Benefit cuts could lead to a million evictions

CAP RENTS ● BUILD ONE MILLION MORE COUNCIL HOUSES ● STOP THE CUTS

See page 3
**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 struggles.

**We stand for:**

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers’ government, based on and accountable to the strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression.
- Fullequality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full legal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.
- Black and white workers’ unity against racism.
- Workplace or community to global social organisation.
- 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!

**Support the Vita Cortex factory occupation!**

**By Liam McNulty**

Workers at the Vita Cortex factory in Cork, Ireland, have been occupying the plant since 16 December.

They are refusing to leave without the €1.2 million compensation promised in September when Vita Cortex management announced plans to move production to Athlone, County Westmeath.

They rejected a subsequent offer of €1.50 each, calling it “scorched-earth,” and vowed to continue occupying the foamy rubber plant until they received the payments, amounting to 2.9 weeks per year of service for each worker.

The factory occupation has caught the imagination of local workers, and hundreds of supporters have joined a solidarity demonstration on 2 January. It has also caught the imagination of Occupy Cork activists who have occupied an unused building on Oliver Plunkett Street in the city, with plans to turn it into a community resource centre.

Speaking to Solidarity, Occupy activist Eoghan MacMahlon said: “The Occup y movement in Cork is fully behind these workers. We were thrilled to see direct action like this happen, as it shows the Irish people are beginning to wake up and say no, this isn’t right.”

He also expressed scepticism about the protest of support from trade union leaders, noting that “Ireland’s trade unions have been far too resistant to actually mobilising people in the last few years and resisting the cuts. Too many people are too comfortable in the union bureaucracy to really rock the boat.”

The workers have received support from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) general secretary, David Begg, and from the president of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), Jack O’Connor, who visited the factory on Christmas Eve and promised to “mob ilise” the SIPTU’s members in the new year.

Begg and O’Connor have been central to the so-cia l partnership “Croke Park Agreement”. As the general secretary of the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants, Dave Thomas, gushed recently to the Irish Times, social-partnership has meant that “for almost two years—despite the sacrifices that have been made, the cuts endured and the impact of previous reductions in pay and entitlements—the Republic has, in large part, enjoyed industrial peace.”

It is a tragic commentary on the state of parts of the Irish labour movement and the workers’ parties that he saw this as a good thing(!) rather than a dis astrous shake on the labour movement.

Workers should not take the assurances of Ireland’s union bureaucrats at face value. If workers really want to help the Vita Cortex workers they should establish a campaign—of course, on the trade unions but more importantly, on rank-and-file structures inde pendent of the bureaucracy.

**Abridged from: bt/17/24456**

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**Drive out cosmetic surgery business!**

**By Vicki Morris**

The French state is offering to remove the breast implants of 30,000 French women who got implants from Poly Implant Prothése (PIP).

The company has folded after revelations that it used industrial-grade instead of medical-grade silicone in its implants.

Around 40,000 UK women also have PIP implants. The UK government has said that it will remove implants for those women who want it if they had the implants as part of treatment on the NHS. These women will be cancer patients who have had reconstructive surgery.

This only accounts for 5 per cent of those affected. For the 95 per cent of women who got their PIP implants from private companies, overwhelmingly for cosmetic reasons, the government is offering little. They say there is no clear proof that there is a clinical need for removal, and that women should discuss the issue with their private provider if they want removal.

The government will not force private surgeons to remove implants, and has simply urged the private companies to “step up to the plate”, and perform their “moral duty” to provide aftercare to patients. In many cases, the government knows, this simply will not happen, in a few cases because the surgeons have gone out of business, in most because the companies will not accept liability.

Much of the cosmetic surgery industry does not act in a moral fashion. This burgeoning industry is unregulated. The growing number of prosecutions by customers who have been badly advised or had procedures bungled demonstrates that most of the providers are simply in it for the money and not because they care about their clients/patients.

Immediately, the government should offer to women who have had private procedures the same options they are giving NHS patients: consultation and removal of implants should be the women’s choice. The government should hasten their investigations into the safety or otherwise of PIP implants. It should move immediately to regulate the cosmetic surgery industry.

On the broader issues raised by this scandal, socialists should fight against all the conditions that lead women and men to decide to undergo medically useless, and potentially dangerous, cosmetic surgery procedures, including but not limited to breast enlargement.

**New Unionism: how workers can fight back**

Saturday 18 February 2012, 11:30-5:30
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book tickets online: workersliberty.org/newunionism

In the late 1800s, workers (often unskilled or semi-skilled, often migrants and often working in casualised and precarious environments) organised militant industrial unions to fight back against their bosses. Socialists activists like Eleanor Marx, Tom Mann and Will Thorne were crucial to the struggles.

Faced with increasingly similar conditions today, can we build a New Unionism for the 21st century that transforms and revolutionises the modern labour movement?

**Speakers/sessions include:**

- Louise Raw, author of Striking A Light, on the Bryant & May matchwomen’s strike of 1902
- Colin Waugh (Editorial Board, Post-16 Educa tor, and author of a pamphlet on the Plevs League) on independent working-class education
- New Unionism and the fight for working-class political representation
- New Unionism 2012
- The Troublemakers’ Handbook: reading Labor Notes’ guide to organising at work

**Tickets:** E15 (waged), E8 (low-waged), E4 (unwaged)
Miliband has taken the Tory benefit cuts as a cue to flag pensions as a key to flagging the benefits. Three facts add up an even whacker Labour stance on cuts.

By Patrick McCabe

In London, the Government’s cap on Housing Benefit payments means social cleansing, akin in its severity to the High Anglican Clauses. Large areas of the city will become unaffordable for working-class people, and whole boroughs will be gutted by the deterrence of affordable housing.

Under the government’s proposals, 80% of privately rented houses will be unaffordable by 2016. Around 360,000 households are on housing waiting lists, and rents are rising at 6 per cent a year because of increases for rent.

A two-bedroom flat in London now costs £1,600 a month on average. Research by Shelter which shows that almost seven million people are relying on credit in some form to help pay their housing costs — payday loans, unauthorised over-drafts, other loans or credit cards. And as work

80% of homes unaffordable by 2016

By Patrick McCabe

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Inequality facts

- On current trends, only one-third of people will retain good health until 68 (soon, on Government plans, to be pension age). Some will not live to see that age while others will be suffering from a life-limiting physical or mental disability.
- The average gap in disability-free life expectancy between the poorest and the richest neighbourhoods is 17 years. In other words, top managers have a good chance of reaching 68 disability-free, few workers do.
- Average gross earnings for full-time workers in all occupational groups fell by 5.9% in real terms between April 2007 and November 2011. In 37 occupational groups the decline was over 15%. bit.ly/9q7FvA
- Directors of the top 100 companies saw their average total earnings jump 49 percent in 2010-11. bit.ly/sx5WKe
- Average earnings of top-100 bosses have risen from 47 to 102 times average earnings since 2000.
- British companies are holding cash on their balance sheets worth 7 per cent of gross domestic product (about £70 billion). bit.ly/7OBv2H
Bolsheviks could have granted Kronstadt demands

Paul Hampton is wrong in his analysis of the events which led to the place of Kronstadt as a member of the Labour Party.

Bolsheviks could have granted Kronstadt demands.

- Bloody, exhausted, half-starved, facing a ruined economy and the defeat of the Revolution in Europe, the Bolsheviks had retained state power. They could have negotiated and compromised with Kronstadt. But an offer of media compromise with Kronstadt was rejected.

- The revolt had been sparked off by the brutal suppression of strike by freezing and hungry Petrograd workers, itself a grave error. The Bolsheviks continued to be guilty not only of arrogance and ineptitude, particularly on the part of Kalinin, chair of the All-Russian Central Executive Committeee, and compromised with Kronstadt. But an offer of media compromise with Kronstadt was rejected.

- The Bolsheviks had to face the support of the majority of workers they would have won the new elections.

- Instead on March, misled by disinformation, the Petrograd Soviet proposed a motion proposed by Zinoviev that Kronstadt surrender or be crushed.

- On March, 1921 a mass meeting of 16,000 Kronstadt sailors asked for new elections by secret ballot to the Soviets, freedom of speech and the press for the workers and peasants, freedom of assembly of trade unions and peasant organisations, liberation of Socialist political prisoners, equalisation of rations and their payment, the right to forage in the countryside for food. These demands could have been granted by the Bolsheviks. If they had retained the support of the majority of workers they would have won the new elections.

Bolsheviks and democracy

What puzzles me most about Martyn Hudson’s polemics on the Bolshevik regime is his apparent assumption that the Bolsheviks’ problem was a lack of concern for democracy which we, retrospectively, could easily set right on. If only they had valued democracy more, everything would have been fine.

That makes no historical sense. The Bolshevik cadres of the civil war years had spent decades battling the Tsarist regime under the banners of “social democracy” and “conquest of socialism”.

Until 1917, most of them believed that radical democracy was the most their efforts could win in Russia, in the foreseeable term. Socialism could follow only after a democratic revolution and a spate of bourgeois-democratic rule.

Bolshevik activists had to give up family, job prospects, and any sort of security. They would almost certainly get arrested and exiled.

So why did they do that? The prizes for which those Bolshevik activists fought, and most of the political demands for which they fought, were democratic. They had a passion for democracy much outstripping that of anyone brought up in the conditions of stable, stodgy bourgeoisie democracy in Britain.

The Bolsheviks were democrats, but revolutionaries, not democrats for democracy’s sake. The Kronstadt rebels opposed the Bolsheviks’ demand for workers’ democracy. The Kronstadt rebels opposed the Bolsheviks’ demand for workers’ democracy.

They knew that soviet rule could be won and consolidated only by combat. With much misgiving, the civil war convinced them that the workers’ rule could be defended, and the chances kept alive of a Europe-wide workers’ revolution which would enable workers’ democracy to flower and stabilise, only by vigour and ruthlessness.

They could not allow the civil war to determine a general with troops on the outskirts of St Petersburg planned to overrun them in a night attack, which, if then attacked any regular state machine or armed defence.

At Kronstadt fell on March. As the sailors, soldiers and workers died with the words “long live the world revolution on” their lips. Many of those slaughtered then realised they had been duped. Few would survive the purges of the thirties.

On March the Bolsheviks celebrated the anniversary of the Paris Commune as the Cheka shot prisoners.

The bloody suppression of Kronstadt, something which could have been avoided, was the first step on the road of counter-revolution which led in less than a decade to the triumph of the totalitarian Stalinist Thered.

Terry Little, South London

Kronstadt demands were revolutionary

Paul Hampton concedes (Solidarity 228) that the Kronstadt sailors did not have the votes to demand a link to the Third Congress and that they supported the Bolsheviks in the Civil War.

He also concedes that the sailors’ “wished equal rights into political privilege”. Having not voting rights, they were “political demanding” to the peasantry”; demands any left-wing could sympathise with, and demands which Paul states were introduced “in order to divide the peasantry”.

The Bolsheviks agreed with these demands then what is the justification for militarily oppressing them? The demand for fair rations at the expense of bureaucratic privilege is a demand the Bolsheviks should not only have supported, but they should not have allowed a situation to develop in which the demand would be necessary.

Paul describes the harshness of the sailors’ repression as “essentially secondary in retrospect”. Why? The harshness of the repression reflects the Bolshevik depression in finding a ready means to the rule of the people? On what democracy that Leninists often offer the Bolsheviks is out of sync with the revolution’s demands. The Bolsheviks did not make a show admiration of those who were against the repression of the Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks abolished the Constituent Assembly in favour of soviet democracy, which is consistent with the demands of the workers and peasants. Low-level Bolsheviks opposed Bolshevik party rule within the soviet, that is an anti-Bolshevik, not anti-revolutionary, demand. The Kronstadt rebels were not counter revolutionaries, even if their dissent would have lead counter revolutionaries to act against the workers’ government. The sailors fought on the side of the Bolsheviks, so why could they not have their demands granted?

Political and tactical arguments among comrades fighting on the same side in the same interests must and be won by reasoning and democratic decision making. The Kronstadt sailors’ demands were consistent with the working class politics that brought the 1917 revolution about. This “blameless” is just a demonstration of Bolshevik hypocrisy.

The rebels used a “strategically important base, with other armed rebellions simmering to the south”, indicating that there was a lot of potential for horizontal power which to have their demands met: arms, and the possibility of triggering a spontaneous rising in other districts. Any attempt at persuasion for crushing the sailors then also becomes the justification for Bolsheviks preventing further dissent; they could not allow the power of the activities in order to secure...the rule of the people? On what democratic basis does the Bolsheviks then rule?

By 1921 was a vote to boycott the Third Congress a political liability. That Leninists often offer the Bolsheviks is out of sync with the revolution’s demands. The Bolsheviks did not make a show admiration of those who were against the repression of the Bolsheviks.

If armed force is what it takes to suppress demands for workers’ equality, then the “unravelling” of “tenious forms of workers’ self-rule” has already begun.

Hannah Thompson, Hackney
Pensions: what's gone wrong?

As Solidarity goes to press on 10 January, the public-sector pensions battle is in the balance.

Many unions have expressed dissent with the “final” Government proposals of 19 December. In fact, it seems that the only actual union objections on a document are the signatures of Unison, GMB and Unite on a joint document with local government employers, and Unite has withdrawn that. Aside from that, even the union leaders keenest to put a lid on the issue are saying no more than that they will negotiate with the Government on its new terms and suspend action in the meantime.

Trouble is, that is enough for the Government. If the union troops are closed down, even with declarations that unions “reserve the right to take further action” such as the civil-service union Prospect has made, then the Government will impose increased pension contributions for teachers, health workers, and civil service workers from April 2012. Over the next months it will nail down measures consolidating the four-tier public sector pensions plan and start.

● Pensions increased as prices rise only by the CPI index, end our sources of funds. That’s why we’re launching an were previously raised; and thus reduced by 15% after 2020.

(That was enforced from April 2011).

● We need money contributions by workers.

● The age at which workers can claim full pensions raised to 66 by 2018–20, to 67 by 2026–28, and to 68 by 2044–46. (The Government’s plans on this have got worse, not better, since the union campaign started.)

● Pensions changed from “final salary” to “career average”, with the method of calculating “average” and the accrual rate (fraction of career-average, or final-salary, won by each year’s contributions) set so that this means a big drop in pensions.

CLOUT

The chances for shifting that depend on the more defi-

citions, in June 2010, and implement it from April 2011.

sions soonafter the May 2010 general election.

The AWL is growing. We now publish Solidarity weekly, settle with new brands from the expanding all of our ac-

tivity. If we are going to continue this, we also need to ex-

Pensions strike demonstration, 30 November 2011

Unison leader Dave Prentis said that Tony pension-cut plans would be met by a “big national strike”, “military”, and “social dislocation”, back in April 2010, even before the general election.

Mark Serwotka, leader of the PCS civil service union, predicted in December 2010 that there would be “mass indus-

trial action” by April 2011.

In fact, aside from two days of strikes by the lecturers’ union UCU in March 2011, the unions organised no action until 30 June 2011, and most of them not until 30 November 2011.

To call the union leaders’ campaign “snail’s pace” would be too generous. Snails at least keep moving. Both on 30 June and 30 November the strikes were organised with no clear plans for follow-up. Workers were une, on strike, then told to go back to work with no further perspective other than to watt and see if the union leaders might summon them to a further one-day strike some months later.

Between 30 June and 30 November the “campaign” amounted to little more than waiting to see when, or indeed whether, the union leaders would call the next one-day strike. There was little action even on the level of demon-

strations or meetings or leaflettings. Proposals from Work-

ers’ Liberty and other left-wingers for strike levies and rolling and selective action between the one-day “spectacu-

lars” were rejected by many others on the left as well as by the union leaders.

That made the campaign also too narrow. The National Union of Teachers decided to run a campaign for “Fair Pen-

sions for All”, linking the public-sector issues with the si-

multaneous and linked attacks on the state pension and private-sector pensions. But the campaign existed only on paper, and not much even there. No union made an effort to raise the whole working-class public on the broad issue of pensions.

This is a great start, let’s build on it!

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We also raised £140 at the London AWL Christmas social. This is a great start, let’s build on it!

Lack of union democracy and scope for rank-and-file has been the core weakness of the dispute. If that can be remedied, it will make the means to cure the other weaknesses.

SOLIDARITY 5

PICKLES

Eventually, in December 2011, the local government unions told their members that they had signed a deal with the local government employers — but “could not” tell their members what the deal was, even after it had been signed, because government minister Eric Pickles had not yet approved it.

Union leaders complain that organisation is often weak, and so the unions could not attempt the more militant tactics which Workers’ Liberty and other left-wingers advocated. Even the leaders’ method of running the campaign ran di-

rectly in the opposite direction.

There was no self-controlled, rank-and-file action, only one-day “spectaculars”. On the days of action, union offi-
cers at various unions ran rallies rather than proper meetings where strikers could debate their action and propose ideas about the next step.

The unions were weak enough that informing their mem-
bers on the issues even if it was true would not be enough. In fact, it is common to find union members, union activists even, who are vague about what an accrual rate is, or how the “funded” local government pension scheme differs from the others, or how CPI varies from RPI.

Evidently the union leaders’ assumption was such mat-

ters “go over the heads” of members, and are best left to the officials, though many of their members deal with more complex ideas, or teach them to teenagers, every day of the week.
**By Sacha Ismail**

That Gary Dobson and David Norris have been jailed for the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 was for the people who loved him, some sort of justice. But as Doreen Lawrence has pointed out it cannot be the end of the matter.

The details of the Stephen Lawrence case and the inquiries and investigations which followed have been thoroughly revisited recently but the lessons of this lethal story are still resounding. Two things stand out.

The police have not — as some pundits would have it — made “good progress” since Stephen’s death. They are still incompetent, racist, corrupt, thuggish and a bureaucratic obstruction on state. Backed up by the criminal justice system, the police marginalise, alienate and if necessary repress working-class people, both black and white.

Vicious racist attacks have not decreased. According to the Institute of Race Relations, there have been 96 deaths by racially motivated violence since 1993, the most recent the murder of Aruj Buld in Salford. Yet there is very little media analysis about what leads to these killings. It is as if, racial killings, stabbings, beatings and arson attacks... just happen. And there is very little social or political intervention to do anything about it.

Yet the roots of most violence in society is very understandable. There is the stress on and brutalisation of individuals caused by the exploitation of the poor. The more unequal the society, the more prevalent it is. The police and criminal justice system are there to both mop up the violence caused by inequality and prop up the system of inequality.

All of this was graphically highlighted in the Stephen Lawrence case.

At the time the police said they had met a “wall of silence” from the community where the killing took place, we can only guess what hampered the investigation. That was a lie. The police had good information given to them by local people. They just ignored it. People in Eltham wanted to see the small group of Asian youths they knew must be responsible for the crime brought to justice.

But what working-class people understand are experience counts for virtually nothing in society. The police are in a position to influence and they need to stay in charge. To the police ordinary people are either “criminals” or “law abiding citizens” or “types”, they are processed by a badly functioning bureaucracy.

More and more working-class people are often more aggressive and narrow-minded than the communities they say they “serve”.

**RACIAL JUSTICE**

By Rosalind Robson

On Twitter (4 January)

Diane Abbott’s comment playing ‘divide and rule’

We should not play into their hands.

IN THE NEWS

**Lessons of the Stephen Lawrence murder**

By Rosalind Robson

“I anti-white racism is a myth, but don’t defend Abbott’s politics”

By Sacha Ismail

**Solidarity**

**“Anti-white racism” is a myth, but don’t defend Abbott’s politics**

By Sacha Ismail

Shadow health minister Diane Abbott’s comment on Twitter (4 January) that “white people love playing ‘divide and rule’. We should not play their game” has just been described as “racist”.

We should oppose right-wing attempts to stigmatise an “anti-white racism” and equate it with the anti-black racism that pervades British society.

That does not mean that Abbott is a left-winger, or that her comments were unproblematic.

It seems highly unlikely that Abbott is a批判ative racist against white people. But in any case racism is not just a matter of individuals’ prejudices. It is a question of power and power relations deeply structured into really-existing capitalist society. AsGuardianjournalistDorain Lynskey pointed out on her blog 33 Reboptions Per Minute: “I can imagine a world in which Diane Abbott’s ‘twist’... would be racist. In a world where Britain is dominated, politically and economically, by an inscrutable black, working-class woman and two black men who have just been convicted, several years too late to save an inscrutable racist black police force, of the murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence. But in this world? Not really.” Shortly after the Lawrence verdict, there seem to be right-wing attempts to use Abbott’s comments to “balance things out”. Their implicit message is: “yes, there is anti-black racism in society, but what about anti-white racism?”

And as for Ed Miliband’s nay to Abbott a “re-versing down”, it is in the spirit of his bent towards goonvelling at the slightest right-wing whisper.

At the same time, we should not uncritically defend Abbott. She was specifically using the “divide and rule” trope to attempt to silence another black person who disagreed with her — journalist and blogger Kim Dowd, who had objected to being treated of the term “the black community” and exploitation.
By Jonny Keyworth

Protests in Nigeria over the removal of the fuel subsidy have created a strong presence on the streets. The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) represents over 8 million workers and launched an indefinite general strike on Monday 9 January. An articulate movement has started to evolve on the streets of the main cities of Nigeria, yet police violence is already making the development of this movement difficult. It also is yet to be seen whether traditional forms of workers’ organisation can complement the Federation of Independent Workers of Nigeria (FIWN), which represents a large number of workers in the informal sector.

The NLC has a checkered past, often acting in collaboration with elites, but is also joined on the streets by the Joint Action Group (JAG), the umbrella body of pro-labour civil society movements which has a much more militant stance than the NLC. The NLC’s claim that “our people are prepared for a revolution” seems rather overstated at the present moment.

The call to national identity and cohesion seen in Tunisia and Egypt is less likely to be a mobilising force in Nigeria due to the deep religious and ethnic divides, but organised (and unorganised) labour is a threat running from North to sub-Saharan Africa.

India continued to have fumigations under British rule right up to independence, they disappeared suddenly with the establish- ment of a multi-party democracy. Europe’s cuts today are not at famine levels. But the same principle holds. A recent government report of a federal united Europe, facing an informed Europe-wide public opinion, could not get away with the idea that the answer to the crisis is to squeeze the poorest people of Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, and Italy harder and harder.

Democracy

The European Parliament has no say in this crisis. The decisions, powers of the EU will not agree to eurobonds. Eurobonds would allow countries to escape the vicious circle which they currently face in the financial markets, where they have very high interest rates, and run some risk of eventually not being able to borrow at any price, because financiers fear that they may not repay; and they run a risk of not being able to repay because it is difficult and expensive for them to borrow fresh. They are not a cure-all, if only because by injecting new powers do come to agree with them, that will be only if linked to harsher cuts; but the Parliament’s proposal is an indication that even a quarter-democratic discussion of the crisis is possible to come with answers different from those being imposed now. The dominant powers of the EU are going for years of 1930s-style depression for the worst-off countries, and maybe for the better-off ones too, and the blighting of millions of lives, on the assumption that eventually all the cuts in social overhead costs will persuade proletarians to launch into large productive investments again and solve economic blight. The priority, as Angela Merkel put it in December, is to show [a] [global capital] that Europe is serious.

Both troubled European governments and European banks need to borrow vast amounts of money in 2012 to cover re- payments due on previous borrowing. There is a serious risk that one or another eurozone state will become unable to borrow enough at any price, and thus unable to meet its promised re-

payments. That could crash the eurozone and bring down major banks. Economically, it will be like the Lehman Brothers collapse of 2008, only on a bigger scale. Politically, it is unlikely to do to the European Union, but it will set back and obstruct the eurozone in its efforts to come up with new rules on the back- ing of countries in Europe, a process which the labour movement should value and defend even while we oppose the current poli- cies, structures, and meth- ods of the EU.

Socialists should work for unity of the labour movement across Eu- rope, around a common programme of making the bankers and bosses pay for their crisis and a united democratic Eu-

lism. Christians have been seen protecting Muslim protesters whilst they pray, with Muslims returning the act of solidarity. It will thus be interesting to see how a protest movement could work to quell these historic divisions.

How will the govern- ment of president Good- luck Jonathan respond? The police repression seen in the Ogbia suburb of Lagos shows that the threat of Boko Haram to security, coupled with a growing protest movement, means the Jonathan government is backed into a corner and is retreating in force. The rest of the Nigerian political elite are now turning on the gov- ernment, the House of Representatives voted for a resolution calling for the restoration of the subsidy. Let protest of pro- testers is increasing and shows that the Jonathan government is intent on crushing the movement in its tracks, as issues beyond the fuel subsidy are being sewn into the dispute and are smothering into a di- rect confrontation with the Nigerian state.

By Rhodri Evans

On 6 January, the elected but obscure Eu- ropean Parliament inter- ved on a new set of discussions on the new treaty under discussion after the 9 December euro-summit to ask that it include a “roadmap” towards introducing the Parliament’s favoured policy of eurobonds. Eurobonds would be a mechanism for eurozone states to borrow, in euros, with a guarantee of credit-worthiness based on the whole EU’s resources. The Parliament’s initiative was a sign that there were even a quarter-democratic political sys- tem uniting the whole of Europe, the current course of trying to work through the economic crisis by im- posing harsher and harsher pain on the conti- nent’s poorer people could not happen.

Many years back, the In- dian economist Amartya Sen wrote: “Famine is an event that if there is a serious effort to do so, and a democratic political system, facing elections and crit- icisms from opposition par- ties and independent newspapers, cannot help but make such an effort. Not surprisingly, while the unions’ policies despite the evidence that they are not the policies that will restore Labour in Scot- land or the UK. They weren’t in 1979 and they are not now.”

Right now the anti-unite right wing newspapers will feel emboldened to attack the party’s links with the unions in the name of “democracy”. The fact that the Party is now led at both national and Scottish levels by two singularly lacklustre fig- ures will only encourage the right-wingers to argue that giving unions a say in party leadership elec- tions undermines Labour’s character of being the To- ries and the SNP.

The SNP and the party and the unions need to tackle arguments against the unions head-on.

Trade unions set up the Labour Party, are its main source of income, and pro- vide additional human and financial resources at elec- tion times. That’s why they have a say in Labour Party affairs.

The real undemocratic element in Labour’s elec- toral college is that 300 plus parliamentarians have the same share of the vote as millions of trade union- ist and the entire individ- ual members of the party.

The real threat to democracy if the Labour Party does come from the unelected party officials who control the selection contests and party confer- ences, not the elected dis- sident voices in the party.

Labour has los- es because of its poor performance in power. The leadership contest provided an opportunity for candidates to campaign against current trade union input into the party. Only Tom Harris chose to do so — winning a decisive share of the vote as a result.

It is true that SNP MPs are now on the Labour’s links with the unions. But that does not mean that there is a prob- lem with such links. What is does mean is that the SNP (and the Tories) have an anti-trade-union agenda.

• Rather than the scrapping or weakening of Labour’s links with the unions, what is needed is to forge a closer link between the unions and the party at all levels — from the branches through to the Parlia- mentary Labour Party.
By Martin Thomas

Public sector union committees, branches, and workplace groups should call emergency meetings to reject the sell-out on pensions outlined at the TUC public sector group meeting on 19 December. So far, only the PCS, Northern Irish public service union NIPSA and Unite (after initially signing up to a “Principles Document” with Unison, GMB and the Local Government Employers) have decisively rejected the deal.

Unison’s Local Government Service Group Executive voted by 24-10 on 10 January to accept the deal. Its Higher Education SGE also voted to accept, and its Health SGE voted to consult (but not formally ballot) members on the issue. In advance of the meeting, Health SGE member and Workers’ Liberty member Alison Brown was bureaucratically prevented from attending and voting, showing the Unison leadership’s desperation to hamstring opposition to the sell-out.

Teaching unions NUT and NASUWT have said they will not “sign up”, but have stopped short of a decisive rejection and have not called further action. An NUT Executive meeting on Thursday 12 January could change that. Unions should reject the deal because the Government has not shifted a millimetre on any of its main plans for public sector pensions.

- a 3.2 percentage point increase in contributions by 2014/15: the Government has already announced that the increased contributions will start for teachers and civil servants from April 2012;
- pegging the pension age for public sector employees to the state pension age, which will increase to 67 by 2026 and then on to 70, faster than was planned when the talks on public sector pensions began;
- switching the uprating of benefits from the RPI rate of inflation to CPI, which runs about 0.8% lower, reducing the value of a pension by 15% after 20 years. The Government has already introduced this shift, from April 2011.
- The RPI-CPI switch gives a twist to the fourth main Government aim: switching all public sector workers to career-average from final-salary schemes.

A switch to career-average is not necessarily bad. But it all depends on the details of the inflation rate at which bygone years’ wages are upgraded to calculate the average, and on the “accrual rate”, the percentage of career-average acquired by each year’s contribution.

The civil service union PCS points out: “Career average salary is calculated by taking a percentage of each annual salary and up-rating it by inflation. By cutting the inflation indicator from RPI to CPI, the government at a stroke reduced the value of...” Only then would a much better accrual rate can a career average scheme be as valuable as a final-salary one.

In short, public-sector workers will:

- have more taken out of their pay in pension contributions — £100 a month more for even middle-range workers, on top of the continued cuts in real wages recently announced by the Government;
- have to work longer for their pensions, often much longer; workers who can now retire at 60 may have to work until 67 as early as 2020;
- get worse pensions.

What’s new? On 19 December a number of union leaders, without consulting even their union executives, effectively, via the media, told the principal personages of the pensions drama, the rank and file workers and the Government, that the campaign was over. Why?

The Government had rearranged some of the detail, not improved it. On 2 November it had already conceded no immediate contributions increase for the lower-paid and protection (though not from the RPI-to-CPI shift) for workers retiring within the next ten years.

On 19 December its main shift was to be better “accrual rates” for the civil service, teachers’ and teachers’ schemes, balanced by a worse method of calculating “career average”.

The accrual rate is the fractions of career-average pay you earn each year of your year’s contributions. These are to be 1/34 for the NHS, 1/44 for the civil service, 1/57 for teachers. The improvements are not sufficiently to “balance” the move from final-salary to career average as the amount of which you “accrue” fractions, and methods of calculation of career average which ensure a low figure. Past years’ pay will be in-flated as needed for inclusion in the average only by CPI (civil service) and CPI plus a bit (health, teachers), not by the pay inflation rate

The Government is explicit about that “the accrual rate has been improved. This has been offset by lower revaluation of accruals...”

SHIFT

In local government, there seems to be a bigger shift. The joint employers/unions document promises no contribution increases before 2014, or only small ones.

Local government pensions work through funds (workers and employers pay into the funds, fund managers invest the money, and pensions are paid out of the funds). In the civil service, teachers’ and health schemes, contributions go into, and pensions are paid out of, general Treasury revenue.

Consequently, the government is not directly bothered by contribution levels for local government workers, and has no direct power to raise them. The funds are regulated by three-yearly expert evaluation of their assets and liabilities, the next one due in 2013.

The Government is happy so long as it can cut the amount it pays from central funds to local authorities to cover the authorities’ contributions to the funds. The December deal gives the Government that cut by worsening pensions (only...
same as the old deal

A caucus of members of the National Union of Teachers at the pension activist conference called by PCS Left Unity on 7 January agreed to press NUT Executive members at their meeting on 12 January to commit the union to name a date for a further strike before 11 February and explicitly to reject the Government’s 19 December formula.

The main conference session, however, 450 strong, failed to press the PCS leadership to take an initiative for continued action against pension cuts.

PCS Left Unity (in effect, the PCS leadership) presented the meeting with a statement which called for the TUC public sector committee on 12 January to organise a further strike, but was silent about what PCS will do if the TUC committee doesn’t do that (which it won’t).

PCS vice-president John McInally said in a speech that if the TUC committee calls no action, then PCS will organise a meeting of unions which do want to fight on. That meeting, he said, would discuss further action, but beyond that he would not go.

He, and conference chair and PCS president Janice Godrich, refused to allow conference to vote on an amendment (moved by East London NUT activist and SWP member Paul McGarr) demanding PCS propose further strikes to such a post-12 January meeting, and also refused to allow any debate on a motion including similar demands and more brought to the conference by PCS Independent Left, Lambeth Unison, and other trade unionists.

The conference, unfortunately, was heavily dominated by the Socialist Party (which has hegemony in the PCS leadership), to the point that a number of obviously preset speeches were straight recruiting pitches for the SP and its TUSC front.

It started with nine platform speeches, one after the other, and allowed little scope for debate. However, the NUT caucus at least was significant, and the conference will have exerted some pressure on the SP to budge from its “no-fight-unless-someone-else-goes-first” line.

The bulk of the platform speeches were given over to celebrations of the action on 30 June and 30 November last year, and denunciations of the leaders of the TUC and right-wing unions like Unison.

Briefing on the details of the 19 December Government formula — and the “sideways shifts” in cuts which it involves — would have been useful, but was offered only in a short floor speech by Unison Executive member Jon Rogers.

The best platform speech was from UCU Executive (and SWP) member Mark Campbell: “Come next Thursday [12th], those unions that are saying no should announce a national strike day before half-term” [11 February]. The SWP has been all over the place in the pensions campaign in the last year and more — sometimes opposing picket lines and recommending strikes be made into “fun days”, sometimes opposing rolling and selective action, blathering that the answer was for everyone to “stay out” spontaneously after 30 November — but it was on the button at this meeting.

Hopes now rest on the members of the NUT Executive’s nominal left-wing majority winning their union to fight at their 12 January meeting.

If they do that, the battle of left-wingers in PCS to budge their own SP-dominated leadership will be greatly strengthened, and almost certainly other unions can be drawn in to the continued struggle.

No fight unless someone else goes first?

WEAKER

“Believes further action should be organised” is much weaker than “will organise further action”, or even “proposes further action”.

And, rather than the action being necessary until the government concedes decent pensions, according to the PCS leaders it is necessary only until the government “negotiates on the core issues” (even if it negotiates without giving substantial ground?)

If this sell-out goes through, it will give a go-ahead signal to the Government to redouble attacks on pay and jobs which are going through with minimal resistance, and probably to supplement them with outright attacks on union organisation, of the type seen with the dispute at Langdon School in Newham and with the victimisation of Northampton NUT secretary Pat Markley (see page 15).

Those attacks can only be fended off with the sort of ongoing, self-controlling campaign conducted by the NUT members at Langdon School, scaled up to national level.

1/60 accrual rate, despite a shift to “career-average”, and no commitment on valuation of past years’ pay for calculating “career average”, and bringing the worse pensions in early (2014, while it is 2015 for the other schemes).

No union leader claims to have an actual agreement. The local government “Principles Document” endorsed by Unison and the GMB (until 9 January, by Unite) is a framework for further talks (in fact, a framework that gives the government everything they wanted) rather than an actual deal.

The headline media reports — that is, the story as received by the big majority of public sector workers — are that most unions have accepted the Government terms, quit the campaign, and settled down to negotiate fine detail.

A closer look at union statements indicates that most unions have not quite accepted the Government terms. That the sell-out can best be stopped. It also means something else, though.

A firm stand by just a few combative unions could push the Government back even if every other union drops out. PCS and NUT alone alone have enough clout for that.

If a few unions take a firm stand, then they will probably rally others. But if they only demur from full-scale capitulation, have their officials weaselling that they haven’t really accepted the Government terms yet, and simultaneously but silently signal doubt about further action, then the weight of media and Government pressure will be lost.

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The question of Kronstadt defines much of the debate between Trotsky and various other Bolshevik leaders during the 1920s. Trotsky was one of the main apologists for the Bolsheviks’ role in the suppression of the Kronstadt uprising. This article explores the various perspectives on Kronstadt, and the conflicts that arose between Trotsky and other Bolshevik leaders over the question of Kronstadt.

**By Martyn Hudson**

The victory of Trotsky over Kronstadt was one of the key moments in the development of Bolshevik power. The Kronstadt rebellion was a major event in the early years of the Soviet Union, and it remains a topic of intense debate among historians. The Kronstadt debate served as a foil for the broader questions of the nature of the revolution, the role of the Bolsheviks, and the future of the Soviet Union. The Kronstadt rebellion was a significant event in the history of the Russian Revolution, and it remains a topic of intense debate among historians. The Kronstadt debate served as a foil for the broader questions of the nature of the revolution, the role of the Bolsheviks, and the future of the Soviet Union.

**DEBATE**

Victor Serge and the question of Kronstadt

**By Martin Hudson**

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The winners in Egypt’s first free election since World War Two are, in the words of prominent commentator George Cole, “the vanguard of the Tea Party and conservative religious parties, of which the largest is the Muslim Brotherhood’s ‘front’, the Freedom and Justice Party. The even more conservative Nur Party, only recently set up by the Salafist movement (which hitherto has been opposed to political involvement, and opposed the January 2011 revolution), came second. Secular parties have done badly.”

Cole comments, rather disparingly, “But until [the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces [SCAF], which has ruled Egypt since the fall of Mubarak] can be brought to the point of putting the Brotherhood on trial, let alone being willing to negotiate with it, we’re just sitting around, in a form of tautology.” (Informed Comment, 7/1/12). In other words, the main thing standing in the way of an Islamic fundamentalist state is military rule.

Cole puts forward other factors, too. But the general point raised is that whatever the “Arab Spring” has wrought, which has now resulted in two Islamist victories — in the two elections held as a result of it, Egypt and, earlier, Tunisia — is rule by Islamist parties inevitable outcome of their revolutions? And what does such rule mean?

In many ways the biggest shock of the Egyptian elections is the strong showing for the Nur Party — which has clearly rattled the Brotherhood itself. Commentators have long suspected that the Muslim Brothers were likely to win free elections in Egypt. Prior to the last — outrageously (as opposed to routinely) rigged — election, which the Brotherhood boycotted, they had 80 MPs in parliament, despite being technically illegal. They are a movement which has been organising from the grassroots and at the time of the first round January were, unarguably, the best-organised opposition in the country.

The Salafists — who consider many Egyptian Muslims to be heretics, and who have deeply conservative attitudes on matters such as women’s rights— had no organised political presence at all, indeed eschewing the very idea. The Salafists, too, have a history of “good works” in local neighbourhoods (which is one of the obligations of Islam). They are the local “ulema” — mullahs — who people, especially in rural areas, are likely to vote for.

In part this must be simply a matter of organisation. The radical youth organisations have no history or experience at all in the Islamic sphere of influence. In part the Salafists have been able to factor in the elections. The Revolution Continues Coalition, which is dominated by a split from one of the chief components of the DWP, got 4% in the first round, which is, by the standards of such things, impressive. This fell to less than 1% in the second round. (Note that “the rounds” are due to a complex combination of votes being staggered in different areas and both first-past-the-post and party list systems; they are not “rounds” in the English, or for French, menus).

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Sawiris is a billionaire. The high vote for the Nur Party will put some pressure on the Muslim Brotherhood, or rather its Freedom and Justice Party. There were signs of this during the election. The FJP had chosen, earlier, to drop the Brotherhood’s habitual slogan — “Islam is the solution” (for one thing because this is highly provocative to the Christian minority, and there have recently been fatal sectarian clashes). This slogan, however, re-emerged during the campaign, presumably in order better to compete with the Salafists. But the Brotherhood is very unlikely to form any kind of alliance with the Salafists. Its general orientation in the last year has been to support the military government. Army sluggishness regarding the democratic transition forced a turn in this policy towards the end of the year; but the Brotherhood will remain anxious to keep on good terms with the SCAF. The Brotherhood has been extremely concerned not to appear radical and dangerous, both for fear of the army’s reaction, and because it has no desire to alienate the United States (which provides the army with $1.3 billion in aid every year).

A more likely political partner would be the old-style nationalist Wafd Party (with whom they have had electoral coalitions in the past). The Brotherhood, which has worked hard to develop as a modern political movement, sees the Salafists as dinosaurs.

In any case, as Juan Cole points out, winning the election is the same as forming a government. The SCAF still holds power. The first job of the new parliament is to appoint the president. The SCAF will appoint a president. The last months of 2011 saw renewed political backing. The SCAF will appoint, in turn, looking for regional political backing. He visited Cairo where its political co-thinkers the Muslim Brotherhood are on the rise.

Ismael Haniyeh, the Hamas Prime Minister of Gaza, is on tour looking for regional political backing. He visited Tunisia on 5 January and has also been welcomed in Turkey and Egypt.

The political and economic situation for Hamas in Gaza is improving. In contrast the situation on the West Bank, run by the Palestinian nationalist organisation Fatah, is worsening. The EU states have cut back on donations, and the US Congress has frozen two-thirds of its $600m aid to punish Fatah for asking the UN to recognise a Palestinian state.

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By Dan Katz

Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group which runs Gaza, faces a party reunion soon, having been divided among three quarters of its staff out of Syria.

The Syrian regime has been the main external sponsor of Hamas and provides the group with a safe haven for key leaders. But Damascus is now in chaos, shaken by opposition protests. Hamas has now opened an office in Cairo where its political co-thinkers the Muslim Brotherhood are on the rise.

Arab Spring: impacts on Palestinians

By Dan Katz

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These are exciting times for followers of CERN and for those who believe that more knowledge about our universe is better than less. Forget faster-than-light neutrinos. The Higgs boson may have been discovered! But what is the Higgs and why was it predicted?

FOR EVERY FIELD, A BOSON

The current explanation of matter and space, the Standard Model, developed in the 1960s, is one of the most successful theories of all time (and space). It explains all the approximately 200 elementary particles that exist and how they interact with each other. Some of these particles, like protons and W vector bosons, are produced by the model and subsequently produced in CERN in the 1980s. Their masses were predicted with 99.9% accuracy using the modification developed by Peter Higgs and others in 1964.

A major failing of the early Standard Model was that it could not predict the observed masses of these particles. In deed, the Standard Model’s predictions predict that they would be zero. If you and I were as small as we in fact are but as light as ghosts. It also can’t explain dark energy and dark matter, which seem to make up about 90% of the universe. Their gravitational effect is evident but they can’t be observed.

The Higgs mechanism explained the masses of particles. In the late 1960s, Higgs and others proposed that space is permeated by a field, the Higgs field, that clings to particles, giving them the property that we call mass.

Now, it is a truism in physics that for every field there is a particle called a boson, so it was predicted that there would be a Higgs boson. Bosons transmit the field, carrying some of its energy from one place to another. The prime example of this is the photon, and the discovery of its nature shows why physicists are so keen to discover other field bosons.

In the mid 19th century, building on the discoveries of Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell showed that a changing magnetic field could induce an electric field and vice versa. And, crazily, when he multiplied the two constants associated with the electric and magnetic fields, he got the speed of light!

This means that the electric and magnetic forces are not different but are aspects of each other. Changes in each are mediated by photons of light or, conversely, light is produced by changes in electromagnetic fields. This led to the discovery of many invisible forms of “light”, such as radio waves, microwaves, and X-rays, with an enormous influence on our lives.

This is an example of the unexpected consequences of much scientific research. Physicists are trying to repeat the discovery of Maxwell in unifying two forces and discovering the particles associated with the force field. This has already been done for the electromagnetic and weak forces, the par- ticless transmitting the electroweak force being the W and Z vector bosons. So far, there has been no influence on our lives from this unification, and there may not be, but we cannot know where a discovery may take us.

WHY USE A COLLIDER TO HUNT FOR THE HIGGS?
The electromagnetic (EM) force is very strong and infinitely in extent: its associated particles, photons, are massless.

They are quite easy to produce and are therefore all around us. The weak force, though responsible for a type of radioactivity, is ... weak! It's about 7,000 times weaker than the EM force and only operates over a very short range — less than the diameter of a nucleus. Its bosons, W and Z, have a lot of mass, about 100 times a hydrogen atom, and they are very rare and short-lived. They can only be produced where there is a lot of energy, such as in a particle accelerator.

They were predicted back in 1968 and produced at CERN in 1983 in the Super Proton Synchrotron. Like the Large Hadron Collider, this smashed protons together at high speeds, converting them into pure energy, which then in a few cases “condensed” into W and Z bosons. These decayed into more stable particles in a characteristic way, enabling scientists to deduce their existence.

It wasn’t just luck that W and Z were discovered at CERN. The Higgs mechanism predicted particular masses for W and Z and it was only with the SPS that sufficient energies would be available to produce particles with these masses. CERN’s 1983 experiments were therefore a test for the Standard Model, which it passed.

The Higgs theory predicted a field and a particle, the Higgs boson. Predicting the mass of the Higgs was not straightforward but eventually most estimates settled on a value about 50% higher than the W and Z masses. Sufficient energy was not available from the SPS or from the Large Electron-Positron collider (LEP) that followed it. This had to wait for the construction of the Large Hadron Collider.

So, has the Higgs been found? If a Higgs is produced, it is predicted to decay immediately into two Z particles, which will then decay into two muons each. These are easily detected because they behave like electrons, but 200 times heavier.

So far, there have been four “events” at the predicted energy that match the predicted behaviour of the Higgs. This is not enough for the required certainty that there are not just coincidences. After all, other processes produce Z bosons, and it is not impossible for pairs of bosons to be produced at about the same time on four occasions.

After the LHC’s scheduled restart early this year, much more evidence will need to be found before the Higgs can be confirmed (and Nobel prizes awarded). However, if it is not confirmed...

* then took the square root and divided the answer into 1. For those who want to try it themselves, c = 1/(1/µρg), where µρ = 4π × 10^-10 and ρg = 8.85 x 10^-12. You should get c = 3 x 10^8 m/s — approximately.


Thatcher and the Higgs boson

Back in 1993, the Conservative Science Minister, William Waldegrave, challenged physicists to come up with an analogy for the Higgs mechanism.

Professor David Miller of UCL produced the following: “Imagine a room full of Tory party workers. Mrs Thatcher walks in and the workers near her are attracted and cluster round her, giving her a greater ‘mass’ and making it more difficult to get her moving. The party workers are like the Higgs field.

“Now imagine a rumour passing through the room. The party workers cluster round the source and as the rumour passes the cluster also moves.

“Since the clustering gave Thatcher her ‘mass’, the clusters also have mass: they represent the Higgs boson.”

- www.hep.ucl.ac.uk/~djm/higgsa.html

Stop the War disgraces itself

The Stop the War campaign, led by Stalinists and former SWPers, is discrediting itself again.

SW mobilised against the Western bombing which helped the Libyans overthrow the notorious regime of Muammar Qaddafi.

Now SW is campaigning against Western sanctions against Iran and Syria, quoting right-wing journalist Simon Jenkins to justify its stand. Jenkins says sanctions are “idiocy” and a step towards open war. In fact war on Syria looks unlikely, some sanctions may be bad, but why would socialists bother opposing sanctions such as travel bans and freezing the corruptly-gained fortunes of the Syrian leadership?

Not a single word is said in support of the democratic opposition in these countries. Not a single word indicates SW opposes the vicious regimes in these states.
Matt Cooper reviews The Iron Lady (director: Phyllida Lloyd)

Don’t think for a second that this is a political film. It is not.

The majority of the story is told in the present about an aged Margaret Thatcher, brilliantly played by Meryl Streep, defending herself against the world.

Isolated from her family by her previous single-mindedness and ambition, she is portrayed as a woman who cannot let go. This is expressed in her continued dialogue with her eight-year-old dead husband Denis (a miscast Jim Broadbent), but it is life without power that she really cannot bear.

This second dialogue, with her road to and time in power, is told in flashback.

It would be possible to criticise this as a poor and partial history, but what we are seeing is filtered through the old woman’s memory. Recollections of the 1970s seem deliberately to confine the Conservative and Labour governments. The Conservative Prime Minister from 1970-74, Edward Heath, is played by John Sessions, who appears to be reprising the role of the Labour prime minister. In 1974 it is clearly confining the public sector strike wave in the dying days of the Labour government and the Winter of Discontent of 1978-79. In Thatcher’s mind, and this is clear in the film, both Heath and Wilson failed to confront and defeat the organised working class.

This selective memory is also evident in Thatcher’s sense of her isolation as a woman.

Christopher Hitchens

(13 April 1949–15 December 2011)

By James Bloodworth

In the 1940s, George Orwell wrote that “every line of serious writing since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic Socialism, as I understand it.”

To all many right across the political spectrum like to pick and choose from Orwell according to taste, stressing either the democratic, socialist or anti-totalitarian aspect of his work at the expense of the whole — the resulting “legacy” depending very much upon the political persuasion of who is doing the accounting.

Christopher Hitchens, the one-time darling of the left, in recent years uncomfortably skated this same political dividing-line at once attracting the scorn of former comrades for his alleged shuffle to the right, while in the process gathering a substantial number of followers whose admiration rested almost entirely on the premise of him having “come to his senses”.

BLUSTER

The nature of Hitchens’s politics depended, in a similar fashion to Orwell’s, on who one was talking to.

Were Hitchens alone in rejecting the conventional left/liberal, post-9/11 perspective since 1936 has been written, against totalitarianism and for democratic Socialism, as I understand it.” But anyone looking to understand Thatcher as a class warrior for her class in the 1980s, or our class’s response to her, will have to look elsewhere.

SHADOW

Hitchens, like many British journalists of his generation, undoubtedly spent much of his career in the shadow of Orwell. He also perhaps spent a certain amount of it waiting for his very own Orwell moment — a moment where he could take on his own side in the way Orwell took on the left over the appeasement of Stalin. The problem for Hitchens, however, was that despite the bluster and fear-mongering (not to mention the genuinely repulsive politics of the Jihadi movement), Islamism was not Nazism or Stalinism; and Hitchens, however good his prose might have been, was no Orwell. In defending the gains of liberal democracy against certain enemies, Orwell was completely right.

The most important message that Hitchens left behind is perhaps the most basic one: never to talk for one’s self. The reason large numbers of people admire Hitchens is the same reason so many detest him — attacking orthodoxy, whether of left or right, is never likely to win a person as many plaudits as clinging to the shore like a Daily Telegraph editor.

We will all be worse off without the raffish demagogue, whose words and cigarette in hand, belligerently argue a point when others have long ago given up the ghost.

While many of the left were predictably quiet at the news of his passing, they will be the ones who will miss him the most, they just don’t know yet.
This is Dystopia, lady!

What world is this, sir? This is Dystopia, lady! World of hallucigenic sights And waking nightmares; Realm of Dime Remembrances And of things seen in our Bleak Imaginings.

Strange ancient worlds still threaded in This ending-time of mankind’s long pre-history: See it through the lenses of its parts, Its smaller, true and fancied, Past and present, parts, And of its pasts, If you would see it plain, And know what centuries this is: Here old as well as new: Progress and regress intertwined.

II

This is the Great Dark Civilization: Run by little-shrivelled, dishrag things, strutting, Inside a big, relentless blind machine.

This is the Western Town In the cowboys picture: robbers rule here, The sheriff and the hangman work for Crooks make and break the Law.

This is the village in the “Seven Smurfs”: Bandits force tribute From starved and half-starved people, Indifferent to the hunger cries.

Thinkers, teachers, writers, philosophers, Humanity’s recusanteffete elite, From starved and half-starved people, Gang with the bandits, To rob the hungry villagers: They steal your oat and live.

Here, the educated, knowing, clever Thinkers, teachers, writers, philosophers, Pandits, seers, prophets, Humanity’s recusant effete elite, With the brigands, hangmen, hagmen, murderers and Thieves.

Commence and its Conveniences, Are gateway alike of Law, Morality, Art; The Stockholder, his priest, Lawyer, spin-lax, And his hacking journalist, Are Moses, Marx, Mohammed, Christ. These are the things you have to recognise and know.

Here, God serves Satan The priests of the high Morality go in lockstep To make men fit to live in their allotted place, To fill and till their social slot And let their lives be lifted By the ruling lot elite.

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VI

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The Money-Changers own the Temples: Usurer-scourging Christ is jailed As a heelessl and crucified For lesser Majesty, and lesser God.

No “Do to others as you would have them do to you”, But “do to them as you would have them do to you” Might do to them, and do it first.

Thievry, robbery, chicanery, Grown old and blindly familiar, Nest deep within the social seed: Few now will call the Great Thieves, “thieves” Or name Big Thievery, “theft”.

Falling fine acidic rain, The moral culture eats At the ties and fabrics of the society That makes, remakes, sustains and poisons the rest.

VII

Lady, this is a world ruled-over By Conquestists Entrenched, still looting predatory victors, And their victims, vanquished In savage old class wars. That change in form, but do not cease: A war of social worldsrips and rages.

This is the world of Spartacy: Freedom and slavery entwine, symbiotic still; The priceless chains, Less visible, and longer now, Are forged and retorted, relentless ever.

The means of life, The work of nature, And of the generations, Are held by a few, Run by mercenaries, Guarded by scribblers, lawyers, prattlers, cops.

The rest must pay eternal dues To the Lords of Life, who make the Law. You must work, wage slave, Unpaid for part of each long day For masters of land, bank, plant, Or they won’t let you work at all. Most hire out their labour power, A few deny parts of theirs. Many sell their own starved red blood.

Here they treat most of the people Most of the time As farmers treat their beasts.

This is the Theatre of the Abused: Here the rich and their ticket-touts Have pre-booked all the good surveying seats.

This is the land in the croyde picture Held by the half-mad cattle barn Against diggers of the soil And all whose need To grow food and people.

This is the world of the Itho-waters, The Realm of Annecia: Here you are induced to forget Who you are, and what, And what you and yours might be.

Humankind is snared in a world-ensnaming web By the busy, spid’ring bourgeoisie: Lives are drained, reduced, shrivelled. Made senselessly arid, emptied, numbed.

This is the planet in Star Trek Rule by Drunk Frankenstein, Here they steal your oat and live. Your hands, your eyes, your heart For spare part surgery on prospered citizens.

Here we pray to The Three Malignant Gods, Hope-of-Wealth, Wealth, Profit, And Their anointed Saints and Holy Souls, In whom the quest for wealth Ended with their birth.

Here footballers and singers Athletes, musicians, models, Disc-jockeyes, psychics, gurus Are adored, amongst the richest of the Age. Our spiritual out-reach; our epipheme.

Here live olympian Hero-Drones Of consummate compassion And Their attendant swarms Of added Cargo Cultists.

Here, too, reign Pearly Kings and Queens; Shimmering tinsel is worn, Not with shame but pride: The cherished wealth is glittering nothingness.

A Princess Di is Queen of Hearts, A Paris Hilton Queen of Heaven To mesmer’ed, would-be clones Who browse, voyeur, gawk and gape, eternally Wishing, hoping, hungering, longing, Imagining, miming: helpless.

Before the Great Sleep Window And its menacing minskins.

IX

This is the world and the Age Of humankind’s Great Fear Of imminent, close-crowding doom And all-pervading guilt; The drowning, gnawing sense, That humankind has fooled its nest; An Age of surging, burgeoning Fear Before the looming shadow Of the Tsunami Times coming; Engulfing tidal nature waves, And waves of man-made social devastation.

This is an Acute world, Lady; Mourned and mired in blood-drenched Fait Here beating human hearts Are ripped out of the living flesh, And sacrificed to the ravishing Market-God, Without whose favour nothing moves.

Humanity’s heavy-dragging tail Rises and striking, and again, To its all too-low-advancing head. This is the world of The Big Sleep: Of murk, enshrouding fog, And deep, self-multiplying mystery: Even the authors lose the shape of this mad tale!

X

This, Lady, is Cuvvian Planet: Here bones and toxic dung and dirt Pile up over the years; except, We have no other cave to move to. And this... Lady... This is... Sir, it is all these things, you say, Metaphorically – but what is it, Beyond analogue and metaphor? Why, Capitalism, Lady! Capitalism! This is a state of society In which the process of production Has the mastery over humankind Instead of being controlled by us. Relentless mills of commerce grind: In a world of finite things, In-built, Incessant Waste, And pre-set built early in obsolescence, The ruin-price we pay Our self-developing, all-deciding, Humankind-deriding, Paramount God: Profit.

Lady, this is Animal Farm: The pigs rule here! But, sir, what things always, here, he so? No, lady. No. Hell, no! And, sir, what should I do in Dystopia?

Sean Matganna

* Cargo Cult: during World War Two, the setting up of a US South Sea island base kept in supplies by planes, produced amongst the stone-age level native people of the islands by American soldiers, the native people creating, doggering their work and indeed took to ago the behaviour of the in comers and praying and sacrificing to the God of Airborne Supplies, looking for the magic that would bring cargoes to them too...

“The Treason of the Intellectuals, and other political verse” by Sean Matganna

A collection including items previously published in Solidarity and forerunner publications over the last 25 years. Available soon on www.amazon.co.uk or at £9.99 post free from AWS, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (order at www.workersliberty.org/donate)
Private sector pensions fight

Sparks’ fight goes on

By Padraig O’Brien

The seven construction contractors planning to unilaterally impose their own new agreement (“BESNA”) set 9 January as the new date by which electricians must sign up to the new terms or face the sack.

“Agencies will drop the wages for new starters. Then it may spread into other industries like the railway maintenance, road works and factories,” was how John McGookin, a member of the Unite’s Northampton National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI) bargaining team, put it.

United, the rank-and-file committee which has been coordinating the resistance to the attack, is available in full online at bit.ly/w6fgZ5. See jibelelectric.org.uk for details of direct actions in the campaign.

The methods of the BESNA seven are outrageous and a disgrace. It is utterly black-mailing.

They say “sign up to BESNA and face a drop in wages by £240 a week or you will be sacked!” Unite officials wouldn’t allow it to happen to themselves, so why are they so lack-lustre in fighting for us? Unite should be giving every backing to their members at the coalface, not hiding behind trade union rules in the event of wrongful dismissal.

To secure a challenge of BESNA, rank-and-file sparks and others have the duty to respond by withdrawing our labour and Downing tools.

If we don’t, we are finished and the JIB agreement will be gone forever as other firms are sure to follow the rogue seven (who have got all the big worker deals in the industry).

Agencies will drop the rates as well. Then other trades will have their wages slashed and NAECI agencies will stick to the introduction of worse terms for new starters.

The new deal would cut the hourly rate from £8.45 to £6.45 for new employees.

The new package would also drastically lower shift premiums and overtime payments. As we have seen, any strike, workers also launched an indefinite work-to-rule.

Unite regional officer, John McGookin said: “Our members have consistently indicated to Wincanton that their pay should not be linked to the introduction of inferior terms and conditions.

Our class and livelihoods need us more than ever!”

By a NUT activist

A long-serving humanists teacher at Dustin School, Northampton, is facing victimisation and possible dismissal at a disciplinary hearing this week.

Northampton National Union of Teachers (NUT) branch secretary and Dustin School NUT’s Ian Waddell, Pat Markey, has been suspended from his teaching post since September 2011. It is clear that Pat Markey is being victimised because he is a trade union representative who re- mains opposed to the loss of local democracy and accountability as a result of Dustin School attempting to become an academy. Despite making promises that academy status would not affect teachers’ terms and conditions, management chose to end Pat Markey’s one union bargaining time even though Dustin School has not yet become an academy — or would be academy schools. Pat should be reinstated without further delay.

Please show your support by signing the online petition/re-instate-pat

Pat Markey is totally committed to his teaching at Dustin School where he has worked for 18 years, and wants nothing more than to get back to teaching his pupils in the classroom. The case is a gross injustice, and further evidence of the anti-union mentality in academy schools, or would be academy schools. Pat should be reinstated without further delay.

By Stewart Ward

Langdon strike wins concessions

Bya NUT activist

A long-serving humanist teacher at the Langdon School in Newham, East London, voted to suspend their strike action following concessions from the school management and the council.

Members of the National Union of Teachers at the school voted unanimously to suspend the action after council commitments to pay a strike relief wage, ending bullying manage- ment, and allowing the strike ballot remains live they should decide the concessions — are not being pro- perly delivered.

Messages of support for the workers can still be sent to nullandnongoodgo@ntlworld.com.
By Ira Berkovic

The decision of Unite’s local government committee to follow the lead of its health committee in rejecting the latest pensions offer is a significant development in the fight to defeat the government’s attacks. Unite says that its local government members will “now consider their next steps”, rather than definitively committing to further action. In Unite now, the battle for activists is to ensure that the union organises further strikes, and quickly.

A proposal from AWL member Patrick Murphy to the National Union of Teachers (NUT) executive on 12 January could commit the NUT to joining the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS). Northern Irish union NIPSA and now Unite in explicitly rejecting the deal as an offer.

The NUT’s notionally left-led strike action even on the Public and Commercial Services, Unite and possibly others to call a more action as soon as possible, in consultation with other unions.

NUT’s Day Motion, supported by PCS, NUT, and other unions, states that we should “set up a national committee of rank-and-file strike committees to control the dispute.”

The rally was released from the University of Birmingham Library for the education strike vote of no confidence in the government.

In the face of that, the Guild had forced a new disciplinary hearing to investigate me for not complying with the Guild’s rules. The hearing was held at the Guild’s headquarters.

I was released from prison on 26 September (Edd was arrested for doing a banner drop at the Albert Hall). I was released from prison on 26 September (Edd was arrested for doing a banner drop at the Albert Hall).

The Syrian state and its allies have pushed for intervention in the country’s affairs. They have used military force to suppress protests and demonstrations.

The intervention of foreign powers in the Syrian conflict has raised concerns about the potential for further escalation. The involvement of countries such as Russia and Iran has added to the complexity of the situation.

The question of the timing and nature of any intervention remains uncertain. There is no clear consensus on the appropriate response to the crisis in Syria.