunnel and forced people to walk down the tunnel towards the next kettle...

As I jumped off a wall I saw perhaps eight rows of riot police moving in and begin to lash out and beat people.

Reports from my friends today are that one man has had part of his finger amputated. He and a friend of mine

were at the front of a kettle when a fence came over their heads. The fence went down, people pushed forward. As they went forward my friend fell into the fence, and the man tried to keep the fence up. As he did that the riot police smashed up against his fingers.

My friend, who ended up on the ground, said she was acutely aware that if someone fell onto her or if the riot police moved forward, her back could have been broken.

Another friend was arrested. His home was raided this morning and the police took his computer and his flatmate’s computer. My friend is out on bail. The police have said it was mistaken identity.

A 15 or 16 year old boy was grabbed by the throat and pushed up against the wall because he said the word pig.

A guy I met... who was on the bridge said the brutality was horrendous but he didn’t want to speak about what he had seen.

What happened [on 9 December] was brutal, people could have been killed...

Defend rail union

From back page

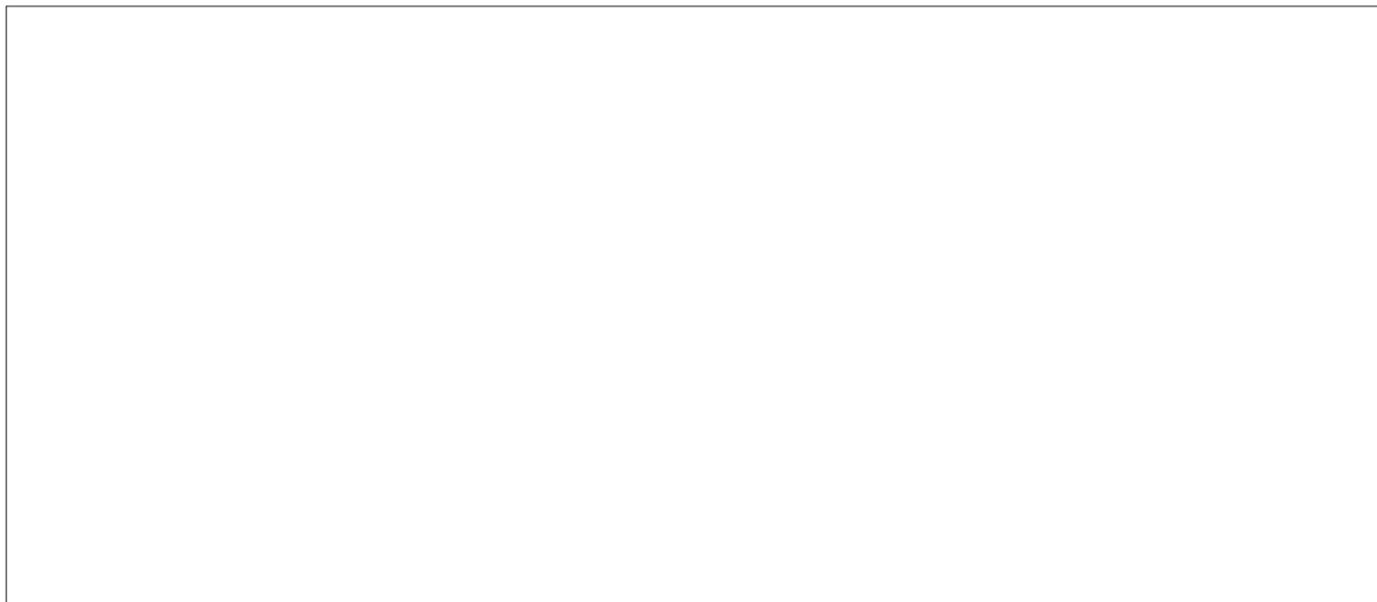
RMT and TSSA have recently renewed their offers of further talks to management, within a specific framework structured around reviews into various aspects of the cuts proposals. The unions’ hand at the negotiating table would be greatly strengthened, however, if sustained strike action of at least 48-hour was scheduled.

Rank-and-file RMT and TSSA members should use strike committee meetings to pressure their officials to escalate the dispute as a matter of urgency.

Unfortunately, tube workers are now in a situation where the series of four 24-hour strikes has finished, but the Executive has not yet announced new strike dates, only non-specific threats to escalate the action in the new year. While the unions take a festive breather, the company is not doing so, but is going ahead with its process of cutting not just the 800 stations jobs but a further 800 jobs as part of the “support services review”.

Information from the union has been patchy, so members are left wondering what the unions’ strategy is. Tube workers have shown willing to fight these job cuts, and need a clearer strategy from the unions as to how they intend to pursue this dispute and get a result. If the union leadership is incapable of providing that strategy, rank-and-file activists must fight to impose a strategy of their own.

The next steps for student activists



London Underground workers and RMT members before setting off on the student march on 9 December. Mutual solidarity will strengthen the fight

BY AWL STUDENTS

On 9 December parliament voted in favour of a massive hike in tuition fees. We cannot accept that as decisive defeat!

In 2006 the movement against the CPE law in France, which would have allowed bosses to summarily sack workers under the age of 26, continued after the French parliament passed the legislation and eventually forced its repeal. It can be done!

Forcing the government back means maintaining momentum, and that means reaching out to a wider working-class resistance to the cuts.

Students need to organise strongly, and develop organisations which can reach the trade-union rank and file and push concerted demands on the union leaders.

The TUC has called a national demonstration against cuts. But it's not until 26 March 2011. So calling for student-worker unity can sound like an instruction to student activists to harness their activism to the sluggish and bureaucrat-pace of the labour movement. That's not what we want to say at all!

Student organisations, and rank-and-

file union organisations, should demand that union leaders co-sponsor, with student activists, a big demonstration early in January to restart the campaign with a bang after Christmas.

If the union leaders won't do it, then the demonstration should be called with whatever lower-level union organisations will back it.

One way or another, a January day of action on fees and EMA should be set soon.

Students and workers together can be a decisive force against cuts. By virtue of its pivotal position in capitalist production and the logic of the class struggles that position generates, the working class is the social force which can win a socialist alternative to the rule of profit.

BUILD LINKS

We can build student-worker unity now by:

- Delegations from union branches and trades councils visiting student occupations, as striking RMT members and TSSA members have been doing in London.

- Union groups supporting student actions in other ways, even if that's just by visiting demonstrations with union banners or by producing supportive statements, like the one signed by several National Union of Teachers National Executive members (initiated by AWL member Patrick Murphy).

- Producing joint statements, like that from the Regional Secretary of the rail union RMT in London and leading members of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

- Students visiting workers' picket lines, as many have done in London during the recent Tube strike.

- Students going to speak at union branches and trades councils.

If the unity and solidarity that is being developed locally can be amplified nationally, then the wave of student action can catalyse a long-dormant labour movement into life. If it does that, the possibilities are limitless.

HOW TO ORGANISE

On every university campus, students should organise to take over their student union and make it a campaigning body rather than a bureaucracy fixated on "services" and good entries for the sabbaticals' CVs.

The success of the UCL occupation in forcing an emergency general meeting of the student union, and winning student backing for the occupation there, shows what is immediately possible. The transformation of student unions can't be done overnight; but, in the meantime, the broad and democratic campus organisation of students needed to change the student union will also be the organisation for immediate action.

It will also connect with campus unions in a joint student-worker committee.

In every school and FE college, student activists should form a broad and democratic campaign committee. Across every city — a coordinating committee.

AN EMERGENCY CONFERENCE!

The recent actions of the leadership of NUS (the National Union of Students) have exposed it as a conservative, thoroughly-bureaucratised organisation. After condemning the Millbank protest on 10 November, NUS president Aaron Porter was forced to shift a bit and support occupations. But the NUS Executive's vote not to support the 9 December march, and instead to limit support to a "vigil", shows that little has changed.

Years of anti-democratic structural reform have left NUS's membership all but incapable of exerting any pressure, never mind direct control, on what NUS does politically at a national level. These changes have fed, and been fed by, a lurch rightwards in policy terms.

In the 1980s and 90s NUS used to organise a national demonstration every year, and it would have two conferences a year, with vigorous debate. 10 November was the first demonstration that NUS has organised for some years.

On education funding, NUS wants to tinker around the edges of the payment system but accepts as inevitable (desirable, even) the idea of education as a paid-for commodity. Its leaders denounce free education activists as

utopian fantasists.

The NUS leaders can't be allowed to continue peacefully on their present lines until 12 April, when NUS's regular conference is due. NUS has held plenty of emergency conferences in recent years to push through anti-democratic rule changes. It should hold an emergency conference now to allow the new generation of student activists to control the battle over fees and EMA.

STUDENT UNIONS

Activist-led Student Unions should get together to press for an emergency NUS conference, and also plan their own conference, soon, to be a powerful left force within NUS, and also to have the means to organise action independently.

To fail to take up these campaigns, and instead rely exclusively on ad hoc activist networks, would be to let the large resources available from our student unions' membership fees and assets stay under unchallenged conservative control.

We should:

- agitate for local student unions to demand an emergency NUS conference

- propose policy for NUS conference 2011 that seeks to overturn its position on education funding and to abolish the existing undemocratic constitution and replace it with one based on a grassroots control

- stand a united left slate for the NUS NEC, in the first place based on the unity of activist networks such as the NCAFC and EAN.

- form a permanent caucus of left student unions that can organise within NUS and, when and where necessary, independently of it.

Sign up to the NCAFC information list for supporters, build a CAFC group on your campuses. For more information visit anticuts.com email againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com or ring 07775 763750.

Aaron Porter must resign!

Aaron Porter is not fit to be the President of the National Union of Students. As well as condemning the Millbank protest and substituting nice peaceful vigils for militant protests, he has, according to leaked emails, been begging government to consider cuts in student grants and loans as an alternative to raising tuition fees. What a lackey!

Even right-wing trade union leaders usually resist telling bosses how to make their cuts! We say Porter should resign and be replaced with a decent leadership which is prepared to represent students who are on the streets, protesting against these cuts and fighting for free education.

Demand Labour end tuition fees!

Labour MPs and peers voted against the tuition fee hike in the House of Commons and House of Lords. Good.

However Ed Miliband has refused to commit Labour to reversing these proposals when Labour returns to government at the next general election.

Miliband's excuse? He does not want to repeat Nick Clegg's "mistake" of promising something he might not be able to deliver.

We should campaign for Labour to oppose all tuition fees and restore student grants.

How settlers and the army carve up the West Bank

Between 22 November and 2 December, nine members, supporters and friends of the AWL took part in a solidarity delegation to Israel and Palestine, visiting Palestinian resistance organisations, Israelis supporting them and workers', youth, women's, anti-occupation and solidarity organisations in both countries. Sacha Ismail discusses some of the political impressions the delegation had during their visit.

Firstly, I want to first discuss the ways in which Israel is undermining the emergence of a two-state settlement.

One thing leftists in Britain often argue is that a two-state solution could be no different from a series of Palestinian bantustans controlled by Israel. When you go to the West Bank you see all the ways in which it would be different.

The West Bank is currently divided into three zones; only 20 percent is under full Palestinian control. 60 percent is under the control of the Israel in terms of both "security" and administration. That amounts a constant regime of harassment and intimidation against Palestinians, for instance in terms of arbitrary house demolitions, one of which we witnessed.

There are checkpoints all over the place; tens of thousands of workers have to go through these to get to work, and tens of thousands who previously worked in Israel now cannot get there and have lost their jobs.

Israel controls Palestine's borders — and in the case of Gaza this amounts to an ongoing siege.

There is the Wall, which is not simply a barrier preventing free movement of people, but a way of seizing resources in the West Bank — for instance land and artesian wells — and economically and socially strangling many Palestinian villages. This is vividly demonstrated by the fact that the course of the Wall is almost twice as long as the 1967 border.

Then there are the settlements — and this is one of the crucial points, perhaps one which we in the AWL have not emphasised enough.

There are now hundreds of thousands of settlers in the West Bank; settlements are expanding and new ones being built all the time. In fact, building has continued even during supposed settlement freezes. And beyond the "official" settlement-building process is a process in which far-right Israeli youth set up new encampments, often in violent conflict with the IDF (Israeli Defence Force), which then become accepted after they have existed for a time.

The settlers do not just seize territory; they also monopolise resources, for

instance water. They control the access of Palestinian towns and villages to these resources. As a result, more and more Palestinian centres are being depopulated.

These trends if they continue to their logical conclusion would make the establishment of a genuinely independent Palestinian state impossible.

It's worth thinking about the apartheid comparison. We have argued, rightly, that Israel is not an apartheid state but a mini-colonial power. The Israelis are not a narrow caste but a nation with the whole spectrum of social classes — working class, bourgeoisie, intermediate layers — and therefore the right to self-determination. But the society which is now developing inside the Occupied Territories, as opposed to Israel itself, is something like apartheid.

In the long term, such developments might make a two-state settlement unviable. I don't think they do, now, because the distinction between "metropolitan" Israel and the territories it occupies — between the two nations, Israel and Palestine — still holds. But

what follows from that is that one of our number one priorities has to be oppose the settlements and highlight the damaging role they play.

In principle, there is no reason why Jewish people should not remain in an independent Palestinian state as equal citizens. And in fact, dismantling the settlements would not be easy — the largest, Ariel, has over 150,000 inhabitants. In practice, however, I think they will have to be dismantled for Palestinian self-determination to become a reality. Certainly that was the view of Israeli leftists we spoke to.

ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN LEFT

Both are operating in extremely difficult circumstances, and are on the defensive.

In Palestine, you have the growth of the religious right — Hamas, but also beyond that jihadist groups which Palestinian leftists compare to al Qaeda. The left parties, which in any case are more left-nationalist than socialist in the sense we would understand, are

Below: working-class activists from the DWRC in Palestine (along with our delegation) express solidarity with the 30 November student day of action in the UK.

This Palestinian home was demolished the morning our delegation arrived

Not by Reason Alone

So what is "reason"? Sums, cold calculation
About the world. Be reasonable! Don't doubt!
Sums are infallible: multiplication
Serves you best! Be cold and measured. Don't shout
Against good sums, or kick against computers:
If Freedom is necessity, bow down:
The sum sets mind-ruled man in gear, neuters
Fond hope, desire and fantasy, brands clown
The heretic who says, "This is insane,
Our tyranny of the bourgeois abacus!"
Life's richer than the counting houses of Cain,
Or your own mind, stronger than Spartacus!
Be brave against the odds, subvert their sums.
And if we get it wrong? – A new try comes!

SM

weak, disoriented, and discredited by the collapse of Stalinism.

At the same time there is a vibrant Palestinian “civil society” fighting against the odds — the trade unions, but also for instance women’s and now LGBT movements. They were thrown back by the chaos of the Second Intifada and Israel’s military repression, but they are using the relative calm and stability since 2006 to rebuild and renew their struggle. Solidarity with these forces is also a priority.

In some, although conditions within Israel are easier, the Israeli left is more marginalised.

The failure of the Oslo process, the increasing shamelessness with which Israel’s military power is exercised, the expansion of the settlements — all these things have poisoned Israeli politics, undermining the left and the peace movement and boosting the right. At present, anti-occupation demonstrations are small; even the movement against the Gaza war in 2009 mobilised only 10,000 or 20,000, rather than the

hundreds of thousands seen in previous anti-war movements. And the settlers are at the core of a growing religious-nationalist bloc in Israeli politics. Former Knesset member Uri Avnery, who we interviewed, said that many of the forces on the right of the Knesset would be described as fascist if they were in Europe.

Of course, that is all the more reason why the Israeli left and peace movement, and particularly the radical wing of the peace movement, the anti-occupation wing, need solidarity.

There may also be long-term trends at work which may undermine the right in Israel. At the Workers’ Advice Centre, Roni Ben-Effrat talked about the economic processes which are undermining the traditional bases of Zionism — since Israel’s turn to neoliberalism, the limited degree of social democratic security enjoyed by most Jewish workers has largely disappeared.

In this context, the idea that the Israeli workers enjoy some super-privilege distinct from that of any working class

Clouds of tear gas surround demonstrators at Bil’in as the IDF fires cannisters at the protest

in an imperialist centre is nonsense. In fact, the mass of the Jewish working class is being more and more impoverished and proletarianised.

This has already resulted in the growth of small unions independent of the Histadrut and also some odd phenomena — for instance the support from traditional Likud supporters from the slums of south Tel Aviv for the Israeli Communist Party’s mayoral campaign, which won 34 percent of the vote. In the future these trends may split Israeli politics wide open.

SOLIDARITY AND BOYCOTTS

The British government is currently altering legislation which has allowed campaigners to bring war crimes prosecutions against Israeli politicians and generals. Adam Keller from Gush Shalom told us that he thought opposing and stopping this legislation could make a real difference in terms of saving Palestinian lives.

It is possible that the Palestinians will soon seek recognition for an independent state at the UN, regardless of negotiations with Israel. We should be putting pressure on our government to recognise Palestinian independence.

But solidarity with the Palestinian and Israeli labour movements and left is of course the top priority for us.

I think the AWL’s case against boycotts of Israel — particularly academic, cultural and labour movement boycotts, but boycotts of Israeli goods too — holds. These boycotts will undermine the Israeli left and peace movement, do little to help the Palestinians and shade into anti-semitic campaigns,

even though many Palestinian activists emphatically do not intend them that way.

I think boycotting the settlements is a different issue. The settlements are radically illegitimate in a way that Israel itself is not. We should do everything we can to undermine them. And this is possible — lists of settlement goods are widely available, and there are some very high profile cases such as the Ahava “Dead Sea” beauty products range produced in the West Bank settlement of Mitzpe Shalem.

Of course we should be careful not to play into the hands of the “boycott everything Israeli” lobby, or to think boycotts, rather than positive solidarity, are the most important method of struggle. But that should not stop us having our own independent view of the settlements boycott issue.

- Watch this space (in the new year) for more publish reports of the solidarity delegation and details of solidarity initiatives.

A poster advertising International Women’s Day demonstrations at the offices of the Workers’ Advice Centre, a radical independent trade union that organises Jewish and Arab workers.

Read and hear more...

For more information, reports, interviews etc. see the delegation’s blog ipsol.wordpress.com.

If you’d like to organise a report-back meeting for your town, union branch, university or school, email Heather at centre_stage_red@yahoo.co.uk

Palestinian workers mobilise for their rights

The Democracy and Workers’ Rights Centre, a radical trade-union NGO based in Palestine, reports on Palestinian workers’ recent mobilisation.

In a historical move, 25 Palestinian unions and federations mobilised on 6 December in the public and private sectors to protest against unilateral decisions from the Palestinian government regarding the introduction of amendments to the tax law, the civil service law and the compulsory health insurance law, the proposed optional implementation of the pension law for the private sector, the draft trade union law, the draft strike law for the public sector and local government employees, and the lack of responsiveness of the government to specific union demands.

They demanded that the government engage in effective social dialogue with all the unions that represent workers in the public and private sectors, under the motto: “Partners in building our country, partners in decision making!” The national action day, called for by the unions, was widely followed in the public sector and private sector organisations, with several banks closing their doors around mid-morning, while employees joined the movement.

Sit-ins took place in many West Bank governorates (including Nablus and Hebron), while a central rally was organized in front of the Council of Ministers in Ramallah, during which representatives of several political factions of the Palestinian Legislative Council expressed their support for the unions’ demands and reaffirmed that the gov-

ernment cannot assume legislative power and forgo consultations and discussions with all concerned parties, parliament members foremost.

The proposed tax law amendments would impose taxation on the severance pay of public and private sector, as well as on the pension allowances of retired public sector employees and earnings of small farmers.

Since the beginning of 2010, the Federation of Independent Unions Palestine and its member unions have been campaigning relentlessly for the extension of the pension law — currently benefiting only public sector employees — to all other categories of workers entitled to it (the private and non-governmental sectors, as well as local government workers); the gov-

ernment’s proposed regulation falls short of their expectations, as it would render the pension system optional, while the law confirmed by a presidential decree stipulates that it should be compulsory for all sectors.

Unions are also extremely concerned about the proposed strike law for public sector and local government employees that would place serious restrictions on this right in contravention of the Palestinian Basic Law, as well as international labour standards.

The unions have decided to suspend their actions for a period of one month, to give a chance to establishing a dialogue, following the promise made by President Mahmoud Abbas not to ratify any legislation before constructive discussions could take place.

OCCUPATION

Building for battle in January

BY PATRICK SMITH (HULL AWL AND STUDENT OCCUPIER)

We were discussing taking some kind of radical direct action for a long time before we went into occupation.

We had a democratic meeting on a Saturday, which involved a lot of different groups and forces. We discussed what kind of action we wanted to take and decided to go for an occupation. We thought about some demands we'd like to raise and used the Sunday to make flyers, make banners and build support amongst activists for the idea. On Monday we went into occupation.

We chose this space because it's visible. It's near the student union, so a lot of students walk past it. Staff come into this building for their lunch so we can engage with campus workers as well. We also wanted to cause some disruption to the university; this building is often used by the university to host corporate events, so it's good from that point of view as well.

Some of our initial demands were around control of our occupied space, and some were about demanding that the VC and university management more generally come out against cuts and commit not to pass on any increase in fees.

We've been having general meetings at 5:30pm every day where we plan and

jackets on that demonstration so we're supporting them in that fight too.

Our term is coming to an end soon so we may choose to end the occupation on our own terms. But really this is just about laying the foundations and building support for a bigger fight next year, both in terms of the student movement and wider anti-cuts campaigns. There hasn't been a student occupation at Hull for over 20 years; this is just the beginning.

• **Students have been occupying rooms on the first floor of Staff House. They have succeeded in forcing an emergency general meeting of their Students Union after its Council refused to back them. Their website is: occupiedhull.wordpress.com.**

decide our activity. We recently sent a delegation to support the Connaught workers, and we've been making links with Unison and the FBU. Firefighters in Hull are facing cuts to staffing levels and they organised a recent demonstration which we attended. Some of them are being disciplined for wearing their work

SCHOOL STUDENTS

They shoot children?

BY HARRY SINCLAIR WAUGH

We are told we live in a democracy. We are told that we have freedom of speech and freedom of expression. If that is the case, then there is a lot to be said about a recent event in David Cameron's constituency.

Twelve year old student Nicky Wishart is a peaceful protester who like many young people is unhappy with the current attacks on the working class. He happens to live in Cameron's constituency, and decided to organise a demonstration against the closing of his youth centre in Witney outside Cameron's constituency office.

The protest gained support over Facebook, and had around 130 people planning to attend. However a certain part of the state's machinery didn't like it.

Wishart was told by the police that if the protest went ahead and there was trouble he would be arrested, and that armed police would be there if things "got out of hand".

Yes, you read that correctly, A twelve year old boy was threatened by armed police for planning a peaceful protest with other children. The police did this without informing Wishart's mother and presumed they could get away with it.

I had a similar yet less dramatic experience

with the police in Warwickshire, who called me after seeing my name and number on a Facebook page advertising a walkout on 24 November and told me that if a demonstration outside our MP's office took place then I would be arrested and would be given a criminal record.

The walkout took place and nothing happened.

These are two examples of the police using fear-mongering tactics. It's atrocious, disgusting, and ridiculously undemocratic. The police only exist because there are so many reasons for unrest in Britain and the world today, and they are a scarily powerful part of the machinery of the state.

The website www.inspectorgadget.wordpress.com is a police forum, and some of the things on that website just show us how terrifying some police officers are. One police officer going under the name of Taff Taff posted about the student protests on 9 December: "...could all be solved by a few marksman on roof tops and a few well placed head shots". He continued: "get chainsaws and cut the legs off then. That will slow them down a bit".

He may be joking, but it shows us just how deluded and scary the police are.

We can not let them scare us into doing nothing. We will speak out against the police force as well as the state they defend.

Arts against the cuts

BY RUBEN LOMAS

"The communist revolution is not afraid of art. It realises that the role of the artist in a decadent capitalist society is determined by the conflict between the individual and various social forms which are hostile to him. This fact alone, insofar as he is conscious of it, makes the artist the natural ally of revolution." (André Breton and Leon Trotsky, *Towards a Free Revolutionary Art* 1938)

Among the more innovative direct actions taken during the recent, student-led anti-cuts upsurge have been sit-ins and occupations at significant cultural institutions such as the National Gallery and Tate Britain.

They were there to draw attention to the cuts in arts and culture budgets, the fact that arts and humanities courses at universities will be amongst the worst hit by higher education budget cuts.

For the Tories and their Lib Dem partners, it is not simply basic public services like healthcare and education that one must be abundantly wealthy in order to enjoy at a high quality; art and culture are also off-limits for the worse-off.

Students at the University of the Arts London have been in the forefront of the anti-cuts movement, helping anticipate and catalyse it with one of the first anti-cuts occupations at the London College of Communication way back in late 2009. We print below (abridged) a statement from student activists at the Camberwell College of Art (one of UAL's constituent colleges) which they released when they went into occupation

on 6 December 2010. Their website is <http://artsagainstcuts.wordpress.com>.

Arts benefit us all: the statement of the CCA occupiers

We, the students of Camberwell College of Arts, believe that if the massive cuts proposed for education happen, it is unlikely that academies such as ours will continue to exist. Arts and humanities courses are being targeted with the largest cuts, while still requiring a great deal of funding, which even a rise in fees will not cover. In response, we have decided to occupy the Wilson's Road building at our college.

We see the arts as occupying a vital place within society, one which benefits us all, both culturally and economically. If arts education ceases to be a viable route for students, that benefit will be lost.

An artless society is a heartless society! We oppose the transformation of education into a market. Education should be a forum for all, not just those who can afford it, to learn, experiment and debate.

Therefore, we call for all arts students, especially those from UAL, to join this occupation, and call for more arts-led occupation and actions. We propose to use our space for a practice-led resistance. We will run workshops, performances, debates and experiments, creating a collective space of generative discourse. At no point will we disrupt any fellow student's education, allowing all scheduled lectures to continue. We wish to propose, rather than simply oppose!

Students, class struggle, and socialism: an AWL day school for young activists

26 February 2011 11am-6pm
Highgate Newtown Community Centre, 25 Bertram St, London N19 5DQ
A day of discussion and political education hosted by students and young people in Workers' Liberty.

Discussions, debates and workshops will include:
* How capitalism works, what socialism means * Britain's revolutionary tradition
* Students and workers: how student struggles fit into class politics
* School students get organised * Sexism, racism, homophobia: class politics and fighting oppression * Marxism or anarchism? * Why join a socialist group? Which one? * Activist eye-witnesses from Israel-Palestine * Where now for the student movement? Panel discussion



Tickets £2 unwaged or school/FE students, £3 low-waged or university students, £5 waged. For more information email students@workersliberty.org or ring 07961 040 618

Barricade is a new socialist youth zine launched by members of Workers' Liberty and others. It is predicted entirely on the kind of politics the Daily Mail would describe as "extremist" and was last spotted causing trouble for riot police in Parliament Square. It can be read online at www.workersliberty.org/barricade, but if you love the smell of paper in the morning and want some to read/sell, write to us at barricade@workersliberty.org. You don't have to be a member of Workers' Liberty to support Barricade but a healthy class hatred for the rich is a must.

#1 November 2010 210 where not
barricade
Which side are you on?



STRIKE AGAINST FEES!

Fees rise means a lifetime of debt

BY RUBEN LOMAS

A briefing on the BBC website gives stark figures on the new university fees policy which, if introduced, is set to take effect from September 2012.

They calculate that “a middle-earning graduate would need to earn, for example, an average of £48,850 a year for 26 years to pay off their debt.”

Read that figure again. Ask yourself how many university graduates you know who earn anything like that amount. In a climate in which jobs and wages are also under attack, how many graduates are likely to earn an average of nearly £50,000 a year for nearly 30 years? The government’s plans will literally consign students to a lifetime of debt.

Alongside that, the government plans to abolish the paltry student support that currently exists at Further Education level, scrapping entirely the Education Maintenance Allowance (which, even at its highest rate after means-testing, is only £30 a week).

That cut is a miserly, swingeing attack

on a sum that, while meagre, still represents an important source of income and a modicum of financial independence for working-class further education students.

Currently, a degree “costs” up to £3,290 per year — that is the government-imposed cap on yearly fees. Leeds Metropolitan was the last university to set its own, lower, rate of fees, charging £2,000 a year until 2009 when it increased its fees to bring itself in line with the rest of the higher education sector.

Student finance is administered by the Student Loans Company, set up by the Thatcher government in 1990. It’s last Chief Executive, who resigned in May 2010, was paid nearly £400,000 per year.

As well as loans, some grants are currently available for students that pass a rigorous series of means tests.

The abolition (or, at the very least, the significant increase) of that £3,290 cap has been a long-held ambition of top bosses in the education sector.

As early as 2006 (just two years after tuition fees were initially trebled from

£1,000), figures like Alison Richard (the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge) was calling for the abolition of the cap. The New Labour government hired the former head of BP, Lord Browne, to conduct a review into higher education funding that was widely expected to recommend abolition. By the time the Review reported, Labour were out of office but Browne lived up to the Vice-Chancellors’ expectations and down to ours.

Following Browne’s report, the new government produced its proposals. They tweak some elements of his recommendations but are certainly faithful to his spirit. The key elements of the government’s policy, in brief, are:

- An increase in the fees cap to £9,000. There will be certain requirements around, for example, bursary provision for any university wishing to charge over £6,000. But those requirements do not cover the gap between £6,000 and £9,000. They do not change the basic fact that even if most universities abide by the lower limit (£6,000) the “price” of education is set to double (at least

everywhere.

- The threshold for repayments (currently £15,000) will increase to £21,000. Graduates will pay 9% of any monthly income over this threshold in repayments. The structure exposes the nonsense of posing the graduate tax as an “alternative” to the current system or to the Coalition’s plans; both the current system and the proposed future system are effectively forms of graduate tax.

- The government is changing the existing means-testing structure for grants. These changes will give those from the very poorest backgrounds (with a total household income of less than £25,000) a slightly higher full grant, but the cut-off point for partial grants (to which more students currently apply) is being lowered from £50,000 to £42,000, which will mean fewer students have access to them.

Linked to the proposals of funding are ongoing cuts to teaching budgets of around 80%.

The vote on 9 December was on one aspect of the plan (the lifting of the cap).

Movement needs democratic structures

BY CHRIS MARKS

Hundreds of thousands of students and young people are now coming into political activity. The official student union movement does not know how to respond to the anger and drives towards taking militant action.

Traditionally, local and student union structures have been staffed by people building a career in the Labour Party or simply getting something to write on their CVs. The official movement is weak, but the new political activists need ways to organise if they are to win their demands.

There is great potential to build a broad-based student movement on democratic principles, one which can link up with the anti-cuts and trade union movement. We need to organise. But how?

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) has been at the forefront of the recent mobilisations, and is one organising centre.

During the recent wave of occupations and demonstrations in London, regular London-wide “assemblies” of student activists were held. Those were another organising centre.

Many of the occupations saw themselves as “centres” for action and mobilisation in their local areas.

There are also other student and activist networks — the Education Activist Network (dominated by the SWP), the Youth Fight for Education (Socialist Party front), and the Coalition of Resistance. Unfortunately these activist networks are very competitive, and do a lot of manoeuvring for position.

Whatever positive role they play in individual initiatives, more often than not they are primarily looking for ways to gain prestige and build their own organisation at the expense of others.

This leads to lots of different organisations calling meetings and demonstrations at different times and places. Serious socialists and activists would have responded to the calls for unity NCAFC made many months ago, long before the recent wave of action.

There is also another variety of “sectarianism” in the anarchist movement. This was seen in the Leeds University occupation, where a group of anarchists were so outraged that the occupiers wanted to vote on some proposals that they left the occupation. They put their own dogmatic principles before what a majority perceived to be the needs of a collective body.

In the last few years, it has become fashionable for anarchists to reject normal democratic process, like voting, believing it creates bureaucratic elites. Some anarchists and other activists prefer to use consensus-decision making and tend to scupper attempts to organise steering committees in favour of looser federal arrangements.

Trying to reach a consensus is not a bad idea. But it is not always possible when discussing contentious political issues. To insist on consensus can be stalling and paralyzing.

Looser structures often just mean that the people who shout the loudest get their way.

A lack of democratic accountability leads to once-democratic structures become bureaucratized (for instance in the trade unions). But voting and delegating responsibility are not in themselves to blame. More democracy, not less democracy is the way to beat the bureaucrats.

The “tyranny of structurelessness” (as it was called in a famous pamphlet of the 1970s) can be utilised by those with malign intentions — as seems to have happened in connection to 20 December, the date on which a mysterious “UK People’s Initiative” has called a student demo in central London. The organisers, who refuse to answer questions about who they are, initially used the NCAFC logo for their protest. There is some evidence they may be linked to the far right.

The NCAFC has repudiated the event and urged people not to go.

The AWL believes that we must avoid all varieties of sectarianism and help the growing student movement find its collective voice.

There needs to be better co-ordination

between all different groups and organising centres.

Working in the NCAFC, the AWL will argue that the campaign be opened out so that organisations and individuals can affiliate and join, and have a proper stake in shaping the campaign. Affiliation and membership comes with democratic rights and responsibilities. We do not want union bodies, if they affiliate, to be simply a cash cow for the campaign. We want those bodies to mobilise their members to be a part of the NCAFC.

This kind of organisation, linking up activists, giving them a recognised and definite say in how the movement develops, is better able to grow and thus better able to sideline right-wing student union officials as well as better able to

fight the government.

We should also fight for the open, democratic structures which have grown up around occupations and campus anti-cuts campaigns to fight to replace or open up the closed-off, bureaucratic one which characterise most student unions — structures which exclude the majority of students from any real involvement or say.

Replacing essentially self-selected union councils with regular general meetings is one essential component of this. The anti-cuts movement has shown that such meetings can mobilise large numbers of students if they are dynamic and organise around the crucial issues of the struggle.

• *The tyranny of structurelessness:* www.workersliberty.org/jof

SWP pushes sham “Assembly”

BY DANIEL RANDALL

A recent series of meetings in London, coming from the “London Student Assembly” initiative that emerged some months ago as an attempt to coordinate action in the capital, have highlighted the fundamental importance of democracy in the movement.

While general assemblies are undoubtedly a democratic way of coordinating a movement and something to aspire to, there are increasing question marks over whether the process in London can legitimately claim to be the movement’s sovereign body or even democratic.

One recent meeting, at the London School of Economics on 10 December, was made up overwhelmingly of London-based members of the SWP (including a large proportion of non-student SWPers) and chaired by an SWPer. It was clear that the purpose of the meeting was to give a veneer of democratic legitimacy to the SWP’s plans for the future of the movement — which, as it turned out, was to organise

a “national assembly” in January which they could control. Quite how a meeting of almost exclusively London-based activists, the majority of whom were SWPers, can claim to have the right to call “national assemblies” (not even national student assemblies, but a “national assembly” for the whole anti-cuts movement!) is beyond many.

Those who attended the Education Activist Network conference in January 2010 know very well what kind of character any “assembly” controlled by the SWP will have; it will be top-down, packed by speakers hand-picked by the SWP. If it allows motions or contributions from the floor, it will be manipulated to ensure nothing disagreeable to the SWP is passed.

The debate for democrats in the movement now is around whether to accept the SWP-controlled “assembly” as an inevitability which we must intervene in and attempt to improve, or to argue that it has no legitimacy whatsoever and cannot claim to be the sovereign body of the movement. AWL members within the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts are inclined towards the latter approach.

SWP SLOGANS

“General strike” or general nonsense?

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

A favourite theme of those who trade in lampooning the left is to reduce our ideas to mindless sloganeering. These scribblers conjure some ridiculous caricature and then knock it down with ease.

The influence of these exercises is such that some people turn out on demonstrations with their own home-made placards, daubed with semi-ironic slogans like “down with this sort of thing” or “I’m really angry”. Unfortunately, these creative individuals are consistently swamped by equally ridiculous but apparently earnest placards and leaflets.

The SWP is now demanding the TUC call a general strike.

They think this call “fits the mood”. No-one in the SWP makes any serious argument that is feasible; suggests any practical moves towards achieving it; or even contests the obvious objection that if TUC general secretary Brendan Barber did suddenly have a rush of blood to the head, and made an off-the-cuff call for a general strike, then in current conditions it would flop in a way that would harm the movement rather than helping it.

For the SWP, if a slogan “fits the mood” and can get attention (thus allowing it to recruit more people to its ranks), that is enough.

There are times when the call for a general strike means calling for a big (and maybe, in cold estimate, unlikely) leap in struggle, but a leap which is based on real elements in the logic of already-existing class struggle, and which would take the movement forward.

Thus, the forerunners of the AWL fought for the labour movement to organise for a general strike in the early years of the Thatcher government, around 1980, when the unions were still relatively confident and strong. We called for a general strike to extend the 1984-5 miners’ strike into an across-the-board working-class mobilisation which could have defeated Thatcher and prevented the crushing of working-class organisation and rights that came in the four or five years after the miners’ defeat.

At that time, the “mood” the SWP was trying to tap

into was one of defeatism. They told activists we were in a “downturn”, that any broad labour-movement ventures were doomed, and they should instead focus on “building the revolutionary party” in abstraction (and there was a market for that line).

In the opening months of the miners’ strike the SWP repeatedly said the dispute was brave but doomed, “an extreme example of the downturn.” Worse, for many months they dismissed working-class strike solidarity as “left-wing Oxfam.” Even when they eased off on that, they still dismissed general strike calls as “abstract.”

On the other hand, when last-ditch and ultimately too-weak-to-win demonstrations were called against the closure of most of the remaining pits in 1992, the SWP made call after call for a general strike.

After almost twenty years of silence on the issue, the SWP is now demanding that the TUC call a general strike against cuts. They were wrong not to make the call in 1984, they were wrong to do it in 1992 and they are wrong again now! The emptiness of the slogan is evidenced by the fact of how little the SWP has done to actually fight for the demand in the labour movement. They are not short of members who sit on various union NECs; none of them have made serious attempts to submit policy on the issue.

The background “theory” to the SWP’s call for a general strike also influences their other calls and would-be propaganda.

Take for example their call to “kettle” Parliament on the day of the tuition fees vote, and so to “bring the government down”. Regardless of whether or not it was at all feasible to kettle Parliament, and of whether the SWP ever seriously tried to do it, what happens after we bring the government down? The SWP’s leaflet didn’t provide any answers. Presumably the implied alternative is a Labour government. But does the SWP campaign politically through the labour movement to enforce any demand on Labour? No.

Every socialist would like there to be a general strike, and a growing number of workers — if not the overwhelming majority — would like this government to fall. Neither of these things will happen just by filling Millbank and Parliament Square with thousands of people. None of the obvious questions will be

How indeed? And who do we replace them with?

answered by sub-anarchistic silence on political questions.

A general strike can only be organised and should only seriously be proposed within the context of a sharp, developing and militant phase of industrial action.

To make a call for the TUC to stage a general strike at a time when even the most industrially militant unions call very limited strikes is to ignore all facts and say things for the sake of sounding militant. That is childish, idiotic and, if the SWP had any real, political-shaping influence in the movement, irresponsible.

Miseducating people with the idea that lively and angry demonstrations can bring down a government, at the same time as conspicuously avoiding the question of what might happen next, displays shallow political understanding. But perhaps the SWP “dumb down” their slogans because they have political contempt for their audience; all “the masses” deserve and need are contentless, militant-sounding slogans.

NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS NETWORK

Will the Socialist Party use NSSN as an “anti-cuts” election front?

National Shop Stewards Network committee members have objected to moves by the Socialist Party towards presenting the NSSN as the sole coordination of the anti-cuts battle, and maybe as an electoral vehicle.

We publish their statement (slightly abridged). For our part we support all the conferences and positive initiatives taken by NSSN, Coalition of Resistance, or Right to Work. If the anti-cuts movement is to grow and develop the frantic competition between different “fronts” has to stop and be replaced by realistic cooperation.

At the Steering Committee of the National Shop Stewards’ Network (NSSN) meeting on Saturday 4 December, the majority in the meeting, who were Socialist Party (SP) members, voted through a series of decisions despite the opposition of absolutely everyone else, of various political affiliations and none.

The meeting decided to propose that the anti-cuts conference being organised by the NSSN on 22 January should set up an “NSSN All-Britain Anti-Cuts campaign” and the election of a committee at the conference, which would be separate from the existing NSSN structures.

As supporters of the NSSN, we are aware that the NSSN and its supporters are already working, locally, regionally and nationally in opposition to the government’s attacks on our public services and jobs. The

NSSN has an immense task in helping to build for effective action which can begin to beat back these attacks, although it is noteworthy that the original proposal put forward by the Socialist Party omitted any mention of the NSSN working to organise industrial action against the public sector attacks.

However, to agree that the NSSN has an important contribution to make to the anti-cuts movement is a long way from agreeing to the need for it to launch yet another national anti-cuts campaign. At a time when there is pressure for anti-cuts campaigns to work together — witness the protocol agreed between the Coalition Of Resistance and the Right To Work campaign; the forum on 5 December organised by Right To Work on working together; and the pending meeting called by the Trade Union Coordinating Group on 14 December — the creation of yet another group can only be seen as counterproductive. That the NSSN participated in the forum on 5 December and intend to take part in the meeting on 14 December stands in stark contrast to this move.

Attempts by non-SP officers of the Network to remove the most contentious aspects in advance of the Steering Committee meeting were unsuccessful. The proposals were the subject of a lengthy heated debate. Attempts to delete contentious parts of these proposals were defeated by the SP majority, with no wider support. Attempts to make positive proposals to work constructively with other anti-cuts organisations were

defeated in the same way.

The only real progress was the removal of a proposal that the NSSN should support anti-cuts candidates in local elections in May, a proposal which would have immediately wrecked the non-party and cross-party nature of the NSSN.

Launching a further national anti-cuts campaign, while obstructing cooperation with other organisations, would be a retrograde step, as well as changing the nature and direction of the NSSN. If the NSSN becomes controlled by one political party which is unwilling to work constructively with any other shop stewards in the network, we would see no point in further participation...

We therefore urge the Socialist Party to pull back.

Dave Chapple, NSSN Chair, adds: “... Please discuss [this statement] at your trade union branch or other union meetings. We need messages of support for this statement, but would also welcome questions and comments, sent to the address below. NSSN Officers and steering committee members listed are willing to attend trade union meetings to put our case, so please consider inviting us.”

Dave Chapple, CWU, Chair, NSSN Steering Committee; davechapple@btinternet.com

- Full statement and signatories: www.workersliberty.org/node/15643
- RTW, COR, NSSN: fight for anti-cuts unity www.workersliberty.org/node/15208

WIKILEAKS

Governments caught out in their lies

The contents: banal, insane and abhorrent

BY DAN RAWNSLEY

In 1917, after the October revolution, the Bolsheviks immediately published all the secret treaties of both the Tsarist government and the unelected provisional government of the February revolution.

In the 1972-4 the Watergate scandal, exposing US government dirty tricks against political opponents, led to the resignation of US President Richard Nixon and hugely and permanently increased popular mistrust of government in the USA.

Contemporary journalist and malcontent Hunter S Thompson summarised Nixon as a man who was "criminally insane, and also President of the United States". It's anyone's guess how rational world leaders are these days.

The recent torrent of US embassy cables released by online whistleblower Wikileaks has revealed the manipulating and lying ways of bourgeois governments across the world. The great outcry from many governments is that the leaks put government agents in danger and sabotaged diplomacy, but in fact the major effect has been to embarrass. The leaks are set to continue well in to the new year.

Defend Assange, but for the right reasons!

It appears likely that the attempt to extradite Assange is a politically motivated attack. It is right to defend Wikileaks and Assange from this right-wing attack. It is right because attacks against government secrets form a part of our fight for working-class democracy.

But some defences of Assange have ranged from the problematic to the abhorrent. Without adequate facts, some have rushed to attack the two women bringing the charges against Assange.

Naomi Wolf, an American liberal feminist has accused "the alleged victims" of "using feminist-inspired rhetoric and law to assuage what appears to be personal injured feelings".

Two blogs, Raw Story and Counterpunch, have speculated that one of Assange's accusers is a CIA agent or has links with the CIA. Is this possible? Certainly. But as yet there is no real evidence to support it.

There are two clear and separate issues at play in the trial of Julian Assange. On the one hand is the political attack against Wikileaks and on the other is the allegation of sexual molestation against Julian Assange. The muddling of these two issues has led Naomi Wolf to trivialise sexual violence against women and caused Raw Story and Counterpunch to veer into charges without evidence.

Those who wish to defend Assange would be better served by campaigning for his trial to focus on the facts of the charges brought against him rather than on his political activities, and not muddle things counter-productively.

The governments have responded by trying to trip up Wikileaks founder Julian Assange.

Assange walked in to a police station in London on 7 December to be arrested on charges of rape and sexual molestation brought by the Swedish authorities, and is currently fighting extradition.

Is there substance to the charges? We don't know. Assange may well be a deeply unpleasant person. He is reported as saying to a co-worker on the Wikileaks project: "I am the heart and soul of this organisation, its founder, philosopher, spokesperson, original coder, organiser, financier and all the rest... If you have a problem with me, piss off." (*Guardian*, 8 December 2010).

It is reasonable that Assange face trial for any charges brought against him in as fair a court as bourgeois justice will allow.

But the details surrounding the Assange man-hunt are pretty odd. Sweden issued an international arrest warrant via Interpol, and an EU arrest warrant was also issued. There were 3,159 acts of rape in London alone in the past 12 months, none of have prompted a response of equal magnitude.

The charges look like, not the Swedish government spearheading a crack-down on rape in Europe, but an opportunist and political attack on someone who has annoyed all established governments.

Both Visa and Mastercard have prevented their cards from being used to donate money to Wikileaks via Paypal — though people can still use Visa cards to donate money to the BNP or the Ku Klux Klan. The finance arm of the Swiss postal service and Paypal have cut off Wikileaks accounts. Amazon and EveryDNS have removed Wikileaks from their servers. (Amazon has claimed this was not in response to government pressure).

Mike Huckabee, former candidate for the Republican nomination for the US presidency, is rousing the American right to a flurry of "my-country-'tis-of-thee" rage, declaring that "whoever in our government leaked that information is guilty of treason, and I think anything less than execution is too kind a penalty."

In response, a surge of hacktivism, largely by a loose network calling themselves "Anonymous", partially paralysed Mastercard's website, through a series of DDOS (distributed denial of service) attacks under the banner 'Operation: Payback'.

There were also street demonstrations on 10-12 December in Australia, under the slogan "Defend Wikileaks".

The story highlights the rise of internet activism. Twitter is said to have played a role in the demonstrations against Ahmadinejad's government last year after the rigged Iranian elections (and the rigging of has been verified by the recently leaked embassy cables.)

Some enthusiasts of an "online revolution" forget that electronic activism in Iran shook the regime not "by itself" but only by helping organise people to be out on the streets in great numbers.

As socialists, we have to learn to adapt to new technology and find the best possible ways to use the technology to help build real (and not just "virtual") action.

What do we know now that we didn't know before 28 November when the leaking began?

In July 2009, French officials feared that Gordan Brown had "decided disarmament will be his legacy, and the UK has moved from talking about disarmament as a political sop to gain parliamentary support for renewing its Trident force, to embracing disarmament as an end in itself".

There were "press reports about HMG plans to defer Trident replacement design work, but US diplomats reassured their government that these reports "came as news" to FCO and MOD officers charged with following Trident". Ignore the press, they said; the government remained committed to Trident and "there has been no change to the timetable."

The US is reported to keep a good relationship with Uzbeki Prime Minister Islam Karimov in order to ensure the protection of a supply line in to Afghanistan. In the meantime Karimov's daughter, and possible successor, Gulnara, is described as "the most hated person in the country", seen as a "robber baron" who has accrued a share in almost every lucrative business in central Asia and in her spare time flatters herself with a manufactured career as a pop star.

The leaks show that the Vatican, a small patch of land that remains the little kingdom of an Italian prince, still has political weight. The US government noted the Vatican's anger that "the Irish government failed to respect and protect Vatican sovereignty" during investigations into child abuse by Irish priests, and effective Vatican lobbying at the UN. "The Vatican observer mission lobbied actively... especially on the Defamation of Religions resolution."

Some pieces of leaked information are truly banal. We have discovered that US ambassadors find Angela Merkel to be boring; she is, according to one cable "risk averse and rarely creative".

We also learned that Prince Philip dislikes journalists and the French, and hunts in Morocco and Tanzania with King Abdullah II of Jordan and United Arab Emirates Armed Forces Chief of Staff Muhammad bin Zayid Al-Nahyan.

Vladimir Putin is regarded as an "alpha-dog" by diplomats, who say that "when the conversation shifts to Chechnya or Islamic extremism, Putin's eyes turn to those of a killer."

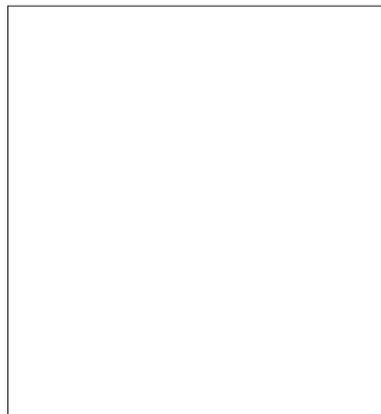
Nicolas Sarkozy is a domineering figure who "rewards party leaders prepared to adopt his policies and marginalises any opponents with a diverse view". He inspires fear and submission in his staff. "Elysee contacts have reported... the great lengths they will go to avoid disagreeing with him or provoking his displeasure — even recently reportedly re-routing the President's plane to avoid his seeing the Eiffel Tower lit up in Turkey's colours on the visit of PM Erdogan."

Did we know, before the leaks, that the world is run by a scheming gang of liars who are constantly looking over their shoulders, deeply mistrustful of one another? Anyone who didn't certainly does now.



London Underground dispute heats up

Defend our union!



BY DARREN BEDFORD

As the battle over jobs continues, RMT members on London Underground are preparing to take action to defend two union reps from victimisation.

Bakerloo line health and safety rep Eamonn Lynch was initially dismissed after he followed an instruction from the line control centre which turned out to be erroneous. A driver who made a similar "mistake" a year ago on the Piccadilly Line was given a warning rather than the sack. Management are attempting to victimise a well-respected union rep in the midst of an increasingly bitter dispute and, by attacking drivers' reps, could be attempting to weaken one of the stronger groups of workers.

The union was able to win "interim relief" (essentially full pay) for Eamonn at an Employment Tribunal — something which, according to the RMT, is only ever granted where "there is the clearest possible evidence that an employee has been dismissed on the grounds of their trade union activities." But despite that outcome, London Underground management has upheld Eamonn's sacking.

Their actions expose the paper-thin and class-biased nature of the whole tribunal process, which is unfortunately all-too-often relied upon by many unions as the sole way to deal with cases of bully-

ing and victimisations.

By contrast, the RMT has a good record of collectivising issues of individual victimisations and bullying. As the RMT's Bakerloo branch newsletter proclaims, "this strike is not just about Eamonn Lynch — it's about you!" An industrial action ballot was organised and returned with 95% in favour of strike action and industrial action short of a strike. RMT members at both Elephant and Castle and Queens Park traincrew depots (both ends of the Bakerloo line) take strike action that starts with the night shifts on Friday 17 and continues all day Saturday 18 December.

Arwyn Thomas, another victimised activist, based at the Morden depot, is facing disciplinary charges for allegations made against him by a strike-breaking manager. The union has reviewed CCTV footage which clearly show Arwyn walking calmly away from two attempts by managers to provoke him into an argument. RMT members at Morden traincrew depot will be taking strike action during the same period as members on the Bakerloo line.

Activists on both the Northern and Bakerloo lines had initially planned a 48-hour strike on the Friday and Saturday, and it is unfortunate that the union has gone for 24-hour action instead. Experience tells us that management can usually cope with 24-hour strikes, but would struggle to cope with longer ones.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said "By announcing these two dates for action we are sending out a signal that LU will not be allowed to get away with picking off our activists. Instead of harassing our members and activists on trumped up charges, the London Underground management should be directing their energies into reaching a settlement to the on-going disputes over tube safety and safe staffing levels."

The jobs dispute is one that needs to be escalated if it is to win. The RMT has suspended the overtime ban on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. It does not want to take action that will hit the working-class travelling public as much — if not more — as it will hit LU bosses' profits. But whatever the rights and wrongs of that decision, it has become increasingly clear that sporadic 24-hour actions are not enough to force concessions from management.

Continued on page 4

London Transport Region place on RMT Exec: vote Janine Booth!

*** solidarity and socialism * no cuts * an all-grades, industrial union * for a rank-and-file voice on the Executive**
RMT members: get your ballot papers returned by Xmas!

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