

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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**DEMOCRACY
MEANS
THE RIGHT
TO STRIKE**

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Midnight raid on uni protest

By Ed Maltby

On 9 May university management at London Metropolitan used police and private security to evict a peaceful occupation of the Holloway Road Graduate centre.

Students at London Met's North Campus staged the occupation in protest against planned cuts of 400 courses and

several student support schemes. London Met provides courses and support to working-class students who otherwise would find it difficult to access higher education.

These cuts will transform the college into, in VC Malcolm Gillies's words, a "lean", "tightly-organised", "competitive" institution. Gillies plans to outsource services and market London Met as a

cut-price, business-oriented institution.

Eshe, a first-year performing arts student, said: "Not only did management have tens of security guards and five police officers, but they acted really aggressively. They told us we had ten minutes to leave the occupation. It was like bloodhounds with a fox. They didn't give anyone time to read the injunction. It was really bad, bullying tactics. They scared the occupiers out with sheer force, 'pick up your stuff and go go go' kind of thing."

The use of police in a midnight eviction is a serious escalation in management bullying tactics. Most university evictions in recent years have been resolved without the involvement of the police. Other Vice Chancellors might now be tempted to use such tactics. The student movement must denounce this attack.

Eshe added, "It's not over until the fat lady sings. People are thinking about trying to occupy something else or bring

more pressure to bear. We've got a tip-off about the location of the VC today, so we're going to rally round and sing him a song."

Max Watson, secretary of London Met Unison branch, told *Solidarity*, "A midnight raid is a scandal and should be exposed as such. The students are defending their education and they have shown the way forward: we have to take decisive action now to stop the cuts. The education support staff and students are united: we will not stand for this. We are London Met not 'EasyMet'. We will not become a no-frills university. We pledge to resist with every weapon we have.

"We're already in dispute over job cuts and failure to avoid compulsory redundancies. We're working on a timeline for a strike. It'll be as soon as possible."

• The students will lobby the Board of Governors on 11 May calling for the resignation of Malcolm Gillies.

The knock on the door

By Pdraig O'Brien

At around 9am on 10 May two plainclothes police officers turned up at University College of London (UCL) Astor halls of residence in Bloomsbury and arrested two known UCL student activists.

As far as UCL anti-cuts activists know at the time of going to press, they have not been charged and as of 3pm (10 May) they are still in custody.

UCL student union office Michael Chessum said: "This shows a clear escalation in the police's tactics, and it is being used in order to intimidate known student activists. It is clearly political policing."

The Bloomsbury Fightback group will shortly announce a protest against the police action. Details: www.anticuts.com

Extra university places for the rich?

By Sacha Ismail

Having floated the idea of universities creating a separate admissions system for those who pay above the £9,000 cap on tuition fees, the government has quickly backtracked.

Universities minister David Willetts had suggested that institutions could recruit more British students by offering extra places to those who pay full-cost fees of up to £28,000. He claimed that the extra income would free up more places for students for poor backgrounds.

In Australia, those who pay their tuition fees upfront are offered a lower grade for entrance to university than those who have to take a loan to pay them. That is evidently the direction the Tories wanted — want — to move in.

But within 24 hours, stung by the obvious charge that, at a time when it is cutting 10,000 university places, the government was talking about a special, much shorter queue for the children of the rich, Willetts has retreated. Coalition spokespeople now say that only companies and charities will be able to access extra, higher fee places, not individuals.

This is still highly objectionable. It is part of the

government's drive to encourage corporate sponsorship of university places. The accountancy corporation KPMG has just unveiled a plan to pay fees for a set of accounting students at universities including Durham.

In any case, the idea that any of this will help most students is the same logic which says that private schools, private healthcare, voluntary sector provision of public services and so on will free up public services for the rest of us. In fact they are moves to trash public services.

We need to rearm the student and workers' movements to fight all fees, and for decent public funding for universities. Killing off Willetts' outrageous plans is a necessary start to that fightback.

Sacked for eating

By a healthworker

At our staff meeting last month, our ward manager warned us that Trust management are taking a zero tolerance approach to the heinous crime of... eating leftover patient food.

We were informed that two members of nursing staff have already been sacked and we could expect management spies to jump out from the shadows at any moment.

No-one in the NHS is particularly proud of eating of leftover patient food. However, on some shifts it is the only way to grab a quick bite to eat.

As a recent survey in the *Nursing Times* shows, 95% of nurses regularly work in excess of their contracted

hours with 22% doing so on every shift. Just under 40% said they work through their meal time at least three times a week and only 32% are able to get a drink of water when they need it.

This recent crackdown must be seen in light of the RCN's investigation that revealed Trusts are planning to cut nursing staff by 12% by 2015. Management are looking for ways to sack staff on trumped up charges so they can limit the number of costly redundancy payouts.

In my Trust, catching a few overworked, undernourished nurses scoffing down a plate of overcooked hospital gruel is seen as a legitimate way to make "efficiency savings".

Reinvigorating the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts

Birmingham University, 12-5pm, Saturday 4 June

The student anti-cuts groups at Royal Holloway, Birmingham and Hull universities, and the student anti-cuts network in Merseyside, have called a conference on 4 June to revive and develop the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

You can read their statement on the NCAFC website, www.anticuts.com.

Accommodation will be provided and there will be a pool fare. For more information ring Royal Holloway SU president-elect Daniel Cooper 07840 136 278 or email dancooper13@hotmail.com.

Facebook: "NCAFC Reinvigoration Conference"

Why the Tory vote held up

By Chris Reynolds

The Lib Dems lost heavily in the local government elections on 5 May, but the Tory vote held up.

The Tories gained 86 new council seats in England compared to last time these seats were contested — which was in 2007, when the Labour government was very unpopular. They control 19 more councils than they did before 5 May.

The Tory percentage of the vote was the same as in 2010. The Tories have lost no share of the vote since the general election, despite introducing huge and very unpopular cuts.

In mid-2009 George Osborne, then shadow chancellor, calculatingly leaked to the press the opinion that “After three months in power we [the Tories] will be the most unpopular government since the war”. He was trying to brace his party in advance for what history indicated as probable.

Margaret Thatcher’s

government, even though it would go on to win the 1983 and 1987 elections, was hugely unpopular a year after taking office. And it was, at that point, much slower and more cautious about its cuts and privatisations than Cameron is. And it faced a Labour Party deeply discredited by very harsh cuts in 1977-9. This time, more by luck than by judgement, Labour increased social spending seriously and made fairly few cuts before leaving office.

The Labour leaders’ opposition to the Tory cuts can rally a limited constituency; but it is so much more weak and mumbling than even in 1980 that it has no power to grip and win over the perplexed, the deferential, or the dispirited, the people who think that big cuts may be “necessary”.

The Blair-Brown regime shifted general public opinion to the right — more so, in fact, than Thatcher did. That shift could quickly be reversed given a sizeable force in the working class which

Osborne and Cameron

will seize on the vast disquiet with capitalism created by the 2008 crash and point it forwards.

Yet Ed Miliband seems to have decided that with his speech at the October 2010 Labour Party conference disavowing New Labour he used up his quota of even vaguely left-wing talk for the year. Since then he has been on the run from the Blairites.

Ed Balls, now Shadow Chancellor, was relatively pugnacious against the cuts when running for the

Labour leadership. Now he only offers snide jibes about George Osborne being “out of his depth”.

The Labour leaders have let the Tories appear to the confused and unsure as the people who may be nasty, but are straightforward about the plight of capitalism and ready to do something to fix it.

Miliband and Balls move under pressure. They have been under heavy pressure from the diehard Blairites in the Labour Party, who have recovered their confidence since October 2010. They have been under almost no pressure from the Labour left, or from the Labour-affiliated union leaders, almost all of whom, on paper and in formal policies, should figure as “left”

jail sentence? Answer: No. So a jail sentence for carrying a knife is not going to be mandatory after all? Well, errrr...

Labour also attacked the SNP for its policy of scrapping short prison sentences. Indistinguishable from a true-blue Tory, Labour promised that jail would mean jail.

Labour’s election commitment was that it would not only send more people to jail but also that it would send people to jail for longer.

Those responsible for Labour’s debacle must now be called to account by the party membership and its trade union affiliates. We need a special recall Labour Party conference in the autumn, open to delegations from CLPs, affiliated unions and affiliated societies. It should be a conference, not a rally, and debate motions.

The left in the Party — the Labour Representation Committee — should run its own election-analysis meetings in the major Scottish cities, circulating its own analysis of the reasons for Labour’s defeat, and selecting a candidate who will run for party leader in Scotland on the basis of socialist policies.

in the current Labour Party spectrum. Instead, the union leaders have adapted to the pressure to be cautious and “realistic” exerted by the diehard Blairites and transmitted through Miliband.

Then, in turn, those leaders have been under very little pressure, on the political issues, from left caucuses in their unions, or the union membership more broadly. On the contrary, the leaders have weighed down on the left caucuses and the members.

Beginning from the local anti-cuts committees, and the very significant minority of workers who already are up for a fight, activists can make those political gears and levers work in reverse.

Meanwhile, we should face facts about where we are. Things can change quickly. In action, confidence can grow fast. But at present we are on the back foot.

Demagogic appeals to the TUC to call a general strike are just escapism.

- “Blair’s children”: www.workersliberty.org/blairchild
- The Labour Party has put out a new “consultation document” on “Re-founding Labour”. For comment and suggested responses, bit.ly/scstf.

Unions must stamp on Lib-Lab talk

By Colin Foster

Labour did poorly — in the circumstances — on 5 May, because its political message, against cuts “too far and too fast”, was weak and mumbling.

Labour leader Ed Miliband’s response has been to shift into even more weak and mumbling mode.

He has upped his calls for Lib Dem MPs to “come and work with us. My door is always open”.

Obviously Miliband does not expect the Lib Dems suddenly to break their coalition with the Tories and go for a coalition government with Labour (which would, apart from anything else, not even have a majority in Parliament).

The cunning scheme here is for a Lib-Dem/Labour coalition after a general election in 2015. It means:

- Tying Labour’s future politics to what the Lib Dems, the champions of “progressive cuts”, will accept.

- Signalling that Labour’s opposition to cuts is no more than a spelled-out version of the reservations and quibbles which Lib-Dem ministers express about their own coalition’s programme, and that Labour has nothing much distinct to say for itself.

- Signalling that Labour has already inwardly accepted that it won’t win the next general election.

- Signalling that Labour works on the assumption that the coalition government will run its full course, to 2015.

Miliband’s drift is bad enough. Worse is the fact that none of the big Labour-affiliated unions have criticised him on this, or even said a word to demand that Labour campaign strongly against cuts.

TUSC shrivels

By Rhodri Evans

The three left-of-Labour sitting councillors up for election on 5 May all lost.

The SWP’s Michael Lavalette was defeated in Preston after eight years on the council; and Ray Holmes, also an SWP member, in Bolsover after four years. In Walsall Pete Smith of the Democratic Labour Party (a local group which was part of the Socialist Alliance) lost the seat he had held since 2007.

The Socialist Party’s Rob Windsor, in Coventry, failed to win back the place on the council which he held in 2000-4 and 2006-10. Jackie Grunsell, a Socialist Party member elected to Kirklees council as “Save Huddersfield NHS” in 2006-10, failed by a large distance to win re-election there.

The “Trade Union and Socialist Coalition” (TUSC), a group set up for the 2010 general election essentially by the Socialist Party (but with the SWP also dipping a toe into it), ran 143 council candidates across the country. 26 other candidates had some sort of link with TUSC but ran under other labels.

Aside from the candidates who’d previously held council seats, nine other TUSC candidates did respectably (10% or more), but the median score was under 3%.

The candidacies were run essentially as “anti-cuts”, not as hardline revolutionary socialist propaganda exercises. Candidacies cannot be judged successful if the political demonstration they make is only that very unpopular cuts are opposed... by 3% of the voters.

The poor results cannot be put down to an unexpectedly vigorous Labour campaign. Far from it. TUSC has shrivelled to a lacklustre SP “front” which even strongly anti-cuts voters see as a sideline.

The SP itself showed its lack of confidence in TUSC by running its candidates in Coventry, its strongest area, not as TUSC but as “Socialist Alternative”.

Our health service not for sale —

March to save the NHS

Tuesday 17 May, 5.30pm

Assemble: UCH, Gower Street, WC1

(Euston/Euston Sq/Warren St tube) for march to Whitehall

SNP out-labours Labour

By Anne Field

On 5 May the Scottish National Party increased its share of the popular vote by 13%, increased the number of constituency seats it held by 32, and won an absolute majority of 69 seats in the 129-seat Holyrood Parliament.

Labour’s share of the constituency vote (31.7%) was the lowest since 1923. Its share of the list vote (26.3%) was its lowest since 1918. It lost 20 constituency seats, leaving it with MSPs in just 15 out of 73 constituencies.

In Scotland, Labour could not coast to gains on a vague political platform about deploring Tory cuts (as too harsh and too fast) and promising to minimise their impact — because the SNP had already claimed that political space, and with much more vigour and credibility.

The SNP fought the election campaign on the basis of its record in Holyrood: ending prescription charges, freezing the council tax, scrapping tuition fees, scrapping bridge tolls, ending council house sales, and preserving free personal care for the elderly.

When Scottish Labour Party leader Iain Gray was

filmed about a fortnight before election day running away from half a dozen anti-cuts protesters, first taking refuge in a fast-food take-away, and then being bundled by his minders into a taxi (destination unknown), the Labour campaign was probably already dead in the water.

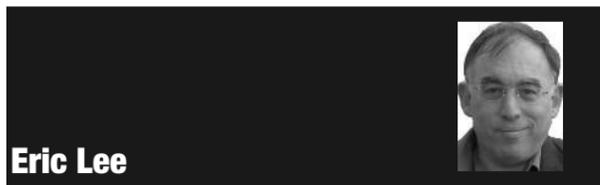
At the last minute, in desperation, Labour relaunched its campaign, switching from anti-Toryism to attacking the SNP for its support for an independent Scotland. Polling carried out over the last days of the election campaigning showed that as many as 80,000 Labour voters switched at that time to voting SNP.

Unwilling to try to compete with the SNP seriously on “old Labour” issues, Labour resorted to catchpenny populism.

Labour promised a mandatory prison sentence for anyone caught carrying a knife — as if social problems could be resolved simply by sending more and more young people to jail.

In any case, the policy fell apart in a “Newsnight Scotland” interview. Would a woman who had used a knife to defend herself from domestic violence and had then run into the street still carrying it automatically receive a

Don't follow leaders: Bob Dylan in China and Vietnam



Eric Lee

Bob Dylan recently performed in China and Vietnam for the very first time, prompting critics to denounce him for "selling out" — and not for the first time.

New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd led the charge. In a recent column she denounced the singer, ending with these powerful lines:

Maybe the songwriter should reread some of his own lyrics: "I think you will find/When your death takes its toll/All the money you made/Will never buy back your soul."

Strong stuff indeed.

But of course Bob Dylan wasn't writing those lines about "protest singers" who had betrayed their values.

He wrote them about the arms industry, the merchants of death who profit from the world's wars, in his song "Masters of War."

I doubt if anyone seriously believes that Dylan is somehow the moral equivalent of mass killers.

And did any of the critics bother to check what songs Dylan did choose to perform — songs that he admittedly submitted to censorship by the Communist regimes?

The second song on his Beijing set was "It's all over now, baby blue" — widely understood as an anti-Vietnam war song. The tenth was the powerful anti-nuclear war song "A hard rain's a gonna fall". The set ended with other 1960s-era classics including "Ballad of a Thin Man" with the famous refrain,

Because something is happening here

But you don't know what it is

Do you, Mister Jones?

This is certainly true of the critics who single out one or

two Dylan songs from his early years that were not performed.

"The times they are a-changin'" is given as an example of the kind of song Dylan would have sung — if he'd had any courage.

But has anyone listened to that song since it was first recorded nearly a half century ago? It's not about fomenting a popular uprising in a totalitarian country like China. It is full of specifically American content, such as a call on Senators and Congressmen to heed the voices of protest.

To an audience living in a completely unfree society with no free press, elections or parliament, such a song might have little impact.

But the more complex, poetic language of songs like "A hard rain's a gonna fall" might well resonate. The last stanza of that song contains a powerful celebration of dissent and protest:

I'll tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it

And reflect it from the mountain so all souls can see it

Then I'll stand on the ocean until I start sinkin'

But I'll know my song well before I start singin'

To understand why some critics have got it completely wrong you don't really need to know Dylan's biography. He was never really all that political, as his friends and colleagues have pointed out. He never wanted to be — and probably never really was — the voice of a generation.

But even if you knew nothing at all about him but his songs, you'd understand the problem with the critics.

Dylan's lyrics are often deeply subversive, even when they don't seem to be about politics at all.

And some of his weakest songs are the ones that are most explicitly political. (For example, none of the critics are suggesting that he sing one of his most political songs — "George Jackson" — which is regarded as one of the worst he ever wrote.)

Finally, why do Dylan's liberal critics assume that any political message he'll want to deliver is one they would want heard?

In a career spanning a half-century, Dylan has not fit into

the notion of a class movement is "direct action [as] a tactic that enables individuals to be at the forefront of their own movement, to make mass decisions in a safe space..." Class and class struggle are blurred out almost completely.

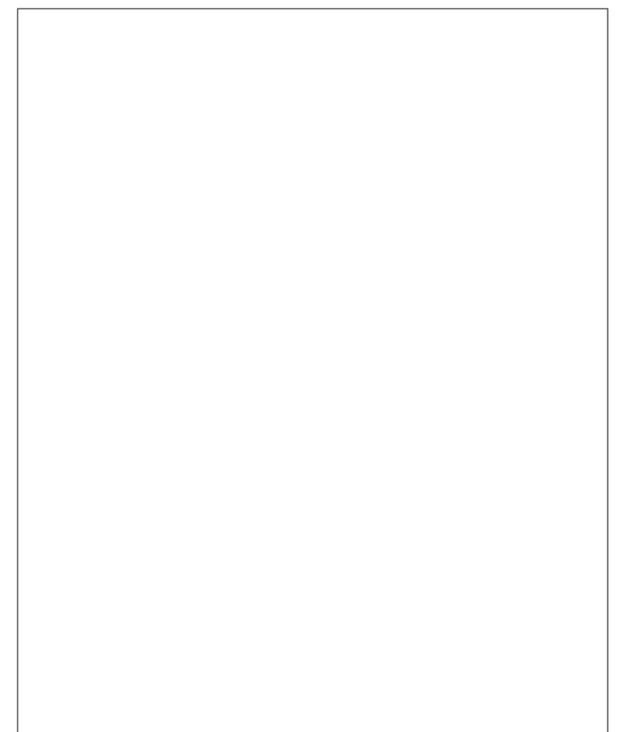
On the other hand, direct action is only one element of working-class struggle, which takes place on many levels (direct action, organisation, representation; industrial, political, ideological). Direct action is not all the labour movement needs to do to organise workers and fight the bosses effectively. Supporting localised direct action by groups of workers, as Bobi urges, is far from the be all and end all of developing working-class struggle.

2. Bobi's piece reads as if she wants to start a new labour movement from scratch, instead of transforming the one we have. She does not state clearly whether she rejects completely working in bourgeois, bureaucratised trade unions, but that seems to be implied.

Without organising to resist its exploitation at the point of production, the working class would "be degraded to one level mass of broken wretches, past salvation" — and thus "certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any larger movement" (Marx). Like it or not, this resistance has, across the world, consistently taken the form of organising trade unions. Unions are not the whole working-class movement, and Marxists have explained why they cannot, by themselves, overthrow capitalism (ironically, this is one of our objections to syndicalism). Their bureaucratisation is not an accident, but an inherent tendency which has to be combated. Nonetheless, they are the core, the bedrock of the workers' movement as it exists, certainly in Britain. Any talk of "class struggle" without seeking to transform them is playing around with words.

Leave aside whether most self-defined anarchists take part in anything which could meaningfully be called class-struggle activity. Even members of organised anarchist groups (AFed, SolFed) which define as class-struggle anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist are mostly either hostile to working in the unions or do not see transforming them as a strategic task. We do.

Lastly, it is not clear whether Bobi opposes large-scale (national, international), structured organisations like unions as such — implied by her apparent hostility to the whole concept of "representation". In which case, how will we have workers' councils, which involve workers electing... representatives?



anyone's neat boxes, and some of his most explicitly political songs would actually be an embarrassment to some of the liberals who are now criticizing him.

For example, would they want him to sing the bitterly ironic 1983 song "Neighborhood Bully" with its explicitly pro-Zionist message?

Singing that song in Tel-Aviv when he performs there in June will not require much courage. But maybe the real test would be if Dylan sings it two days earlier, when he performs in London?



Letters

There's more to it than "direct action"

Much of Bobi Pasquale's response to our "Open letter to a direct action activist" (*Solidarity* 3/202) was made up of statements no leftist could object to (workers and students in struggle good; the cuts, coppers and Labour careerists bad).

And while the Socialist Party, for instance, believes the police are "workers in uniform", and has as its "priority" in the labour movement "moving through elected positions" — these are certainly not accusations you can make at the AWL. They are not relevant to this debate.

I'd urge everyone interested in this debate to read "Can we build a revolutionary workers' movement?", published in *Solidarity* in April, which discusses some of these issues at length. If Bobi had read it, she would not necessarily have been persuaded, but she might have engaged with our actual arguments a bit more.

What are the real disagreements?

1. Judging by what she writes here, I think Bobi fetishises direct action as such, essentially detaching it from class struggle. We should certainly support direct action by many different groups and social forces, but it is not necessarily the same thing as direct action by the working class, at the point of production and beyond that in a class movement whose 'base' is the organisation of workers in production. The point about a strike is not so much that it is the most effective way of making bosses lose money; what is crucial is the growth of workers' class organisation, class consciousness and ability to struggle as part of a class.

In her conclusion, what Bobi effectively counterposes to

3. Bobi's argument also blurs out the question of politics, and the battle of ideas. One example she cites in passing illustrates this. She praises the direct action of the suffragettes (by the way, does this mean that she doesn't share the usual anarchist objection to voting in bourgeois elections?) — but says nothing of the divisions which opened up in the suffragette movement immediately before, during and after the First World War. This split, which led to the expulsion of the working-class suffrage movement of East London, was not along the lines of willingness to take direct action or degree of 'militancy' (what could be more 'militant' than the bourgeois suffragettes' small-scale terrorism?) It was along the class/political axes of universal suffrage vs votes for rich women; class politics vs bourgeois feminism; and democratic mass mobilisation vs authoritarian elitism.

Politics matters — direct action by whom, organised how and for what goals?

Sacha Ismail, south London

Claude Choules and Anzac Day

Claude Choules, the last man alive to have fought in World War One — and in fact to have fought in both World Wars — died on 5 May at the age of 2011.

He lied about his age to join the British navy in 1916. He settled in Australia, and fought in World War Two as an officer in the Australian navy.

His daughter Daphne Edinger said in 2009: "After my father left the navy, he never went to Anzac Day again. He didn't think we should glorify war."

Anzac day (25 April) in Australia is roughly an equivalent of Remembrance Day in Britain, but a much bigger deal. It is a public holiday. Until 1966 all entertainment was banned on the day. There are marches and big ceremonies. Schoolkids are herded into "Anzac Day parades".

Although the date is chosen as the anniversary of Australian troops invading Turkey during World War One, and Turkey has never threatened Australia, celebrants claim that the "Anzac spirit" is about "defending our freedoms".

In the 1970s there were significant anti-war protests in Australia on Anzac day, but they have faded away since then. Maybe Choules's memory can be marked by a revival.

Sid McCullough, Brisbane

Unions must fight for the right to strike

Tory mayor of London Boris Johnson is campaigning for new laws to make it even more difficult for workers to defend our interests by striking. Prime minister David Cameron has said that he is “open to the idea”.

Tory transport minister Philip Hammond responded to the Tube drivers’ recent vote to strike against victimisation of union reps by saying (5 May) that “this is only strengthening the hand of those including the Mayor who are calling for tougher industrial relations laws”.

Not in the rail union RMT, but elsewhere in the union movement, the word is increasingly heard from officials that strikes should be avoided because they will “play into the hands of the Tories” and bring on new laws.

Or the officials say that strikes can’t be ruled out, but must be delayed — and delayed again — because someone (the officials?) has let the union membership database get out of date, and it must be “cleansed” before the ballot to fend off court challenges.

If you cower, crouched down, long enough, then you end by not being able to stand upright!

For workers, the right to strike is the right to stand upright. Without it, workers are better off than slaves or serfs only to the extent of having the chance to leave one employer and try to find another, which with today’s unemployment rates is not much extent.

Workers lost large dimensions of our right to strike under the Thatcher government. Strikes are legal now only on a limited range of issues, only on direct issues and not in solidarity, only after ballots in prescribed form, only after set delays.

The court judgement against BA workers last year shows that current law can be interpreted by courts to give an injunction against almost any large strike on grounds of the inevitable minor discrepancies or errors in any large ballot.

Left Labour MP John McDonnell brought a Bill to parliament to protect workers’ ballots against being invalidated by minor errors. The Tories opposed it, and the Labour front bench did not even give the Bill the support it needed to get beyond its first stage in Parliament. Union leaders were silent.

Boris Johnson’s plan is make strikes illegal unless more than 50% of all workers eligible to vote in a ballot — rather than 50% of those voting — go for a strike.

Johnson himself got just 19% of people eligible to vote when he won the London mayoral election in 2008... So, 19% is enough to put him in office, but everyone who doesn’t cast a vote in a strike ballot should be counted as voting against a strike?

In the days when strikes were voted in mass meetings, few people abstained. But usually some people were slower to put their hands up than others.

Workers do not abstain in strike ballots because they don’t care about the loss of wages which a strike will bring! They abstain because they’re not sure.

Anyone who abstains must be at least partly, unsurely, in favour of striking — otherwise they would vote no, straight off, because of the loss of wages.

But often they feel unsure about whether the union, or the workforce, is strong and determined enough to make the

Cut the ultra-rich, not the poor!

On 8 May the *Sunday Times* reported: “the 1,000 multi-millionaires in [its] Rich List are £60.2 billion better off than they were in 2010”.

In 2010, they were £77 billion better off than in 2009. Over two years since near the lowpoint of the global finance crash, they have gained £137 billion, a 53% rise in their stash to £396 billion.

Compare that with the total of £81 billion which the coalition government is cutting from public spending.

Why not say that the richest one thousand have had “too much”, rather than the relatively poor people who will lose out from the government’s cuts?

Campaigning for new anti-strike laws

strike effective, and not a futile gesture.

In a mass meeting those unsure workers decide by looking. If there’s a large enough body of workers who put their hands up for a strike straight away, then they go for a strike. If not, not.

With postal ballots, unsure workers tend instead not to vote, and to wait to see what the balance of opinion is among workers more sure of themselves.

The outrage against democracy of counting all non-voters as votes against a strike is one option the coalition government is considering. Another is the Lib-Dem policy — reaffirmed by Vince Cable during the 2010 election campaign — of giving the government powers to ban strikes in “essential services”. The “50% of eligible voters” option is the front-runner at present.

RETREAT

Unions have been retreating on this issue for many years. From 1906 through to 1971 — with only slight variations, and except during the World Wars, when there were emergency anti-strike regulations, but widely defied — the right to strike seemed solid.

The Tory government of 1971 brought in an Industrial Relations Act, limiting industrial action. At first the unions said they would defy Thatcher’s anti-union laws. Then in 1983 the print union NGA was abandoned by the TUC when it came up against the law.

After the miners’ defeat in 1985, union opposition to the laws became a matter of speeches, not of action. The Tories added more and more restrictions. The union leaders told activists that the only answer was to wait and vote in a Labour government that would repeal the laws.

Before the 1997 election Tony Blair told the *Daily Mail* that: “Laws banning secondary and flying pickets, on secondary action, on ballots before strikes and for union elections — all the essential elements of the 1980s laws — will stay... Even after the changes the Labour Party is proposing in this area, Britain will remain with the most restrictive trade union laws anywhere in the western world”.

The union leaders were silent. They complained slightly over the details of the changes in union law which the Blair government did introduce — making union recognition slightly easier — but made no agitation for the wholesale repeal of Tory laws.

From around 2001, a new generation of trade-union leaders came in, more combative and left-wing in rhetoric. Still no campaign on the union laws. Formal union policy was for a thorough restoration of the right to strike, but no union campaigned actively for it.

Despite Blair and Brown’s determination to make New Labour a “party of business”, with a effort the unions could have forced the Labour government into at least some loosening of the anti-strike laws. They didn’t.

When the coalition government took office, Tory leaders told the press that they had “no plans” for new anti-union laws. Unsure about what their cuts would provoke, they didn’t want to take on another difficult issue at that stage.

The unions’ docility has made the Tories bolder. More docility will make them even bolder.

Unless the unions rise up now, they will be forced to crouch even lower, with an even heavier weight of law pinning us down.

The first step is simply to start agitating, demonstrating, and demanding commitments from the Labour Party leaders. That can lay the basis for decisive action to push the Tories back.

The government could give the nod to one employer or another to seek an injunction against the big public sector strike over pensions set for 30 June. The more the union leaders signal that they would then cancel the strike, with only a murmur of complaint, the more likely that option is.

The fight against the cuts has to go together with a fight for the right to strike.

Organise for 30 June!

On Tuesday 17 May members of the National Union of Teachers will begin balloting on strikes against the government’s plans to increase their pension contributions, raise their pension age, and cut their pensions.

The government plans affect all public service workers — in similar though slightly varying ways. They go together with the government’s plans to increase the age for the state pension, and are setting the frame for further trashing of what pension provision remains in the private sector.

Another teachers’ union, ATL, will start balloting on 20 May. On 18-20 May the civil service union PCS holds its conference in Brighton, and is expected to vote to ballot from 23 May.

The lecturers’ union UCU already has a ballot mandate to strike over pensions. NUT, PCS, ATL, and UCU members are likely to strike together on 30 June.

Unite’s healthworkers’ committee voted on 15 April in favour of co-ordinating industrial action with other public sector unions on 30 June, though it is doubtful whether the higher leadership of Unite will go along with this.

Dave Prentis, secretary of Unison, the biggest union in health and local government, said on 30 April: “Unison will ballot one million of its members to strike to protect their pensions. This will not be a token skirmish, but a prolonged and sustained war, because this government has declared war on a huge proportion of the population”.

However, Unison’s national executive, with the consent of some of the left, has voted not to ballot in time for 30 June, saying that it hasn’t yet (a year after the government announced its moves on pensions) got its membership database into good enough shape.

The National Association of Head Teachers has voted to ballot, but in the autumn.

This action could be the beginning of a serious fightback against the government. At the National Union of Teachers conference, at Easter, an amendment originating with Workers’ Liberty teachers seeking to commit the union to definite action plans after 30 June was manoeuvred off the conference floor with the complicity of much of the left of the union.

But confidence will grow with action. Some Trades Councils and anti-cuts committees are already organising to create joint committees of the unions striking on 30 June, open also to observers from other unions. They can build for meetings and rallies on 30 June which put pressure on the union leaders.

Workers’ Liberty has called a joint meeting of our union fractions among teachers, civil service workers, local government workers, health workers, and lecturers, for 28 May in London.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/ pointers

All feathered up: a new defence of anarchism

Martin Thomas reviews *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, by Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt (AK Press).

Variants of revolutionary syndicalism were major influences in the labour movements of several countries between the 1890s and World War One.

Their activists reckoned the work of the “political” socialists who spent much time on parliamentary electioneering to be deficient or even harmful, and focused effort on building up militant and democratic trade-union movements which they believed could be both the agency to overthrow capitalist power and the framework for future working-class administration of society. Some of them saw themselves as anarchists as well as syndicalists — “anarcho-syndicalists”.

Schmidt and van der Walt, a journalist and an academic from Johannesburg, South Africa, tell us not only about the famous movements of France and Spain, Argentina and Mexico, but also about the less-known ones of China, Japan, and Korea.

Their book is not primarily a history. The authors reconstruct what the authors call a “broad anarchist tradition”. They argued that it includes all of revolutionary syndicalism, not just the strands which called themselves anarchist. They present their own variant of “anarchism” as the most thorough and “sophisticated” development of the “tradition”.

Their own version of anarchism is one in which the traditional points of dispute with Marxism are thinned down or, some of them, virtually given up; but it is accompanied by a horror of Marxism.

Schmidt and van der Walt never say straight out that they agree that a working class overthrowing capitalism must organise from among itself a strong revolutionary authority to combat counter-revolution and consolidate the new order. They never directly disavow the traditional anarchist doctrine of the immediate abolition of any form of state.

But they pointedly do not repeat Bakunin’s doctrine that the task of anarchists on the day after any revolution must be (through, so Bakunin held, a “secret” network of “invisible pilots”) to thwart, divert, disrupt the victorious workers in their moves to coordinate their efforts democratically by electing a revolutionary authority.

JUNTA

They agree with “taking power in society” and “creating a coordinated system of governance”. They say “stateless governance”, but the adjective “stateless”, for them, seems to mean “radically democratic”, “linked through delegates and mandates”. In that sense, the Marxist-envisioned “workers’ state” (or, in Lenin’s term, “semi-state”) is “stateless”.

They accept the term “Revolutionary Junta” or “Workers’ Republic” for the new authority. Although in one passage they claim that “class no longer exists” once the workers’ revolution wins, in other passages they concede that counter-revolutionary groups will not disappear instantly, and accept the need for the new authority to organise “coordinated military defence” with “the best weaponry” (i.e. not just scattered militia groups with hand-weapons).

They agree that revolutionaries must build “a coherent... organisation, with a common analysis, strategy, and tactics, along with a measure of collective responsibility, expressed in a programme”. They use the term “party” sometimes and the term “vanguard” often for that.

They agree that the party must be disciplined and tight. They quote with approval an account of the Nabat organisation led by Nestor Makhno: “The secretariat... was not merely ‘technically’ executive... It was also the movement’s ideological ‘pilot core’... controlling and deploying the movement’s resources and militants”.

While many anarchists today see the fact that Marxist organisations stretch themselves to produce and circulate

weekly papers as infamous, Schmidt and van der Walt report on the extensive newspaper-producing and newspaper-selling culture of late 19th century anarchists with approval and pride.

They agree that the process of the working class preparing itself for revolution must include struggle for reforms. They approvingly quote Bakunin’s statement, from the time (1867-8) when he was focused on trying to win over the bourgeois League for Peace and Freedom, that “the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy... The democratic regime lifts the masses up gradually to participation in public life”. (Bakunin wrote different things later).

They emphasise that the value of the struggle for reforms lies in organisation from below in the struggle; but this is not a point of difference from Marxism. They explicitly dissent from the strands in anarchism which “refuse to deal with reforms, laws, and compromises”.

Schmidt and van der Walt argue that revolutionary socialists should work systematically in trade unions, generally on building sustained and organised rank-and-file movements, and also sometimes contest elections for union office.

They agree that revolutionary socialists should take up battles for national liberation — “engage seriously with national liberation struggles and [aim] at supplanting nationalism, radicalising the struggle, and merging the national and class struggles in one revolutionary movement”.

They oppose “identity politics” and the “cultural relativist” “claim made by some nationalists that certain rights are alien to their cultures and therefore unimportant or objectionable”.

On all these points Schmidt and van der Walt have, in effect, a criticism of most of what calls itself anarchism today different only in shading from what we in Workers’ Liberty would say. They are further away from conventional anarchism than is a group like the avowedly-Marxist Socialist Workers Party today, with its “One Solution, Revolution” slogan and its pretence that all “direct action” against the established order, even if it be led by Islamist clerical-fascists, is revolutionary and progressive.

Schmidt and van der Walt seem to stick to the old anarchist dogma of boycotting all electoral politics — “this would apply regardless of the mandates given... the wages paid to the parliamentarians, or the existence of other mechanisms to keep the parliamentarians accountable to their constituents” — and their account of anarchists in Korea who were elected to parliament there in the 1920s is disap-

proving. But they make little fuss about that issue.

In one passage they uphold the old anarchist idea of “the revolutionary general strike” as the only and more or less self-sufficient path to socialist revolution. But they make little of it, and other passages in the book imply a much less “fetishistic” view of the general strike.

ANTI-MARXISM

Their anti-Marxism is built not so much on a defence of traditional anarchist points as on a skewed presentation of Marxism. For them, Marxism from its earliest days was proto-Stalinism. They construct their picture of Marxism by “reading back” from Stalinism.

They concede that “in claiming that his theory was scientific, Marx was no different from say, Kropotkin or Reclus, who saw their own theories as scientific”. But somehow they also think that Marx’s claim to have worked some things out and got some things right was more sinister than the similar claim made by anyone who ventures to trouble the public with their writings.

“Classical Marxism purported to alone understand the movement of history and express the fundamental interests of the proletariat... When [this] claim to a unique truth was welded to the strategy of the dictatorship of the proletariat... the formula for a one-party dictatorship through an authoritarian state was written”.

Marxist theory was also, the authors claim, “teleological”, seeing history as progressing mechanically “in a straight line towards a better future”, through predetermined “stages”. Marx (so they allege, on the basis of out-of-context snippets from his writings on India) “considered colonialism to be progressive”. The “two-stage” doctrine developed for poorer countries by the Stalinists — that workers should first support the “national bourgeoisie” in “bourgeois-democratic revolution”, and look to socialist revolution only at a later “stage” — was authentic Marxism, or so Schmidt and van der Walt claim.

They say that Marx had a relatively conservative view of socialist economic organisation: “Marx believed that the law of value would operate after the ‘abolition of the capitalist mode of production’... the distribution of consumer goods under socialism would be organised through... markets”. On that basis they claim the ideal of communist economics — supersession of the wages system; from each according to their ability, to each according to their need — as having been pioneered by the anarchist writer Peter Kropotkin.

The poor quality of Schmidt’s and van der Walt’s polemic on such points can be judged from their quotations. For ex-

barricade

barricade is published monthly by young members and friends of workers’ liberty. recent issues have featured articles on fighting sexism at work, how to get involved with the trade union movement, how to organise picket line solidarity and perspectives from the arab revolts. if you dislike capitalism but enjoy fighting bosses (your own or other people’s) then this could be the zine for you.

“This publication induces in me feelings of loathing so profound that I can barely begin to express them.” Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup (GCB, AFC, FRAeS, FCMI, RAF)

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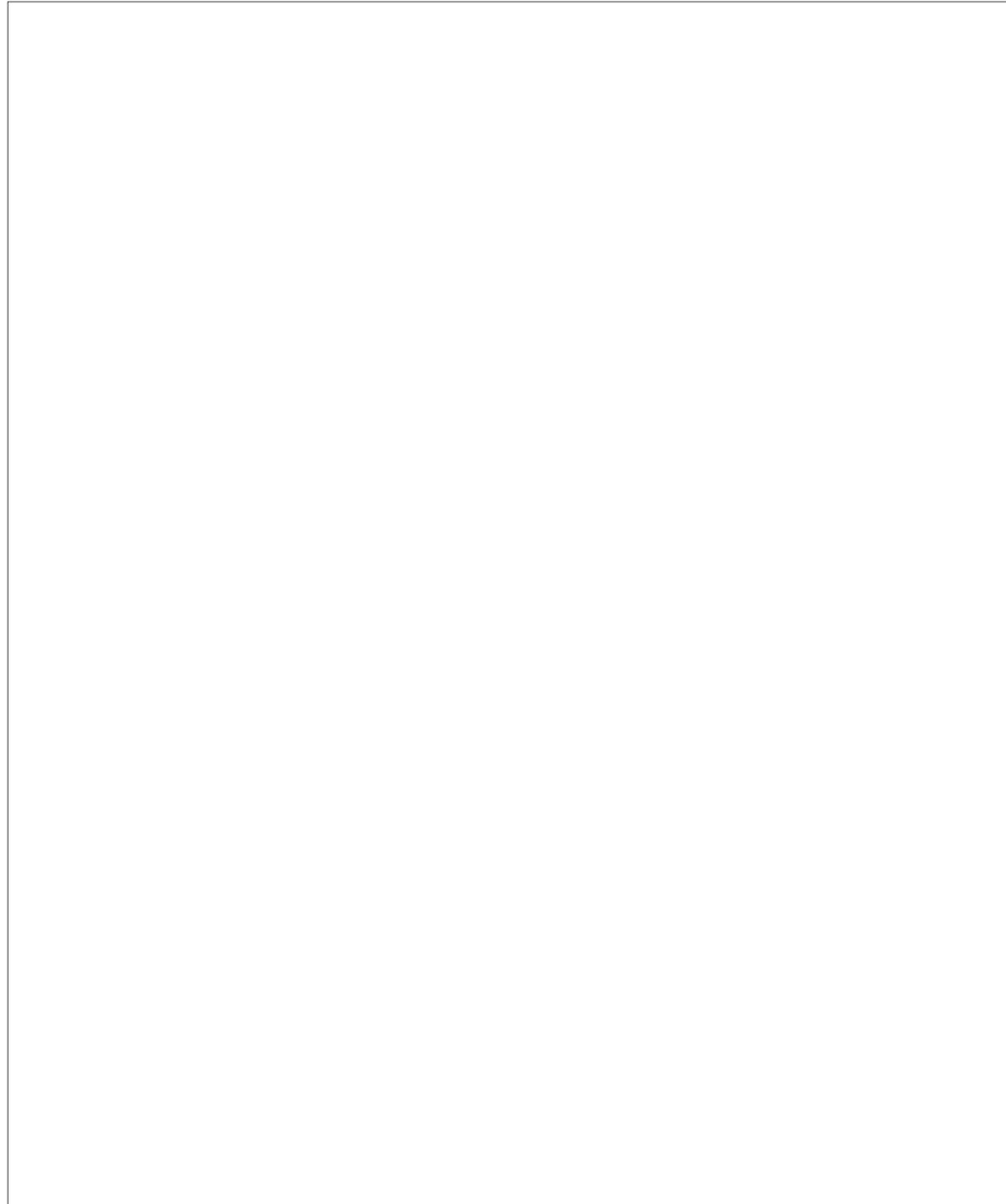
barricade

which side are you on?
STRIKE SUMMER

Government - normally an aggressive right-wing organisation, the state is the enemy of the people. It is the duty of the working class to overthrow it and to replace it with a system of workers’ control. The state is the enemy of the people. It is the duty of the working class to overthrow it and to replace it with a system of workers’ control.



Below: The state is the enemy of the people. It is the duty of the working class to overthrow it and to replace it with a system of workers’ control. The state is the enemy of the people. It is the duty of the working class to overthrow it and to replace it with a system of workers’ control.



In 1886, eight anarchists were tried for murder after a bomb went off during a strike rally in Haymarket Square, Chicago. The ensuing gunfire resulted in an unknown number of civilian deaths and the deaths of eight police officers. Four of the anarchists were convicted and executed and one committed suicide in prison. The prosecution ultimately conceded that none of the defendants had thrown the bomb. The entire labour movement, socialist and anarchist, rallied around the eight men; the creator of the above drawing, Walter Crane, was a socialist not an anarchist.

ample, they claim that Marx was cool on trade-unions, and that it was the anarchists who explained and championed the potential of trade-union struggles.

“Marx complained that anarchists contended that workers ‘must... organise themselves by trades-unions’ to ‘supplant the existing states’...”

This is the passage from Marx (in a letter to Paul Lafargue of April 1870) from which Schmidt and van der Walt quote their snippets:

“Bakunin’s programme [held that] the working class must not occupy itself with politics. They must only organise themselves by trades-unions. One fine day, by means of the International, they will supplant the place of all existing states. You see what a caricature he [Bakunin] has made of my doctrines!”

“As the transformation of the existing States into Associations is our last end, we must allow the governments, those great Trade-Unions of the ruling classes, to do as they like, because to occupy ourselves with them is to acknowledge them. Why! In the same way the old socialists said: You must not occupy yourselves with the wages question, because you want to abolish wages labour, and to struggle with the capitalist about the rate of wages is to acknowledge the wages system!”

“The ass has not even seen that every class movement, as a class movement, is necessarily and was always a political movement”.

Marx was not hostile or cool about workers organising in trade unions. On the contrary: he was probably (in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, his polemic against Proudhon in 1846, at a time when trade unions existed only in infant form) the first socialist to argue that trade-union organisation could

be central in working-class emancipation.

Marx’s objection was not to organising in trade unions, but to Bakunin’s claim that the working class should not also “occupy itself with politics” (i.e. struggles for political reforms, and electoral activity).

Trotsky fought Stalinism to the death. But Schmidt and van der Walt claim he “envisaged socialism as ‘authoritarian leadership... centralised distribution of the labour force... the workers’ state... entitled to send any worker wherever his labour may be needed’, with dissenters sent to labour camps if necessary”. The footnotes show that the words put in quote marks by Schmidt and van der Walt, as if they come from Trotsky, are culled not from Trotsky himself but from “pages 128, 132” of a book by one Wayne Thorpe.

Some of the words may have been taken by Thorpe from one of the polemics in which, in late 1920 — between the Bolsheviks’ voting-down of Trotsky’s first proposal in February 1920 of what would become the more liberal “New Economic Policy” and the adoption of the NEP itself, on Lenin’s initiative, in early 1921 — Trotsky sought expedients to get the economy of revolutionary Russia into working order in the midst of civil war. None of the words was ever written by Trotsky as a statement of his vision of socialism. The quoted string of words was never written as a whole connected passage by Trotsky anywhere.

Schmidt and van der Walt claim further that: “The differences between [Stalinism and Trotskyism] should not be overstated: both embraced classical Marxism and its theories, both saw the USSR as post-capitalist and progressive, and both envisaged revolution by stages in less developed countries”. A footnote dismisses Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution as “no break with stage theory... simply a

compression of the time frame”.

Although Trotsky sketched the permanent revolution theory around 1905, before Stalin became prominent in politics and before Mao Zedong was politically active at all, they call permanent revolution an “echo” of “the two-stage formulation of Stalin and Mao”. Why? Apparently because Trotsky recognised that issues such as land reform, national independence, and the replacement of autocracy by elected and constitutional government would be central in the first stages of mass mobilisation in capitalistically undeveloped countries, and could not be “skipped over”.

Marxism and Trotskyism are equated to Stalinism by Schmidt and van der Walt in order to clear the way for defence of “the broad anarchist tradition”, with the authors’ particular variants presented as the most thorough version of that tradition. The book raises, and offers a distinctive and unusual answer to, the question: what exactly is anarchism?

Its headline argument is that “the anarchist tradition” is in history the libertarian, class-struggle, “from-below” wing of the broad socialist current of thought. The authors have the same scheme of the history of socialism as the Marxist Hal Draper’s famous pamphlet *The Two Souls of Socialism* — “socialism from below” versus “socialism from above” — but for them, unlike Draper, “the broad anarchist tradition” is socialism from below, and Marxism a chief species of socialism from above.

ANARCHISM = UNIONS?

Schmidt and van der Walt say that anarchism proper began only with the Bakunin wing of the First International, in the early 1870s. It was always a class-struggle movement. Anarcho-syndicalism was not a fringe development from anarchism.

On the contrary, “the most important strand in anarchism has always been syndicalism: the view that unions... are crucial levers of revolution, and can even serve as the nucleus of a free socialist order”.

The “broad anarchist tradition” is thus for them, so to speak, what the “broad labour movement” is to Marxists.

We know that our views are for now in a small minority, and I think Schmidt and van der Walt know that theirs are too. But we see ourselves as immersed in a broader movement which — despite all the follies and limitations which affect it now — is constantly pushed by its own activity, by its own logic and fundamentals, in our direction, for now in the shape of local flurries, and in future crises potentially wholesale.

For us, that broader movement is the labour movement; for Schmidt and van der Walt, it is the “broad anarchist tradition”.

Their definition allows them to deal with what they effectively admit to be the follies of much anarchism either by defining them out — for them, Max Stirner and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon were not anarchists at all — or by seeing them as vagaries and immaturities which, with good work, will be dispelled by the logic of the movement itself.

It allows them to claim as de facto anarchists many heroes who in life did not consider themselves anarchists at all. They claim the whole of the pre-1914 revolutionary syndicalist movement in France, and the whole of the IWW, for anarchism, though most of the leaders of the French movement and of the IWW did not see themselves as anarchists, and some, like Victor Griffuelhes, secretary of the French CGT in its heroic period, were explicitly political socialists.

They claim the avowed Marxists Daniel De Leon and James Connolly as “anarchists” because of their syndicalistic views, and seem (though this is not so explicit) also to claim the “council communists” Herman Görter, Anton Pannekoek, and Otto Rühle, and modern “autonomist Marxists”, for their own.

Having “secured their flank” polemically by dismissing Marxism as proto-Stalinism (all but a few Marxists whom they claim as having really been anarchists), and by portraying many traditional anarchist dogmas as mere immature errors of the movement, they free themselves to maintain some traditional anarchist tenets at a more “theoretical” level.

This review article will be continued in future issues of Solidarity. Continuation articles will cover:

- *The discrepancy between Schmidt’s and van der Walt’s definition of their politics as “class politics”, and their views that peasantries are as good a basis for socialism as wage-working classes, or better, and that capitalist development is not a prerequisite for socialism;*

- *Why “socialism from below” is not an adequate political definition, and anyway cannot be equated with a “broad anarchist tradition”;*

- *The real history of the separating-out of anarchism and Marxism as distinct currents in the labour movement after the Paris Commune.*

Don't rule out nuclear power

Les Hearn disputes the left consensus, shared by AWL, to oppose nuclear power.

Our society is powered largely by burning fossil fuels. This is the equivalent to living on our savings. Fossil fuels — oil, coal and gas — were laid down over a period of a hundred or so million years and we are using about a million years' worth every year. Even if there were not the risk of climate change, we should be looking for alternatives.

Ultimately, we need to be aiming for complete renewability, but this will require some massive changes in human societies, and some enormous leaps forward in technology. Humans have never used any resources renewably (apart from a few insignificant exceptions).

The immediate alternatives to fossil fuels include wave, tide, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, biomass, solar and nuclear power. All have their up and down sides but all can make some contribution, and it would be foolish to rule any out without strong reasons. That is just what many environmentalists do when they rule out nuclear power from the future energy mix. Can other sources suffice?

Recently, *New Scientist* looked at one scientist's efforts to "do the math" (2 April). Axel Kleidon, a physicist from the Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry in Germany, has calculated that building enough wind farms to replace fossil fuel-derived energy would actually remove a significant amount of energy from the atmosphere and alter rainfall, turbulence and the amount of solar radiation reaching the Earth's surface.

Humans at present use some 47 terawatts (TW or trillions of watts = joules per second) of energy of which 17 TW come from fossil fuels. The rest is made up of renewable sources, mainly harvesting farmed plants. This is only about one twenty-thousandth of the energy coming from the sun.

But the useful energy available to us is restricted by the laws of thermodynamics to what is termed the "free" energy, the rest being unusable heat. Kleidon calculates that we are using some 5-10% of the free energy, more than is used by all geological processes, such as earthquakes, volcanoes and tectonic plate movements! If we were to set up wind and wave farms with a theoretical output of 17 TW, we would find, first, that a lot of waste heat would be produced, contributing to global warming. We would also deplete the available energy in the atmosphere: Kleidon calculates that this could reduce the energy to be harnessed from the wind by a factor of 100.

There are other sources of energy but these have their drawbacks. Geothermal power stations rely on pumping water into hot rocks fractured by explosions, but experimental plants are losing unacceptable amounts of water underground so the outputs are lower than expected.

SOLAR

Solar electricity relies on rare elements such as indium and tellurium, which are projected to run out within decades. Cheaper versions of solar cells still require another rare element, selenium.

Solar heating, using large mirrors to focus the Sun's rays to boil water and drive turbines, is a very promising technology but it is not clear that this could fill more than part of the gap. For one thing, the Sun does not shine so strongly (or at all) on many parts of the Earth or during many times in the year.

Is it wise to rule out nuclear power? Many eminent environmentalists are coming round to the view that it isn't.

Mark Lynas, writing in *New Statesman* shortly after the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan (21 March), warned that a panicky abandonment of nuclear power would lead to catastrophic global warming, a far greater problem. He argues that renewable sources are not going to be able to fill the gap in energy for countries like Japan, certainly in the short to medium term, and they will simply increase their use of fossil fuels.

And long-time environmentalist George Monbiot (*Guardian*, 22 March) called for a sense of perspective over Fukushima, with no deaths (apart from two killed by the tsunami, and over the enormous disruption of the landscape which would be necessary if renewables were to supply all of our energy needs. Not only would there be enormous areas devoted to onshore windfarms, but also increased networks of grid connections to get the electricity to where it was needed. Pumped storage facilities would be needed to store the energy for when it was needed.

Other options favoured by some involve reversing the pattern of industrialisation and moving people back into rural communities where power could be produced locally. Except, according to Monbiot, it couldn't. In the UK, he says, generating solar power involves a "spectacular waste of scarce resources", while wind power in populated areas is largely worthless, since we build in sheltered spots. And direct use of energy by damming rivers or harvesting wood

would wreck the countryside.

One of the UK's oldest environmentalist groups, Friends of the Earth (FoE) consistently opposes nuclear power. Its five year-old report, *Nuclear power, climate change and the Energy Review*, raises the following objections.

Nuclear power is error-prone and likely to fail in ways dangerous to lots of people; it assists in the proliferation of nuclear weapons; it is vulnerable to terrorist attack; and that it is anyway unnecessary to use nuclear power at all in the complete replacement of fossil fuels in power generation and transport which FoE also calls for.

The claim is repeated that, though nuclear power generates electricity without releasing CO₂, the extraction of uranium and the building of plant result in carbon emissions — as though this was a significant objection. Every current and proposed energy technology will result in carbon emissions as the concrete, steel, etc, will have to be made using current fossil fuel resources. The point is that it will make far less overall than the fossil fuel burning it will replace.

The Green Party uses many of the same arguments.

Both the Greens and FoE both give expense as an argument against new nuclear power, and yet the report the Greens cite states that the increased nuclear option would be the cheapest, while the no nuclear/all renewable option would be the most expensive (necessitating energy imports as well!). FoE's own figures show nuclear power's costs sitting right in the middle of all other energy sources.

WASTE

Another problem identified is that of disposal of waste, including dangerous high-level waste. This has a solution — burial in geologically stable strata deep underground. The waste has to be inaccessible for about 100,000 years, but there are plenty of rock layers where movements of chemicals is measured in a few metres per million years (for example, the Oklo "natural" reactor).

The problem of nuclear accidents was perhaps the most prominent criticism raised by FoE five years ago, and the accident at Fukushima would not diminish the shrillness of their alarms. Nowhere do FoE or the Greens even mention the possibility of improved safety features in current reactor designs, for instance, ones that rely on gravity to flood overheating reactor cores with water, rather than as at Fukushima using pumps whose electricity could be cut off by an earthquake.

Nowhere do they raise the need for new designs using thorium which are "fail safe" and could be adapted to burn up the high level waste which is such a problem and has to be dealt with whether we have nuclear power or not. And nuclear reactors even now are burning up "surplus" nuclear weapons.

The Labour Party's "green wing", the Socialist Environmental and Resources Association (SERA), does not differ from FoE and the Greens in opposing nuclear power, though they concentrate on problems of time and money.

They ignore the fact that the delays are due to the political cowardice of Labour governments and refusals to support research into new reactor designs.

It is notable that the environmentalists seem to have stopped blaming nuclear power stations for clusters of childhood leukaemias (no link with any other form of illness has been found). Such clusters are in fact found in many places where workers and their families have moved from elsewhere and may be due to lack of resistance to locally occurring viruses.

If one hoped for an independent voice from the SWP, one would be disappointed. In a slightly revised update of a 2006 pamphlet, Martin Empson refers blithely to the cancers and other illnesses coming to the Fukushima clean-up workers "as with the Chernobyl disaster". He is clearly unaware of the massive differences in the two cases and the absence of evidence of long-term harm in the unfortunate but brave Chernobyl workers who survived initial exposure to radiation.

He sets up the straw person who argues that nuclear power is "the only way that we can produce low carbon electricity" and repeats the irrelevant fact that some CO₂ will be released in setting up reactors. He insists that "Fukushima shows that nuclear power is extremely dangerous". He doesn't recognise that the reactors survived one of the most powerful earthquakes and tsunamis recorded with minimal damage and would have been virtually problem-free had a fail-safe cooling system been installed — as should and could have happened.

He repeats the discredited allegations of clusters of leukaemias around nuclear plants. He rubbishes suggestions of as few as 4,000 excess deaths due to Chernobyl which came from a United Nations report in 2005, preferring another "independent" report which suggested some half a million deaths already (!). He seems unaware of the latest UN report which drastically reduces estimates of illness and death from Chernobyl. It states that 28 of 134 "liquidators" died of acute radiation sickness at the time and a further 19 have died but not of radiation-linked diseases. Fifteen of some 6,000 cases of thyroid cancer have died (this problem arose only because of the criminal negligence of USSR authorities). No other deaths have definitely been attributed to radiation from Chernobyl. Professor Wade Allison, a radiation expert from Oxford University, argues that people's natural defence mechanisms against radiation damage have been greatly under-estimated.

The environmentalists and the SWP appear to be unaware of the fact that fossil fuel extraction and use is thousands of times more dangerous than nuclear power.

Nuclear power, climate change and the Energy Review, Friends of the Earth 2005

Meeting the UK's 2020 energy challenge: Do we need new nuclear?, Alan Whitehead MP, SERA January 2008

Climate Change: Why Nuclear Power is Not the Answer, Martin Empson, SWP 2006 ("updated" 2011)

Health effects due to radiation from the Chernobyl accident, UNSCEAR 2011

Radiation and Reason: The Impact of Science on a Culture of Fear, Wade Allison (ISBN 0-9562756-1-3, pub. 2009), <http://www.radiationandreason.com>

Climate havoc on the way

The science of heat absorption by the "greenhouse gases", CO₂, methane, water vapour and some others, has been known for over a century.

It is clear that these gases have made the Earth a largely hospitable place for life over the last few billion years. This natural "greenhouse effect" has raised Earth's average surface temperature by some 30 degrees Celsius and smoothed out the drastic day-night oscillation seen for example on the atmosphere-free Moon. Both are needed for the existence of liquid water without which life would be impossible.

The science therefore predicts that the rise in CO₂ levels caused by the widespread burning of fossil fuels should, all other things being equal, cause a rise in average temperatures with some degree of climate change. But how much change? Trivial or dangerous?

A trawl through recent editions of the UK's premier popular science journal, *New Scientist*, reveals the following:

"Arctic shore is crumbling" (23 April): the permafrost is melting as the Arctic warms and the protective sea ice melts. The battering by waves is resulting in shorelines eroding by an average half a metre a year. Some coastal communities are having to relocate.

"Building blocks of coral lost to acid" (16 April): as levels of dissolved CO₂ rise in seawater, the concentration of carbonate ions is falling as it is converted to bicarbonate. Since corals and many shellfish need these to make their skeletons or shells, this should ultimately prevent their continued growth. And since the productivity of the sea largely depends on coral reefs, this could have implications for those who depend on the sea for their food.

"Coral reef countdown" (9 April): coral reefs will have to migrate southwards at a rate of 15 km per year to find cooler water as the oceans warm, something that seems to be virtually impossible. We have only 10 years to save the Great Barrier Reef.

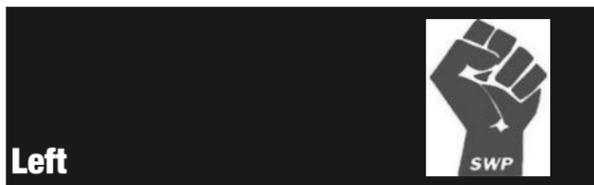
"Gulf stream threatened by Arctic flush" (9 April): melting ice is creating a pool of fresh water in the Arctic which could flow into the Atlantic, slowing the Gulf Stream and bringing colder winters to Europe.

"Contrails heat more than aircraft fuel" (2 April): condensation trails, high clouds left by aircraft, actually contribute more to global warming than the CO₂ released by aircraft engines.

"Earth's melting ice sheets could play havoc with sea levels" (19 March): Greenland and Antarctica are losing ice at an increasing rate. This increases estimates of sea level rise from an average of some 39cm to 56cm by 2100.

"Global deluge" (19 March): extreme weather events seem to be increasing in frequency. Climate change models predict increased water vapour in the atmosphere leading to more intense rainfall.

Mourning bin Laden



By Alan Gilbert

After 11 September 2001, *Socialist Worker* notoriously “refused to condemn” the massacre of three thousand working people in New York by bin Laden’s followers.

It tried to hold that line of “refusing to condemn” in the Stop The War movement, until finally in early 2002 it had to retreat and say “of course” the massacre should be condemned.

Socialist Worker of 7 May shows the SWP still “refusing to condemn” bin Laden.

“Attacks like 9/11”, says SW, “in reality... are a response to oppression, not an expression of ‘evil’.”

The effect of Bin Laden’s death, says SW, will be bad: “A newly confident US may feel emboldened to wage more wars and reassert its power on the international stage”.

A small article “criticises” bin Laden, but in such a way as extensively to endorse him. “To rid the world of oppression and injustice requires not assassinations or blowing people up, but tearing up the roots of the capitalist system itself.

“Faced with the reality of imperialism, some people feel desperate enough to lash out and strike back in any way they feel possible.

“Socialists do not deny the working class and the oppressed the right to use violence against their oppressors.

“We know that the ruling class will not give up all their power, wealth and privileges without a struggle. But that struggle cannot be conducted by individuals or elite groups ‘behind the backs of the masses’...”

“The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky argued that terrorism arose because of the tyranny and oppression of our rulers. ‘We understand only too clearly the inevitability of such convulsive acts of despair and vengeance’, he wrote. But ‘individual revenge does not satisfy us’. Moreover, Trotsky argued that as a political strategy for change, Marxists were ‘irreconcilably opposed’ to terrorism...”

Nothing is spelled out clearly in the SW coverage. Analyse it, though, and a truly sickening abandonment of all socialist political or even moral norms, in pursuit of the “anti-imperialist” bandwagon, is apparent.

Trotsky was criticising Russian populist revolutionaries, who, under a stifling regime which allowed no legal political activity, tried to kill the Tsar or top Tsarist officials (and sometimes succeeded), hoping that their actions would disrupt the regime and rouse the cowed masses of the people.

Morally, Trotsky and the Marxists sided with the populist revolutionaries. Only they argued that their methods could not succeed. A Tsar or an official would be replaced by another. The masses would not be roused by heroes acting on

their behalf.

Socialist Worker equates Al Qaeda’s violence against working people — in New York, in Iraq, in the Middle East and North Africa — in the service of Islamist clerical-fascist reaction, with the Russian populists’ violence against the Tsar and top officials, in the service (as they hoped) of political liberty and socialism.

The equation is based only on the military technique — bombs — ignoring the class and political character of the activity! Bombing workers is the same as bombing Tsars, as long as it is done by people who dislike the USA...

The idea, which in typical weaselling SWP fashion is never stated outright and maybe is never even thought through distinctly in their minds, is that the mere fact that bin Laden become hostile to the USA made him progressive.

He was also, and more, hostile to workers, democrats, secularists, and women seeking equality, wherever he had influence? The SWP just fades that out.

The front page headline of *Socialist Worker* is: “West’s leaders are bloody hypocrites”. True, of course, but hardly this week’s news. **SW uses no such strong term as “bloody hypocrite” for bin Laden, despite his combination of demagoguery against oppression with murderous attacks on working people.**

Would-be socialists end up like SW, using the USA’s compass in politics but just reading it in reverse — so that if the USA says no, they say yes — only if they have lost any compass of their own.

Class politics now old hat?

By Joe Flynn

Around 100 people attended the “counterforum” in London on 7 May called by Counterfire, the SWP splinter group led by John Rees and Lindsey German.

Although this turnout was smaller than I expected, the event was slick and “professional”. I arrived 20 minutes late but was greeted by several people before I entered, and given a glossy leaflet urging me to join Counterfire.

Chris Bambery, not yet a member of Counterfire but bringing fraternal greetings from the newly formed ISG, gave the most political speech in the opening session, but speaking as if addressing an internal gathering of ex-SWP people.

He said he wanted an end to “the sectarian party building and syndicalist politics that have harmed our movement”. Bambery said a narrow focus on the labour movement should be rejected by socialists in favour of supporting anyone “resisting”; the SWP had been at its best when it did this, for example supporting national liberation struggles without questioning every dot and comma of the politics in advance. Stop the War was a model of every sort of organising for more or less every Counterfire speaker throughout the day. An orientation that will lead them to supporting the likes of Qaddafi and other tyrants around the world.

Bambery played down the importance of 30 June; questioned how important workers’ struggles have been in the

resistance to cuts in Europe, and made disparaging remarks about how most of the country’s shop stewards are old, tired and doing casework instead of fighting and organising.

True, the labour movement is weak. But there is no short cut around rebuilding and democratising the existing labour movement. It is only through labour movement focused anti-cuts groups drawing in wider forces from other struggles that the working class stands a chance of defeating the government’s austerity programme.

John Carwithin adds:

Counterfire and SWP activists engaged in a furious row outside Counterfire’s event. The SWP people were banned from entering.

SWP members were indignant about their democratic rights, saying they’ve “known nothing like this in all their years on the left”. “The most we did at ‘Marxism’ [the SWP’s summer school] was to discourage the Sparts from attending.”

The irony will not be lost on AWL members and other socialists who have been physically intimidated, even physically assaulted, when trying to speak and distribute leaflets at “Marxism” while Counterfire and the SWP were one organisation.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/node/8900

The American civil war in Britain

By Matthew Thompson

Just off Albert Square in Manchester stands a statue of Abraham Lincoln, the inscription expressing gratitude to the Lancashire cotton workers for their support of the Northern Union forces against the Southern Confederate slaveholders in the American Civil War of 1861-65. The background was told in Radio 4’s “Manchester and Liverpool: Britain’s American Civil War”, presented by TV historian and Labour MP Tristram Hunt.

Liverpool and Manchester both had links with the antebellum American South. Manchester and the surrounding Lancashire textile towns imported 80% of their raw cotton from the Southern plantations through the port of Liverpool. Liverpool’s growth as a city in the eighteenth century was as a slave port. Liverpool ships transported a third of a million slaves across the Atlantic from West Africa to the Americas between 1783 and 1793 with the last slave ship leaving Liverpool in 1807.

Liverpool played a part in supporting the Confederacy during the American Civil War. A number of Confederate warships were built on Merseyside, including the Alabama at Laird’s shipyard in Birkenhead (after the Civil War, the British government paid the United States £3 million compensation for the losses these cruisers inflicted on Northern shipping). The city’s St George’s Hall also hosted a bazaar to raise money for Confederate prisoners of war.

Manchester, however, saw an inspiring act of solidarity with the North occurred. The Northern naval blockade of the Confederacy ended the supply of cotton and left thousands of Lancashire textile workers on the brink of starvation. Yet they assembled on 31st December 1862 at Manchester’s Free Trade Hall and sent a letter to Lincoln expressing their:

“... hope that every stain on your freedom will shortly be removed, and that the erasure of that foul blot on civilisation and Christianity — chattel slavery — during your presidency, will cause the name of Abraham Lincoln to be honoured and revered by posterity.”



No more auction block for me

This song of African slaves is still performed today. The song is deceptively simple. But the story of oppression it tells is complex — from the deaths of so many on the slave ships bound for America (“many thousand gone”) to a life of unimaginable cruelty and hardship on US southern plantations. Like all slave songs, this is a work song, but like many it contains a highly political message. It dates from the American Civil War. What is the meaning of “no more auction block for me”? An expectation of the ending of slavery or a statement of rebellious intention?

No more auction block for me, no more, no more,
No more auction block for me, many thousand gone.

No more peck ‘o corn for me, no more no more,
No more peck ‘o corn for me, many thousand gone.

No more driver’s lash for me, no more, no more,
No more driver’s lash for me, many thousand gone.

No more pint of salt for me, no more, no more,
No more pint of salt for me, many thousand gone.

No more hundred lash for me, no more, no more,
No more hundred lash for me, many thousand gone.

No more mistress’ call for me, no more, no more,
No more mistress’ call for me, many thousand gone.

No more auction block for me, no more, no more,
No more auction block for me, many thousand gone.

Libya: the opposing shore

By Martyn Hudson

The divide between Qaddafi's Libya in the west and Free Libya in the east has continued even as Nato begins to intensify attacks against the heart of the regime in Tripoli.

It is curiously reminiscent of Julien Gracq's *The Opposing Shore* which described two divided empires across the gulf Sirte lasting for aeons.

This is the fear on all sides — that regime intransigence and the inability of the rebellion to militarily secure the west could lead to some form of longer lasting stalemate. The intensification of Nato attacks signal that this is a very real fear.

Certainly for the rebellion it would be highly unsatisfactory, leaving the regime untouched in the west and still in control of a population of millions upon which to practice its violations.

The rebellion is fighting back in Misrata, however, and have pushed the pro-regime forces out of the city. Yet the human cost is huge — many have died and the city is at starvation levels.

At this point one Red Cross tanker has made it through the blockade to deliver supplies including baby foods and medical equipment but the situation is clearly desperate. All in Misrata know what the consequences will be if the pro-regime forces and tribes enter the city.

At the same time the refugee situation is developing in tragic directions. Thousands of mainly sub-Saharan African migrants have been fleeing the North African coast in barely seaworthy vessels.

A ship containing 600 people has broken up outside the port of Tripoli — reports postulate that there are very few survivors.

Another boat drifting in the Mediterranean was reportedly passed by Nato carriers. No help was offered and 61 out of the 72 people on board died of thirst and starvation.

This could be a warning about the human cost of promoting vulgar anti-interventionism. For all of the hypocritical talk about suspending the Schengen agreement which allows free passage across Europe's borders — there is

Lord Ahmed

little real interest among European governments to make any significant moves towards an international effort to alleviate the distress of these migrants.

Thousands of seemingly Somali refugees are being held in concentration camp levels of imprisonment on Italian Lampedusa in the most terrible of conditions.

UN aid chief Valerie Amos has called for some form of brief suspension of hostilities in order to offer respite to Misrata but this does not address the central question of the future of the Libyan people — rather it simply puts a sticking plaster on a gaping wound.

More laughably Lord Ahmed of Rotherham, well known for his softsoaping on political Islam and his vile anti-semitic slurs, has been over to Libya to hobnob with the regime. Libyan television has been circulating this visit widely and it is clearly a propaganda coup for Qaddafi.

This "peace mission" is a way of "reconciling" Libya's people — as Ahmed says, "It is my wish to try to help the brothers who have fallen out to become friends again."

He is currently in Libya waiting for other members of his mission to arrive including some Tory MPs opposed to the military, political, any kind of elimination of Qaddafi.

Let the people struggle for democracy in Libya offer an answer to Ahmed and his gangster pals. It is not simply a matter of bringing "brothers" together again.

Only when Qaddafi and his family clique are removed from the face of history will the rebels talk of reconciliation — with brothers and sisters, yes. With blood-thirsty tyrants and torturers never.

Police attack Tunis protests

By Edward Maltby

In a move not seen since the fall of dictator Ben Ali, police have batoned demonstrators in Tunis repeatedly since 6 May.

On 5 May Farhat Rajhi, a judge and briefly interior minister after 14 January, publicly charged that the provisional government headed by Beji Caid el Sebsi was being directed in secret by a super-rich clique linked to former President Ben Ali.

The clique is based in London, around Marouan Mabrouk.

Rajhi also said that the army command was preparing plans for a coup, to be activated if the Islamist party Ennahda wins upcoming elections or if Sebsi's government was unable to "maintain order".

Demonstrators took to the streets on 6 May to demand the truth about who really runs the government and to defend democracy. Other demonstrations have followed, denouncing the repression on 6 May, and have been met

by similar police violence.

Oussama, an activist in the Tunisian Left Workers' League (LGO) reports:

"There were peaceful demonstrations as usual in front of the National Theatre [on the Avenue Bourguiba in Tunis]. The police charged, started beating people savagely, with an excessive and abusive use of teargas. We were demonstrating to say, 'Who is governing? Is it still the underworld, Ben Ali's mafia?'"

"There were journalists, children, even very small children beaten. The message the police wanted to send is, 'we're here — we're back, repression is back.' I was beaten in front of two Italian journalists. The government will say that we were rioting and destroying things, but the video of my beating will show that we were being peaceful.

"They have set a curfew, but it's just cinema. They want to intimidate, to paralyse the streets and paralyse the people. But we came out under Ben Ali's police state, we

Beji Caid el Sebsi

demonstrated before 14 January and we will demonstrate now. They will employ thugs to create panic and create demand for 'the return to normal'.

"Everything is fragile. The counter-revolution is coming, and it is being directed by those who are in power right now. The mafia runs our country and they are releasing their dogs on the people."

Another LGO activist reports:

"The demo yesterday [Sunday 8 May] was split into two parts, the first before the Prime Minister

[Sebsi]'s speech. From the morning there were a lot of young people who had gathered around the Avenue Bourguiba [the main thoroughfare in Tunis]. In the same place there were a lot of violent provocateurs ["casseurs"] that the demonstrators were stopping, while the police watched.

"The second part came after the Prime Minister's speech, which people found very disappointing.

"In the evening there were big movements and in the Soliman district, in the southern part of Tunis, an activist from the Patriotic Democratic Labour Party fell, shot dead by police bullets.

"Today, there was a big gathering on the Avenue Bourguiba and another in front of the publishing house of the newspaper *La Presse*, organised by journalists who were expressing their anger at the attacks on 14 journalists [on 6 May]."

• Protest at the Tunisian tourist office, 77 Wigmore Street, London W1. 5.30 Friday 13 May.

Iraqi oil workers' wildcat strike

By Darren Bedford

More than 300 Iraqi oil workers have staged a wildcat strike in Basra and demonstrated outside the headquarters of the state-owned Southern Oil Company.

The walkout included workers from oil fields in Basra; from North and South Rumaila, Albirjisya, West of Qurna and Manjnoon. Their slogans fo-

cused on corruption among company managers. They also demanded the levelling-up of their pay and conditions to the rates of workers employed by foreign oil companies.

Oil bosses used private security to confront demonstrators, and worker activist Sami Hassan was imprisoned for two hours.

Quoted in the Lebanese

Daily Star, oil worker Assad Abu Hussein said "If the Southern Oil Company does not give us our rights of profits and bonuses, we will stop production. Just because we are poor and our field was not developed by a foreign company like the rest of the oil fields, we are being treated unfairly."

The Iraqi Freedom Congress reports that the workers were organised by

the General Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq, a split from the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq (the main left-wing union federation).

The Iraqi Oil Workers' Federation, led by Hassan Juma'a, and the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (the most "mainstream" of Iraq's union federations) also have bases amongst Basra's oil workers.

Egyptian trade unionists speak in Britain

Between 18 and 20 May, Egyptian trade unionists Kamal Abbas and Tamer Fathy will be visiting Britain, hosted by the Egypt Workers' Solidarity campaign.

The Egyptian revolution was prepared by groups of workers struggling to build independent trade unions — and, since the fall of Mubarak, union organisation, workers' protests and strikes have spread like wildfire.

Kamal and Tamer are organisers for the Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services and the new Egyptian Federation for Independent Unions. They will be speaking at the Fire Brigades Union conference in Southport on 19 May, and at EWS public meetings in Liverpool on 19 May and London on 20 May.

Liverpool: 6pm, Thursday 19 May, Britannia Adelphi Hotel, Ranelagh Place. For more information ring Elaine on 07733 248 530.

London: 6.30pm, Friday 20 May, Room G3, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square. Ring Mark on 07984 163 770.

www.egyptworkersolidarity.org / info@egyptworkersolidarity.org

Push Prentis to ballot!

By a Unison activist

“Unison will ballot one million of its members to strike to protect their pensions. This will not be a token skirmish, but a prolonged and sustained war, because this government has declared war on a huge proportion of the population”.

Dave Prentis, general secretary of the big public services union Unison, made that declaration on 30 April. He did not say when Unison will ballot. Unison officials dismiss any possibility of Unison balloting to join the likely strike over pensions by NUT, PCS, ATL, and UCU on 30 June.

But Prentis said it. Unison members should pin him down to a definite schedule.

One reason given by Unison leaders for not striking on 30 June is that the membership database has to be “cleansed”. This is cover for not taking action.

Unison leaders have a tendency to refuse strike ballots on the basis that management might complain if membership lists are not up to date. This ultra-cautious approach has caused anger among members but it has also led to a branch officers “pulling in the horns”.

Organising a strike under current law is incredibly difficult and time consuming. If branch officers know they are going to put themselves through hours of form filling just for the regional office to say no to a strike, they may save themselves the bother.

But some left Unison National Executive members have voted for the “cleansing” on the grounds that our membership lists are not up to scratch. They are either being naive — falling for the right wing’s spurious arguments — or they have forgotten how important it is that the union takes a lead in defence of low paid workers in the public sector.

“Cleansing” databases is not the key to effective strike action. Organising in the workplace, building branches, educating reps and recruiting, and giving political lead in the fight against attacks is.

Dave Prentis

BP locks out engineering construction workers

By Darren Bedford

A senior GMB union official was arrested on 4 May as police stepped up their attempts to break up protests by locked-out workers at the Saltend biofuels plant construction site.

Workers have been demonstrating since 14 March, when their employer — Redhall Engineer Solutions — had its contract with Vivergo, the BP-led consortium building the plant, terminated.

Although Redhall told the workers they should turn up for work as normal, and that they would be transferred via TUPE into employment by Vivergo or by another contractor, they found themselves locked-out and without work.

Solidarity demonstration in Hull for Saltend workers

Workers employed by other contractors have been sent home on full pay.

Workers have been organising daily pickets and protests outside the plant and have encountered increasingly heavy-handed policing. Maria Ludkin,

the GMB’s national officer for Legal Affairs, said:

“GMB has made every effort to organise the protest in the usual way, based on our experience of lawful protest which take place around the country without any arrests.

“In this dispute, our officials have been harassed every day by a high volume of police, and new conditions about how the protest is conducted.

“Police have threatened to arrest our officials on a daily basis for acts such as taking photos of union

members on the protest, or stepping off a curb onto the road.”

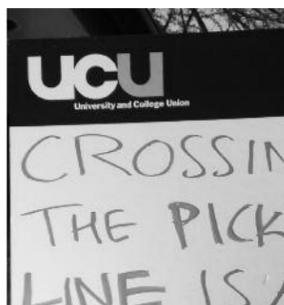
A mass meeting on 21 April rejected an offer from Vivergo to compensate them rather than allowing them to continue work. Vivergo is essentially denying any liability to employ the transferred workers, despite Redhall’s assurances that they would be able to continue to work.

Other workers, including electricians and scaffolders, have refused to cross the Redhall workers’ pickets.

Protests at the plant are continuing, and a national shop stewards’ meeting for the engineering construction industry is due to formulate a plan for developing wider solidarity.

In brief

By Ira Berkovic



COLLEGES

Following a successful strike at Newcastle College in April, two more further education colleges could see industrial action as workers fight back against pay and job cuts.

Up to 200 posts are under threat at South Tyne-side College, where some lecturers also risk losing up to £11,000 from their salaries. In a poll in the local press, 85% of respondents said they supported the workers. Their ballot result is expected on Monday 16 May.

Elsewhere, workers at Sheffield College will strike on 16 May unless management withdraws a threat of compulsory redundancy. A six-day rolling strike will bring workers at each of the college’s three centres out on one of the days. 84% of voting members supported strike action when the University and College Union held its ballot at Sheffield College last month.

SOUTHAMPTON

All three unions organising at Southampton City Council could move to strike action in a battle against cuts.

The £25 million cuts passed by the council in February will see all workers earning more than

£17,500 (65% of the council’s staff) face a pay cut, and 285 jobs axed.

GMB members voted by 91% in March to oppose the plans and the union said it would move to a ballot for strike action. This week, Unison returned a 56% majority in favour of strike action. A ballot result from Unite is due soon.

POSTAL WORKERS

London postal workers will ballot against the closure of several London workplaces.

These include the south London Nine Elms office and the giant Rathbone Place site, the closure of which would result in the loss of 3,000 jobs.

The Communication Workers’ Union ballot will run from 13 to 23 May.

Elsewhere in the industry, postal workers in Liverpool took wildcat action after six workers were dismissed for following an incorrect instruction.

THANET FOODS

Unite is continuing a campaign of demonstrations against Marks & Spencer and Tesco, in protest at exploitation at Thanet Foods, the Kent-based agricultural producer that supplies them (along with Sainsbury and Asda).

Despite Thanet promising in 2009 that it would create 500 jobs locally, most of its workers are agency staff employed in what Unite calls “a system of permanent casualisation.”

Due to competition between two employment agencies operating in Thanet’s pack house, a rota system was scrapped and workers are forced to phone their agency every day to see if there is work available.

Unite demonstrated at the flagship stores of M&S and Tesco in London’s West End on 5 May.

New left caucus in Unite

By Bill Davies

Grass Roots Left (GRL), which emerged from Jerry Hicks’ campaign in the Unite General Secretary election, has officially launched itself as an organisation.

A meeting of around 40 activists on 7 May decided that their main focus initially would be organising within Unite but that they hoped to help build similar groupings within other unions too.

The existing broad left caucus in the the union, United Left, is closely linked with the dominant (now, after the general secretary election, more heavily dominant) section of the Unite bureaucracy. However, a large number of good rank and file reps

and activists continue to support and identify with the United Left. Most GRL supporters were not keen to acknowledge this fact (highlighting instead the more indefensible bureaucratic behaviour of United Left officials) but Jerry Hicks effectively acknowledged it in saying how highly he regarded Rob Williams (despite him supporting McCluskey in the election).

The Grass Roots Left’s strength is in its avowed commitment to independent rank-and-file organisation, union democracy and militant action.

Its weakness may lie in a reluctance to work with others in Unite (particularly some activists who supported Len McCluskey) who share a similar perspective.

Teachers strike to save jobs

By Gemma Short

It’s 11 days of strike action and counting for National Union of Teachers (NUT) members at Rawmarsh School in Rotherham, and they’re showing no sign of giving in.

Teachers are fighting against job losses. Strike action has already brought redundancies down from 25 to two.

One of the jobs which remains under threat is that of the school’s NUT rep (surprise, surprise). NUT members weren’t about to give in and let management have their final revenge, so before Easter they voted to continue action until the rep’s job was safe.

Two days of strike action last week have so far provided no response from management; members are prepared to continue their action if necessary.

The action the members at Rawmarsh have taken should be an inspiration to the labour movement. It has shown how struggle can strengthen the union.

More important, it has started to show what sort of union we need; that turning individual case-work into collective action can beat redundancies.

John Dalton, the Divisional Secretary of Rotherham NUT said:

“It is unfair that teachers should lose their jobs and pupils’ education should suffer because of the failures of those whose job it is to manage the school.

“NUT members are fighting for their jobs and children’s education — the two are inseparable.”

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Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Syria: the labour movement must speak out!

By Rhodri Evans

The Assad dictatorship in Syria is going for endgame. It wants to crush the people's revolt now, with whatever violence that takes.

Despite some small mutinies, the armed forces are standing with Assad, not splitting as in Libya or turning against the dictator as the Egyptian army turned against Mubarak and the Tunisian against Ben Ali.

The big powers, while deploring the repression, are too anxious about their difficulties in Libya to want to get much involved. With most news from Syria blocked by the regime, media coverage is low-key.

Too much of the left is more interested in repeating its familiar "NATO out!" slogans about Libya than in any solidarity with the people of Syria (or Libya).

The methods of the Assad regime have been described by Cal Perry of Al Jazeera, reporting on a demonstration near Deraa at the end of April: "I could see clearly a crowd of people marching from my left to my right over

Demonstrating before the crackdown

the bridge. Suddenly gunfire rained into the crowd. The truck drivers dove for cover. And, for what seemed like an eternity, I sat there in the car, stunned and frozen. People were falling on top of each other, being cut down like weeds in a field by what I think must have been a mix of both small arms fire and machine gun fire. I saw at least two children shot. They fell immediately. People were screaming. Gunfire rattled on...

"This was unlike anything I had ever seen. After covering seven separate

wars in as many years, I've never seen people march directly into a hail of gunfire".

And now the regime thinks it can finish off the revolt. (Or this revolt, at least. Whatever Assad does in the next week, the people of Syria will rise again, sooner or later).

On Monday 9 May, government representative Bouthaina Shaaban claimed that the regime had "gained the upper hand over a seven-week uprising". Echoing Qaddafi's rants against the revolt in Libya, she demonised the rebels as "a

combination of fundamentalists, extremists, smugglers, people who are ex-convicts and are being used to make trouble".

Tanks are in the cities of Baniyas, Homs, and Tafas. A human rights advocate in Homs told the *New York Times*: "They [the regime] want to finish everything this week".

In those cities and in Damascus too, the army has raided hundreds of houses over the last few days. Thousands of people (according to Syrian exiles), or at least 350 (according to Amnesty International) have been rounded up over the last few days in Baniyas, and put under guard in a soccer field.

Syrian oppositionists able to get Internet access have stated their demands, reported in the French newspaper *Le Monde*:

"Stop firing on demonstrators. Let peaceful demonstrations take place. Take down all the public portraits of yourself and your father. Free all the political prisoners. Start a national dialogue. Allow political pluralism, and organise free and democratic elections within six months".

Strike threat forces Tube bosses to retreat

Victimised Tube driver and union rep Eamonn Lynch has been reinstated to a station job with no loss of salary (he can reapply for his driver's job after two years). He had won his Employment Tribunal.

For Arwyn Thomas, the other victimised rep, London Underground bosses have committed to "legal discussions" with a view to resolving the case before his Employment Tribunal is due to announce its decision.

As Solidarity went to press on 10 May, the strikes on London Underground due to begin on Monday 16 May were suspended by a big majority vote of the Train Grades strike committee.

11 This represents at least a partial victory for the RMT and a managed climb-down on the part of LUL bosses.

The decision to suspend the strikes will be reviewed on Monday 16 May and, if Arwyn Thomas has not been reinstated by that time, strikes will be put back on. The following article was written before the strikes were suspended.

By Eamonn Lynch

With hindsight, escalating the dispute was the correct course of action, but at the time it was a very brave and courageous decision to take.

Both the Executive member, Janine Booth and the Regional Organiser Steve Hedley must be congratulated for their part in escalating across the combine. Historically, taking a dispute about victimisation from the local area to across the region has never been done successfully, but the determination of our activists has delivered the mandate for strike action.

The importance of this decision cannot be underestimated. LUL [London Underground Limited] had previously shown scant regard for strike action taken on both the Bakerloo and Northern Lines; we had to send a clear and decisive message to our bosses that an attack on RMT union reps was not acceptable.

Allowing our reps to be sacked without challenge would result in a more belligerent and ruthless management structure, with workers reluctant to put themselves forward to represent union members. This would undermine the years of struggle to build effective and independent trade unions.

Eamonn Lynch

I am immensely proud that my union and the members have demonstrated such solid support, but it should come as no surprise; throughout this ordeal the members of the RMT have offered great solidarity and shown that they are the best women and men can be.

Every victory against the employer should be celebrated. This victory is hugely significant and possibly one of the most important judgements from Tribunal in recent history.

Equally important is the victory at Tribunal gives us more confidence in securing a win for Arwyn Thomas at his ET in May.

Without a shadow of doubt, success in this campaign could put management on the back foot more generally. We have bought the whole region together, showing the benefits of well-organised and well-orchestrated disputes.

It is fair to say that following the jobs cuts dispute, our morale was fairly flat and management were exploiting that. The campaign for our reinstatement has demonstrated the willingness of the RMT to stand up for their members. LUL would do well to take notice of this.

Boris Johnson's call for new anti-union laws is deeply hypocritical. Did over 50% of Londoners vote for the current Mayor? 2008 election turnout was 45%.

What about the current ConDem Government? Less than 36% voted for this shower. At local council level, the average turnout for elections 35%.

We should not be surprised that the ConDems wish to distract attention away from the swingeing cuts currently taking effect.

Would this desire to prevent workers striking be as a result of workers in general realising they can make a difference if they get organised and mount effective fight back campaigns? The anti-cuts march and the RMT's stance on my and Arwyn's cases have shown the way forward.

It's better to go down fighting than meekly walk away and accept

Emergency demonstration against state repression in Tunisia

Friday 13 May, 5.30-8pm

Tunisian national tourist office, 77A

Wigmore Street, London W1U 1QF

For more information read page 10 or

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