What the NHS Bill means:

Serco or Branson to run children’s health

Serco and Virgin Care are bidding for a three-year contract worth £130m to run children’s health services in Devon

Don’t let Tories wreck the NHS!
**What is the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty?**

**By Andrew Smith**

“Don’t mugsabe jail Zimbabwean socialists!

**Six Zimbabwean ac-tivists arrested in February 2011 at a meeting about the Egyptian revolu-tion face up to nine years in prison after being convicted of “inciting public violence.” They were due to be sen-tenced the day Solidarity went to press: they face up to ten years in prison, or a fine of £5,000, or both. The six convicted are Munyaradziviswa Gona (for-mer Movement for De-mocratic Change MP), Taiwanda Chito, Fatema Momberayara, Edson Chakamisa, Hopewell Gumbo and Welcome Zimuto. They pleiad to appeal the verdict. Please send solidarity messages to solidarity@freeThemnow.com**

**Send protests to the Zimbabwean embassies in London at zimbabwe@yahoo.co.uk, ring 020 7375 5730, or make £ and euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub.**

**Don’t let Mugabe jail Zimbabwean socialists!**

**Labour HQ: unholy alliances, hidden agendas**

The Labour Party is creat-ing a new Executive Board. Jon Lansman com-ments.

There are some unholy alliances and hidden agendas here that the leaders are not keen to expose.

Firstly it seems that Sir Charles Allen, Labour sup-porter, senior adviser to Goldman Sachs, former CEO of Granada and ITV, appointed to help with the Labour’s management structure to make it fit for purpose, is himself to chair the new board.

So Labour’s national ex-ecutive is not going to get the board of six the execu-tive approved, appointed and led by those chosen general secretary. Instead, a totally different structure has been approved without consulting them.

So much for governance.

And these details were not in the party re-lease but have since emerged in a letter from Ed Milliband to National Executive mem-ber and other key people which revealed that the new board would be “led by Tim and Iain [McNicol], and chaired by Sir Charles”.

We have no grudge against Sir Charles (unlike others) but his experience is not exactly in empower-ment of the footsoldiers and we agree with Emma Burnell who argues forcefully that what is at stake here is whether the party is going to devolve power to its members. She is confident that it will.

DEVOLED

“Power will be devolved to Labour Party members because we will demand nothing less.”

We know what we want, we are no longer shy of de-manding it and we have more ways of doing so loudly and forcefully every single day.”

And she doesn’t mince her words about those re-sponsible for this public shambles.

“The process has ex-posed rich seams of divi-sion between the leader’s office and the Party Head-quartes.

“I, aged, tired and starved caracters the charac-ters involved circle the picked-clean remains of their last good meal as they miss the point completely. For ever there they areight-ing over may look alive, the image of their centra-li-ised command and con-trol has died. This is merely a death to the death over its zombie corpse.”

And yet I am concerned when Peter Watt, former general secretary in the age of “centralised command and control” launches into a defence of the defenders of Labour’s members: “If I was on the NEC I would be worried. I worry because it looks like the leader’s office has taken over the running of the party. It looks like the gener-al secretary’s role is being watered down. And the danger is that when all of this plays out, the role of the NEC in overseeing the good governance of the party is being watered down.”

Since when have the Blairsites been defenders of the role of Labour National Executive? What is going on here is a power struggle.

In one corner, you have some of those chosen to ad-vise a leader elected to sweep away command and control who are themselves unwilling to let go.

In another corner, you have the corrupt and rotten re-mnants of the party ma-chine, or sects to and con-trol and command regime, who manipulated and cheated to get over what they thought their leader wanted, always happy (as [right-wing blogger] Luke Akehurst would have it) “in giving the left a kick- ing”.

In-between those, you have those who want not to change the party, empower the members, make the ma-chine fit for purpose.

And though the press may write about the good, loyal, party staff reacting to change “with fury”, the truth is quite different.

There are, of course, widely held concerns about change and how that will affect people’s jobs. Legiti-mate and understandable.

And we sympathise with the staff though change is certainly needed. But the corrupt and rotten rem-nants amongst them are whisking up the party, spin-n ing and leaking and cast-ing the blame widely without concern about the damage to the party.

In fact, destruction is their strategy for survival: damage the leader, his sta-f, the NEC, the general secretary, it’s all worth-while, they’re all on the wrong side. If they don’t win, at least they’ll take a few down with them. The culprits here complain about “the lack of leader-ship” but what really infras-tees them is that the leadership is in the lead-ership they wanted.

Labour’s national execu-tive needs to get a grip — to ensure that the general secretary they appointed is allowed to do his job.

And Ed needs to get a grip on his office — to see that they focus on doing their jobs not of that the party’s execu-tive or general secretary.

Free Left Futures. More: bit.ly/freefutures.**
French killer targets Jews and Africans

By Ed Malins

In a message entitled “Why I support a nuclear option for Iran,” Ron Paul, a 2012 Republican presidential candidate, wrote that “the United States must be prepared to use nuclear weapons as a deterrent if necessary.” This statement has been widely criticized as reckless and dangerous.

Paul’s views on nuclear policy are consistent with his broader foreign policy agenda. He has long been a vocal opponent of U.S. military intervention and has called for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. He has also condemned the use of torture and has called for the release of political prisoners around the world.

In his message, Paul argues that Iran is a rogue state that poses a serious threat to the United States and its allies. He notes that Iran has been engaged in nuclear proliferation and has supported terrorist groups in the Middle East. He also cites Iran’s ongoing support for Hamas and Hezbollah as grounds for taking action.

Paul’s message has been met with mixed reactions. Some supporters of nuclear deterrence have praised Paul for taking a strong stance against Iran. Others, including many military and defense experts, have criticized Paul’s views as unrealistic and potentially dangerous.

Overall, Ron Paul’s message on nuclear policy reflects his broader foreign policy agenda, which is characterized by a strong preference for non-intervention and a skepticism of military power. His views on nuclear deterrence are just one manifestation of this broader trend.
**Why “default Stalinism” is still a problem**

Dave Osler

A Tory councillor in Redbridge recently described calls to link maximum security prisons to Russian Gulags as “insulting”. It’s amazing what you can learn from the Ifford Recorder, I guess.

Worried minds are commonly used with that degree of hyperbole, you know that the concept has become virtually synonymous with the term “Stalinism”. Yet according to the homepage of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty website, the AWL’s raison d’être is to create an alternative to “both capitalism and Stalinism”.

At first reading, terminology like that seems willfully anachronistic, and perhaps a throwback to the days when people used to think it was a bit of a laugh to shout “get back to Russia” at lefty paper sellers.

You’re against capitalism? No surprise there; all socialists are against capitalism. But Stalinism? Really? Whatever their relative weights once were (and in my boyhood and early adulthood, capitalism and Stalinism were regarded as competing social systems) the latter is distinguished from the former by scarcely existing any longer.

Stalinism in the most common sense — the purges, the show trials, the gulags, those kitch posters depicting musclescreeched Stalinfanatics glocously over-fulfilling the tractor production quota — disappeared over half a century ago.

Stalinism in the more precise definition — of a class-society based on collective ownership of the means of production, legitimated by nominal adherence to Marxism — describes a phenomenon widespread until a couple of decades ago. But today there are just five countries left to which the designation could possibly apply. Only China has any importance on the world stage, and no serious commentator regards it as anything other than a vast seething capitalist sweatshop.

In fact, as Martin Luther King once noted, “when we talk about the Civil Rights Movement, we are talking about the global middle class and the movement which has now involved itself, and that which is reaching the whole world.”

Stalinism was never so much an ideological as a sociological entity. It spread through local variations on a universal model, thanks to the material and intellectual resources provided by the failed Soviet Union. It was a massive effort to “produce” the peculiarities of this or that country’s anti-capitalist movement.

So it is that members of Socialist Action and the Socialist Workers’ Party — the latter of which once liked to think of itself as the only authentically anti-Stalinist current on the far left — are up contributing regularly to the Morning Star, producing copy that is indistinguishable from lifelong CPB-bers.

The manner in which some minor leftish trade union bureaucrats can be called “Stalinist” is a testament to the sense in which Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria was a Stalinist.

Frequently these people profess to have learned from history. Or at least to say that they respect the USSR as a degenerated workers’ state, or perhaps even as state capitalist.

**SOF**

**But their soft Stalinism instead manifests itself in a tendency to stifle democracy, and a propensity to settle controversy by decree from the top.**

It is characterised by deafness to rational argument, and invocation of party or union discipline to close down debate whenever anybody disagrees with the leadership line. It also leads them to a misunderstanding of world politics, mostly by deference to its, or at best studied criticism of, various thuggish regimes. Unable to break from a “them and us” mentality when considering international affairs, they tend to label any government as imperialist, as if the word stood for something meaningful.

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In 1989, the Trots were supposed to bring the Tankies round to their way of thinking; but so far the process looks to have been largely the other way round.

It is testimony to the failure of Trotskyist currents that Stalinism remains hegemonic within the left of the labour movement, eerily exerts its monstrous gravitational pull from the grave and the grave.

As so far as I’m concerned, the AWL formulation is pretty much on the money.

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**MEMORABLE**

I met Bayard on a number of occasions but the most memorable, to me, took place in 1974.

I was then a student at Cornell University, which had eschewed a dormitory system in favor of a co-operative system. As many college fraternities were still “whites only”, our small socialist student organisation campaigned against this reversion to an apartheid system. That was back then, in the early 1970s. But Bayard Rustin never agreed to fly up to Cornell and give a public speech on the subject.

We were very concerned about security as emotions were running high, and naively asked Bayard over dinner what he wanted us to do — should we involve the campus police? Absolutely, not he said. The police are never welcome at our meetings.

Bayard spoke to a packed hall full of young Black students with a handful of white socialists in the back. I won’t say that he won them over — that would have been impossible, even for someone with Bayard’s considerable rhetorical skills.

But he did challenge them, and raised the question of — as he put it — “tribalism”.

It was not fashionable to oppose Black separatism back then, in the early 1970s. But Bayard Rustin never gave a damn about being fashionable.

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**REGULARS**

**Rustin: Bayard Rustin**

**ERIC LEE**

This March marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Bayard Rustin, the American civil rights leader who passed away in 1987.

Rustin is remembered as the organiser of the great 1963 March on Washington at which Martin Luther King gave his “I have a dream” speech. But to socialists, Rustin’s legacy is richer than that.

I first met Rustin some 40 years ago when he agreed to co-chair the Socialist Party together with Michael Harring -ton and a long-forgotten Jewish trade union leader named Charles Zimmerman.

Rustin was at that time already unfashionable on the left because of his advocacy of gay rights and his unflinching support for the state of Israel.

I was to learn later in life that being unfashionable was nothing new for Bayard. He was never fashionable, and he never championed the causes he believed in, regardless of how unpopular it might make him.

**CAREER**

He began his political career with a brief membership in the Communist movement, though he quickly resigned when it became clear that his employers. Later in life, Rustin became an outspoken advocate of gay rights.

Today Rustin’s sexuality, his early flirtation with Stalinism and his pacifism make him to a certain degree acceptable to some parts of the left. But in his lifetime, his views on the Cold War and on Israel won him few friends on the left.

Rustin moved in the same circles as Max Shachtman, and eventually shared Shachtman’s views on issues like the Vietnam War. While many on the left supported a Communist victory in Vietnam, seeing Ho Chi Minh as some kind of Vietnamese George Washington, Rustin took a more nuanced view, and supported a negotiated settlement that might result in an American withdrawal from the country without necessarily giving Ho control of the south.

When the North Vietnamese army triumphed in 1975, Rustin spoke out at small, hastily-organized demonstrations called to highlight the plight of the “boat people”.

Rustin, like his mentor, the legendary A. Philip Randolph, was a lifelong supporter of the trade union movement. He set up the A. Philip Randolph Institute which for decades served as the centre for Black trade unionists and build strong ties between the Black community and trade unions. And he did this despite the overt racism of many of those unions—a racism he fought against from within the movement, and not as an outsider.

Like most Black leaders in the US in the early 1960s, Rustin felt very close to the Jewish community and the state of Israel. The bonds formed in the early days of the civil rights movement between Blacks and Jews were still quite strong. When this became unfashionable following Israel’s victory in the 1967 Six Day War and a bitter critics’ strike in New York, City, Rustin severed firm in his beliefs. As tensions increased between the Black and Jewish communities, Rustin organized the Black Americans Support Is rael Committee (BASIC) and continued to push for reconciliation between the two communities.

He was by no means uncritical of the Israeli government. On his visits to Israel he pushed hard for better and fairer treatment for the small community of “Black Hebrews” who settled in the country’s south.

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**RE MEMORABLE**

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WHAT WE SAY

Vultures out of the NHS!

The diversification of Richard Branson’s Virgin Group seems to know no bounds. He’s already done planes, trains, record companies and a bank. He now thinks that healthcare is the logical next step.

What motivates him? A deep-seated desire to deliver high quality health care, or a deep-seated desire to further line his and his shareholders’ pockets?

Virgin now owns the majority share in Assura Medical, which is bidding to run frontline children’s services across the whole of Devon. This would include community children’s nursing, health visiting, child and adolescent mental health services and some safeguarding services.

Reports suggest that they are likely to be successful in their bid; and that is scary news.

There are already serious problems in the delivery of children’s healthcare; long waiting lists for services such as speech and language therapy; heavy caseloads mean vulnerable families and at risk children are not given the service they need and deserve.

To exacerbate these problems by putting the health of the children in Devon in the hands of a profiteering company like Virgin (or any other set of private vultures) is revolting.

The stated criteria of the Devon tender is for the “most economically advantageous bid” to be accepted; this is nothing more than a race to the bottom.

Private providers will want to reduce staff numbers, attack pay and conditions and cut corners to maximise their money-making potential. This is already happening in healthcare; private contracting began under New Labour.

Serco, another company bidding for the Devon children’s contract, were contracted in 2006 to deliver an out-of-hours GP service which was almost immediately identified as inadequate, corner-cutting, and unsafe. An improvement notice was served in 2007, but Serco kept the contract.

In 2010, a boy died when an understaffed and overstretched out-of-hours service advised parents to put him to bed instead of sending a GP. Tragedies like this are almost inevitable when services are understaffed.

Only a short time ago, even the Tories thought it too risky, politically, to cut the 50% marginal rate at time when poverty is increasing for the majority of the population at a rate outstripping the Thatcher era, while the ultra-rich are doing well and inequality is increasing sharply.

Especially risky at a time when tax credits for low-paid workers are being cut in real terms, and cuts in housing benefit and other benefits are working their way through the system.

But, on the day before the Budget, it looks as if Osborne just might do it, claiming to “balance” it by raising the income threshold below which very low-paid workers pay no income tax.

The big story of the Budget will not be in the tax adjustments, but in the ongoing social spending cuts. Osborne is unlikely to announce significant change there, but those cuts are still working their way through.

An analysis in January by a right-wing thinktank, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, showed that so far only 12% of Osborne’s planned cuts to spending, and only 12% of his planned cuts to spending on public services have been implemented. There is 88% still to come.

The cuts so far have not reduced the government’s Budget deficit, because they have depressed most incomes so much as to cut tax revenue even more than spending. Their real purpose is not budget-balancing, but to “use” the crisis to push down wages, harness work regimes, and cut social overhead costs several notches for the sake of greater profitability in a capitalist revival, some years in the future.

As the IFS reported: “Over the next few years, the UK currently has the fifth-largest planned reduction in public spending as a share of national income [among relatively well-off countries]. Only Iceland, Greece, Estonia and Ireland are planning larger cuts.”

“If the current plans are delivered, spending on public services will [in real terms] be cut for seven years in a row. The UK has never previously cut this measure of spending for more than two years in a row... Over the seven years from April 2010 to March 2017, there would be a cumulative real-terms cut of 16.2%, which is considerably greater than the previous largest cut (8.7%)... from April 1975 to March 1982.”

The setbacks over pensions do not mean that the 88% of cuts to come are guaranteed safe passage. Already, though belatedly, protest over the NHS has erupted as the Health and Social Care Bill comes near to passing into law.

We demand of the union leaders simply that they use their union resources to assist, nourish, publicise, and generalise every bout of working-class resistance, instead of downgrading local struggles in favour of promises of future one-day “spectaculars”.

help AWL raise £20,000

Britain’s roads are crumbling. But David Cameron has a brilliant idea to fix that.

He will get his mates in the city to compete to lease the most popular roads; they’ll fill in the pot holes and, as is only fair, in return, they will get to levy tolls.

Whether it’s VirginHighways, Serco or Ballour Beatty that gets the lease to the M25 etc, imagine what the less busy roads are going to look like in ten years time?

And that’s why the AWL is saving up to buy a donkey and cart.

Actually we need money to continue fighting Tory stupidity. Publishing Solidarity as a weekly, maintaining our website, and organising events such as our Ideas for Freedom summer school are key ways in which we do that.

We depend on donations, subscriptions and sales to help us.

Please consider:

• Taking out a monthly standing order to the AWL. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and on this page. (Even a few pounds a month really does help.)

• Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to “AWL”) or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

• Organising a fundraising event.

• Taking copies of Solidarity to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.

• Getting in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

For more information on any of the above, contact us: tel. 07796 690 974 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, SE1 3DG.

We raised £572 this week from a donation, an increased standing order and new subscriptions. Thanks to Karen, Liam, Lynne, and Max.

Wipe the smirk off Osborne’s face!

More confident now that even the unions which reject the public-sector pensions deal have relegated further national strikes to an undefined possibility in late April, chancellor George Osborne may cut income tax for incomes over £150,000 in the Budget on 21 March.

Only a short time ago, even the Tories thought it too risky, politically, to cut the 50% marginal rate at time when poverty is increasing for the majority of the population at a rate outstripping the Thatcher era, while the ultra-rich are doing well and inequality is increasing sharply.

Especially risky at a time when tax credits for low-paid workers are being cut in real terms, and cuts in housing benefit and other benefits are working their way through the system.

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Photo: Vicki Morris

worker who was put in the position of having to work within a deficient, overstretched service that wasn’t up to the job.

The next step in campaigning to defend the NHS has to be local campaigns against contracts going to these private companies. Vultures out of the NHS!
Two years that damn the union leaders

A timeline of the pensions debacle from 2010 to the present day

workersliberty.org/pensionstimeline

By Martin Thomas

To turn round the public-sector pensions campaign now will need not much less than a miracle.

Activists will work for that near-miracle: to make the London strike by teachers and lecturers on 28 March so strong that it bounces the National Union of Teachers (NUT), at its 6-10 April conference, into organising an escalating series of regional strikes, and forces the leaders of the PCS civil service union, at last, after three months of prevarication, into calling strikes.

Even if the London teachers’ and lecturers’ strike cannot rise above it this year, there is a chance of a better than quiet compliance, and a spirited token protest is better than a flat, perfunctory one.

One young teacher in a well-unionised London school, in a left-wing NUT area, told Solidarity: “Despite my disappointment with the [NUT’s decision to strike only in London] I feel there’s scarcely any point attempting debate here as it’s all so gung-ho in support of [the 28 March London NUT] strike action.”

Don’t pretend arguments about perspectives or strategy, or criticisms of the leadership? Be positive! Build the next action, set everything else aside, and later there will be time for debate.

That attitude may seem militant and left-wing, but it has rooted the whole pensions campaign. It works to shield the union leaders from scrutiny, and to put the “gung-ho” activists in a position where they are disabled from responding to the questions of non-gung-ho union members with anything other than trite “compulsory optimism”.

To turn the union leaders round now, and to get them to organise action when 70-plus per cent survey majorities for a national strike on 28 March could not get them to do it, we will need to have a sudden surge of militancy from the floor, and file erupt after months of squandered momentum. If the London teachers and lecturers cannot find the extraordinary bounce for that, it cannot be surprising, and the blame lies not with the London workers, but with the union leaders.

FUTURE

It will disable activists for future battles if the union leaders are allowed to get through their conference times (NUT, Easter; PCS, May) by offering the same old jam-to-marrow promises, and by blaming shortcomings on the supposed reluctance of workers to mobilise or on the most right-wing union leaders (the TUC’s Brendan Barber, or Unison’s Dave Prentis).

Think back almost two years, to when the Cameron government took office. Everyone knew it meant big cuts. Before the election, George Osborne had said: “After three months in power we will be the most unpopular government since the war.”

In the midst of slump, industrial resistance would be difficult. The union leaders in the public sector had not used the almost-decade of rising public sector budgets and payrolls, up to 2008, to build organisation and strength. They had in store a long period to keep its members on the backfoot.

They had allowed real organisation, as measured for example by the spread of active workplace reps, to decline. They had trained members to think of strikes as one-day protests “about” issues, and strike ballots as devices to strengthen union officials’ hands in negotiations more than as instructions from the members to the officials.

But now the union leaders said they would fight. After the Government outlined its plans in June-July 2010, the union leaders proposed a cunning scheme: The whole complicated myriad of attacks was hard to fight. Pensions were different.

With its plans for public-sector pensions, the Government was willfully uniting public-sector workers. Millions of workers could be unitedly mobilised on a clear-cut, uniform issue, and a breach could be forced in the wall of Government attacks.

The civil service union PCS and the teachers’ union NUT, especially, took that line, and, with their reputation as left-wing unions, were able to set the tone. From late 2010 onwards, much of the attention of union activists was focused on getting industrial action on pensions.

Left-wing unions said it was best to wait until right-wing unions could be nudged into line for united action. PCS leaders told their activists that PCS could “boost the Government on its own”, and deduced that PCS could not even give a lead, or take its own action to force limited concessions on its members’ pensions.

In June 2010 the Government outlined its broad pension plans; the same month it legislated the RPI/CPI shift in pension uprating that same month, in October 2010 it announced an average 3% increase in workers’ pension contributions (to start April 2012). September / October 2010 saw a wave of strikes and occupations by French workers and students against pension cuts, but the British unions did not budge. It was not until 30 June 2011 that the main left-wing unions struck (along with the ATL), and not until 30 November 2011 that most unions struck.

The mobilisation was slow; but it happened. We wrote in Solidarity: “The...mass public sector strikes on 30 November demonst[ra]d[ed] the potential social power of the working class to a generation of workers who had not experienced it before, to give a glimpse of the mass labour movement as a vital social force”.

Within three weeks union leaders would drop that glimpse into a black hole.

After 30 November, even the left union leaders announced no definite plans for further action, and organised no real debate among their activists and members. The line was: wait and see.

Workers waited. On 16 December the big unions in local government, Unison, Unite, and GMB announced they had agreed a formula with the employers to put to the membership (a variant of what local government employers had proposed back in September).

FINAL

On 19 December, the Government announced “final” outlines for all the big public-sector schemes (health, education, local government).

The changes from the Government’s previous outline, on 2 November, were “sideways” — improvements on accrual rates balanced by worsening in the long-term used to calculate “career average”. The essence was unchanged: pay more, work longer, get less. Most unions said, in one tone or another, that they would pause and consult. Only PCS and the Northern Ireland public sector union NIPSA explicitly rejected the outline. The media reported that the pensions dispute was more or less over. Over the Christmas/New Year holiday, activists had little chance to get a different message out.

In January, when union activists were able to meet, NUT and Unite shifted towards rejection of the December terms. PCS’s dominant faction, Left Unity, called a cross-union activist conference on 7 January, but blocked any vote on whether PCS should call further action. Not until late February, not until after two further months of lost momentum and confidence, did PCS, NUT, and UCU go for a strike on 28 March. Then they did it via “surveying” their members — “we know you voted for strikes on pensions, but do you really want another one?” — which further hurt momentum. They got 70% plus majorities for strikes, and largely ignored them.

Some union activists say that the dispute was shaped by a lack of preparation below the national level. 30 November rallies generally saw workers applauding bland speeches from the leaders rather than heckling them to demand more deffinition.

Workers faced the myriad of other attacks — cuts in jobs, forced conversion of schools to academies, etc. — which often hit them more sharply and quickly. They knew the union leaders were sluggish on those issues. They knew that the pension changes could not be fought by local action, so required national unions to take action. No wonder there was some mood of scepticism, of being pleased that the union leaders had at least organised something, of not expecting much more from them.

But when union members had a chance to discuss the issue, at union conferences, the union leaders felt they had to display a more militant tone. When union leaders called action, members responded well. The problem was not a general un-
Battles can win

In August 2011 Lambeth Council in south London agreed to a deal saving all the jobs in its library service, following the workers announcing they would strike.

By combining a high-profile public campaign with the threat of strike, the workers saved every job in the service, and reading groups, story times and enquiry services will continue.

Rawmarsh School in Rotherham, in mid 2011, wanted to cut 25 jobs. The NUT immediately called a members’ meeting, gave the case for industrial action and ballots. Once they started strikes, they escalated, eventually to three days a week. All decisions on negotiation, strike dates, tactics for picket lines and communication with the wider labour movement were put to the NUT group at the school at regular meetings. Result: no compulsory redundancies.

The two examples show that sustained, democratically-controlled trade-union action which reaches out to win wider working-class support can win, even in difficult times.

No-one expects union leaders to be able to generate militancy where there is none, or to guarantee to win every dispute. What they can do is support, nourish, publicise, and generalise every spark of resistance as wider working-class support can win, even in difficult times.

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2012:

What is capitalism and can it last?

29 June-1 July, north London workersliberty.org/ideas

Ideas for Freedom is an event which combines a serious approach to Marxist ideas with a commitment to activism in the workers’, student, feminist and other social movements. We emphasise accessibility, mutual education and free debate. Weekend tickets brought before the end of April are £22 waged, £14 low-waged/HE students, £8 unwaged/P6school students.

Day tickets also available.

Workshops, talks and discussions will include:

• How do we make socialism a force again?
• What’s wrong with conspiracy theories?
• The NHS we had, the one we have and the one we want
• Roma communities and the rise of the far right across Europe
• Where is the “Arab Spring” going?
• How do we make socialisma force again?

Ideas for Freedom will open on Friday 29 June with a meeting to celebrate the massive workers’ struggles which convulsed Britain in 1972, paving the way for the downfall of Edward Heath’s Tory government, with film footage and speakers who were involved.

DEBATE

Over two years of the campaign, there was never a proper debate. Nothing was ever pinned down.

The response to what AWL argued was not so much “that’s wrong”, “no”, again and again, “that’s right”, but it would be premature and might cut chances of broader unity to decide details now: For now, build the next action, and we’ll see...

Unions never publicly demanded any specific concessions (no contribution increases for workers below a certain wage level, higher than the Government offered)!

The pensions campaign signals the debacle of the bulk of a whole age generation of the left in the unions — a generation of activists who entered trade-unionism in the 1980s, who have now “risen” to prominent full-time or facility-time positions, who remain left-wingers in general terms, but who have trained and habituated themselves in manipulative, bureaucratic, short-sighted trade-unionism. The best activists from that generation now need to strike out and develop a new left with new young activists.

The way to unity and energy in the new struggles comes through division, rancour, and reorientation now over the pensions campaign.
The first general assembly of the type of government which we want to replace the pro-cuts regimes: a workers' government, a government as loyal and as accountable to the working class as the present Greek government is to the bondholders, the bankers, and the capitalists. "Of all parties and organisations which base themselves on the workers, as Leon Trotsky put it, "we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for a workers' government." At the same time we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should in our opinion form the program of the 'workers' government':

- workers' control; and seek to impound the wealth of EU and IMF; nationalise the big banks and businesses under workers' control; and seek to impound the wealth of Greece's ultra-rich.

- The approach would be similar to the call which the Bolsheviks made in Russia in 1917 for the reformist left, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, to break with the "capitalist ministers" in the Provisional Government and form an administration which the Bolsheviks pledged to side with against reaction and to oppose only peacefully. Paradoxically, the Bolsheviks won over workers and peasants from the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries as much by "supporting" them in that sense as by actually opposing them, and they eventually Overthrew the Provisional Government on the back not of agitation to win over the workers, but of a powerful movement against the proto-fascist Kornilov revolt.

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Porting the opposition but so far they haven’t been successful; they don’t trust them. The Iranians have their foreign policy — in the region — in Afghanistan, with their support for the US. The pro-Israel lobby has been pressurising the American government to strike against Iran. But Israel will not make a strike against Iran if the regime will try to attack US military and economic capability. This is the danger. And they could give the green light to Israel? At the moment Israel is more keen to strike Iran than the US. The pre-Israeli lobby has been pressurising the American government to strike against Iran. But Israel will not strike Iran without getting the green light from the US. They are trying to persuade the US and the British to get broad agreement, that if the situation gets out of hand from their point of view, there will be a strike against Iran.

The main point here is the Islamic regime’s strategy — the fact that it wants to be recognised as a major power in the region and a player in the West that can be dealt with. But the Iranian government is not against American imperialism or against capitalism — the Iranian economy is part of global capitalism.

Israel is still a regional power, despite the eight-year war with Iran. But the geopolitical situation for the Iranian government remains that the West doesn’t recognise it as a major power, they don’t trust them. They have their foreign policy in the region — in Afghanistan, with their support for Hamas and Hezbollah — and the Americans and the Western governments are opposed to this policy. And of course the Iranian regime has a good relationship with the Syrian regime and fully supports Assad’s regime.

If either America or Israel make a strike against Iran they are going to enrol themselves in a regional conflict, conducted by Iranian proxies in the region. That is true. The regime will try to attack US military bases in the Middle East, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and will try to attack Israel directly or indirectly by using Hezbollah in Lebanon. Even some Gulf states, such as Bahrain and the UAE, may not be immune from Iranian attacks. In such a scenario, the whole region would be engulfed in a new conflict. This is what now makes America and its allies cautious in making a decision to strike against Iran militarily.

We should stand against the threat of military action from a working-class point of view. But America is very good at waging proxy war. It has been successful at this since the Second World War — and not so much at full-scale wars. It was successful in arming the mujahedeen in Afghanistan and overthrowing the Soviet Union-backed government in the 1980s. Another example is the success of the US-backed Contra paramilitaries in the war against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

How does the situation in Syria affect the calculations? The US wants to see the back of the Assad regime. But they can’t do what they did in Libya — military strike by NATO. The Americans (but also Qatar and Saudi Arabia) are supporting the opposition but so far they haven’t been successful. In Homs the Syrian regime has suppressed the opposition and destroyed part of the city, killing many civilians, but arms are being provided to some sections of the opposition: the Free Syrian Army, for example. The Iranian regime has also been involved in the Middle East. But there are different communities living together — between Sunnis, Kurds, Druse and Christians — and they are not united against the regime. Many still support Assad, because they fear what might happen if the regime falls. But naturally the opposition of them are definitely Islamic fundamentalist. Fear of that gives them the regime a base. But that does not mean the regime will survive.

If the Assad regime falls Iran will lose its most powerful ally in the Middle East.

Abdoreza Ghanbari, teacher, faces the death penalty in Iran for “enmity towards God”

What position do you take on the policy of America and its allies towards Iran? What state is the Iranian opposition in? What state is the Iranian opposition in? What state is the Iranian opposition in? What state is the Iranian opposition in? What state is the Iranian opposition in?

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Ahmedinejad talked about “wiping Israel off the map of the world”. Then people who support military action said “this is the most irrational regime in the world. They will use the nuclear bomb against, for example, Israel”.

But how do you define irrationality? The Israeli government and the nuclear bomb, are they rational? Or the US? Or the British government? I am not defending the Iranian regime but they are rational. They are small, but this cannot be predicted. On the other hand, the government is aware of this danger and that puts pressure on them. This guides the reasoning of the US and EU. They are trying to get the Iranian government to the negotiating table and impose their own policy on them.

The red line for the Iranian regime is to stay in power. If they realise they can’t survive without compromising, they will back down. But they do not go to war against Israel. They support a proxy war against Israel in Lebanon.

They say they are against the powers in the West, they are anti-imperialists. But they have a very good relationship with the big European countries. They are part of global capitalism.

The Iranian regime is not just another capitalist regime. It is a theocracy, it is fascistic, it is more ruthless.

Yes, they are ruthless, yes, it is a theocracy, but that does not mean it is irrational. Any government can be irrational.
Merseyside: new challenge from far-right

Phil Dickens is an anti-fascist activist involved in Liverpool Anti-Fascists (Lever AF). He spoke to Solidarity about recent clashes with the English Defence League (EDL) and their splinter organisations.

What’s the current situation with street-based fascist activity in the north west? Who are the ‘North West Infidels’?

The North West Infidels (NWI) are a splinter group from the English Defence League (EDL). Whilst the EDL bill themselves as “anti-extremist” and liberal/civic nationalists concerned with militant Islam, the NWI have taken a more overtly racist, ethno-nationalist tone, as well as declaring open opposition to the left and the organised working class. Most of their activity to date has been around the northern mill towns and areas of Greater Manchester. Rochdale has been a particular focus, withى Bury and Hul are also being targeted. They come from the same street-activist tendency as the EDL, but want to be more militant and not to be kettled in a car park. The electoral collapse of the BNP and the disillusionsment on the far-right with the EDL leadership has allowed them to do that.

What happened around fascist provocation against an Irish Republican march in Liverpool on 14 February?

We saw the local fash talking about targeting it and, basically, we underestimated what would happen. There was talk of a bus going about getting topped up and confronting people who stray from the march outside the city centre; the expectation was that there would be a local mob shouting from the sidelines, so we organised for that.

Meanwhile, the “Scouse Nationalists” group (CXF) called in their supporters for a national mobilisation, and there were posters in Manchester saying the IRA were in town. These people genuinely believed that they were here to face down a Republican paramilitary organisation. Loyalist touch-me-nots from the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and Nationalist information from the Catholic Action (CA) and NWI were joined by veterans of the British Legion in town. It was a tactical mistake on our part, but also a really horrible situation.

LiverAF ended up having to stew a tiny youth demonstration against police brutality in the centre city and lead it away, while the EDL lined up back under threat from the police. It didn’t so much highlight the far-right’s strength— the conditions on that day were unique—but more our own organisational weakness.

TREND

To what extent are these phenomena local, and to what extent part of a national trend?

The NWI have only recently come to Liverpool, as a result of linking up with Liverpool EDL when the entire division “went rogue” and re-branded themselves as the “Scouse Nationalists”.

There’s a lot of crossover, but basically the NWI have here ties to both the local BNP branch and long-standing neo-Nazis formerly in groups like the British Freedom Fighters. The Scouse Nationalists keep some distance because there are tensions over the white power/neo-Nazi imagery and their reluctance to be able to go along with the “Scouse nationalism” agenda of the Scouse Nationalists in the vein of, say, the EDL and British Freedom Party.

FEATURE

Not surveys but agitation

By Stuart Jordan

It has become habit for public sector unions, even when they have a legally-valid ballot mandate for strikes, to conduct “surveys” of their members to see whether there is a mood for further action.

In the 1960s sociologist John Goldthorpe undertook a survey of Vauxhall car workers in Luton. His study was technically sound. After detailed analysis he concluded that the workers were concerned about their pay, working hours, their health and safety, whilst the Irish march had to turn back under threat from the police.

Goldthorpe’s study is now famous for its profound failure to judge the mood. Within a month of publication, the workers voted in favour of a general strike, though with no clear idea of what it would mean, and with no sense of working-class solidarity.

Goldthorpe’s study shows that the survey method is inadequate, for its pure form, as a piece of disinterested research, Goldthorpe’s study shows that the survey method is inadequate.

Workers often hold a number of contradictory ideas in their heads at any one time, for example, “My boss is a good person, but I wish I didn’t have to work such long hours”.

Even the best surveys are unable to reflect these nuances and contradictions in people’s minds.

But union surveys are not only scientific investigative surveys. By conducting their “up-for-further-action?” surveys, union leaders are signalling to members that they want to question them? By means of agitation.

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London Troublemakers’ Group

How can we organise to win power in our workplaces and our unions? Come and meet other rank-and-file trade union activists to discuss strategies for fighting back at work — and winning. We’ll be using Labor Notes’ Troublemakers’ Handbook. Join us to be launched by Labor Notes co-founder Kim Moody. This is our first meeting, and we hope to develop an ongoing programme of workshops and training. Anyone interested in working together, from any trade union, is welcome to attend.

Wednesday 28 March, 7.30-9.30pm, at the Exmouth Arms (Starcross Street, nr. Euston)

For more information, contact skillzz_999@hotmail.com or ring 07961 040618

Union leaders surrender on pensions

By a civil servant

The leaders of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) have voted not to call national strike action on 28 March.

PCS leaders claim that, since the government’s policy has been applied across the whole public sector, only nationally-coordinated action by as many unions as possible can win any concessions.

Of course, we are not let into the secret of exactly how many unions are needed to win concessions. Only the National Union of Teachers and the University and College Union were even “in the market” to take action alongside PCS on 28 March; after the NUT’s abstention and refusal to call action, we must conclude that the PCS’s policy has been turned down three times. A PCS statement looks to the 6-10 April NUT conference for “decisions on further action”, but even if the TUC and PCS take joint action in April, will this be “good enough”? The government can ride out one-day strikes, separated by months of inaction, very easily.

By Patrick Murphy, NUT Executive (op)

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) Executive ignored the views of a huge majority of members (as expressed in an internal survey) and decided not to proceed with a further national strike on pensions in March.

Despite a 73% yes to strike action, the majority on the Executive decided that there was insufficient support for continuing action. 15 NEC members voted for a yes, and no one voted against the action but they were opposed by 24 members, including a significant number who would regard themselves as being on the left of the union.

The NUT leadership have failed to show any thing like the degree of urgency required in this dispute. Having started by announcing that the union had “reserved its position” on the pensions deal (rather than rejecting it), the NUT then went on to reject any possibility of strike action in January, February or early March, despite proposals being put to the Executive and a specific proposal from the University and College Union for action on 1 March.

The idea that we would get a yes vote comparable to the 92% last year was fantasy, and no-one in the run-up to the survey even suggested we would. Tensions are also variable across the country and was not significantly more among this single division or association failed to vote yes for action.

In place of national action, the NUT has decided to call on members in London to take action on 28 March and to roll out action across other regions after Easter (after reviewing the London strike). This “strategy” is incomprehensible; how can a potential regional strike help us rebuild support for national action?

Nevertheless, it is im portant that the strike is suspended until we can prepare to take action across the country and not simply more of the same. Single division or associates to keep up the pressure for national action.

If that can be done the control job is to think that this is a strategy to win rather than a national day one protest strikes we have seen so far.

Teachers’ union limits strike to London

By Dale Street

Thirty Union members working in the Central De Contamination Unit in Ayrshire Central Hospital (Irvine) staged a 48-hour strike on 15-14 March as part of the ongoing campaign in defence of NHS pensions in Scotland.

The unit had been opened just a week earlier by Scottish Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon.

“Shewashappytomeet the staff then, have the plaudits, have the photo opportunities. This week, she’s chosen to ignore us. Rather than come and discuss the pensions issue, she decided to put the legis lation through Parlia ment the same day,” said Unison rep Elaine McLeod.

Unison is demanding a Scottish solution to all aspects of pensions changes, including the year one increase to employees’ contributions of up to 2.4% (due to take effect on 1 April).

The strike action in Irvine is due to be fol lowed by further selective action in Lanarkshire, Lothian and Greater Glas gow, beginning on 2 March.

We do hope that NUT activists, from their leadership and that we fight together in April.

In the PCS, the inde pendent view has gained the backing of the standing the upcoming NEC elections to challenge the leaders who have orchestrated this surrender.

London Workplace groups

How can we organise to win power in our workplaces and our unions? Come and meet other rank-and-file trade union activists to discuss strategies for fighting back at work — and winning. We’ll be using Labor Notes’ Troublemakers’ Handbook. Join us to be launched by Labor Notes co-founder Kim Moody. This is our first meeting, and we hope to develop an ongoing programme of workshops and training. Anyone interested in working together, from any trade union, is welcome to attend.

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Tube workers reject Olympics briebe

By a Tubeworker supporter

On Friday 16 March, all workplace reps for stations, drivers, service control staff, and maintenance workers met to discuss London Underground Limited (LU)’s offer for Olympics briebe. The meeting vote unani mously to reject the offer. The offer was for an £800 bonus, but some of that included money reallocated from existing bonus packages that we would have got anyway. The new money was a £200 bonus plus a £60 bonus per shift worked during the Games, paid on plant which would be reclaimed in substantial strings. For example, on stations staff could be deployed to any station on their group. Some groups are as big as 3 stations, that could have meant being sent anywhere where over large distances. It would significantly increase travel time and from work. Management also plan to deploy people with the current two-hour time limit for changing duties, they want to stop us from moving or redeploy us without notice whatsoever. Stations staff would have had to take their meal breaks in station offices, and there would be a compulsory six-day week for service control staff.

The decision of the meeting to reject the offer is a clear message that workers are not prepared to sell out terms and conditions on an Olympics bribe from management. It’s an im portant signal, because prior to the meeting there had been a feeling from some union officials that compromising on terms and conditions would be the only way to win a bonus. Reps have been clear that our members didn’t want to sell out our framework agreement.

Now the decision’s been taken, we need to act on the campaign in the workplace to involve “shop-floor reps and ordinary workers. People need to feel owner ship of the other action’s doing and feel like they have control over the direction of the campaign.

If we can build that ac tive rank-and-file involve ment, we have a chance to mount a serious and coordinated campaign that could force real con cessions from bosses.

Scotts strike for NHS pensions

By Dale Street

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According to the current issue of Unison’s ‘Scottish Pensions Bulletin’, the first negotiating meeting with the Scottish government is due to take place on 28 March.

That Unison is continu ing with a campaign of in different parts of its members’ pension regions would be uncondi tionally welcomed. But the in formation currently available raises a number of questions.

GAP

Why a gap of a fortnight between the first and second selective strike action? What action, if any, is being taken by other unions with members in the NHS in Scotland (most obviously Unison)?

While Unison continues its campaign of selective strike action, the Executive Committee of the EIS (the main teachers union in Scotland) has decided not to call a 24-hour strike on 28 March.

74% of members who voted in the recent bal lot on industrial action had voted in favour of a strike on a turnout of 38%. But last week’s meeting of the Executive Committee voted by 12 to 7 not to call a strike.

Factors influencing the vote appear to have been the NUT decision not to stage a strike on 28 March and the rela tively low turnout in the ball ot for a strike action on 30th No vember (having dropped to a turnout of 54%).

The statement issued by the EIS also por trayed the need for strike action on 28 March as effect ively superfluous in the light of the decision to enter negotiations with the Scottish government and local authorities: “As a result of the decision to enter negotia tions with the employers’ side on pensions, the EIS Executive Committee has decided to suspend (sic) plans for a day of ind ustrial action on 28 March.

“Fellow teaching unions on the border have already decided to suspend national in dustrial action on this date, which opens the opportunity to consider Scottish solution on pensions.”

More industrial news online

More strikes on Heathrow Express — bit.ly/GAsoNP
Carillion workers fight strike breaking — bit.ly/GA3LbQ
Primark strikes off — bit.ly/GA8M84
On 16 March, 20 people organised the headquarters of the Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust to protest against the government’s plans to scrap the NHS.

One of the occupiers, Larry Saunders, described the bill as “the most destructive bill in a generation” adding that it is not too late to “keep the battle going”. Larry said that they had received a “sympathetic response” from staff at the Primary Care Trust.

The police and security staff have been less sympathetic, and have been trying to persuade the occupiers to leave. They have refused to do so, because their protest is legitimate and non-violent.

By Vicki Morris

On Saturday 7 April, Barnsley: “Save the NHS” demonstration assembled 9.30 Churchfields, rally 10.30 Peel Square. Organised by local Unison branches.

By Stuart Jordan

“I'm not being disingenuous. I really haven't spoken to anybody who's in favour of the Health and Social Care Bill,” says nurse consultant Andrew Fraser in the Guardian's “100 NHS Voices” survey. The Guardian’s interviews of 100 people who work in and around the NHS were heavily skewed in favour of medics, chief executives and other well-heeled professionals. However, despite the middle-class bias, it gives a rough picture of where this Bill is at and how it is being understood. There is almost universal condemnation for the plans; their attitude is backed up by the tiny 14% approval rating in the population at large.

The introduction of a conflict of interest by the Bill is a key point. Peter Wilmshurst, consultant cardiologist, comments, “The NHS is the best way to provide healthcare. Where you are getting a fee for a service, patients can't be sure they are getting the treatment they need rather than the treatment that gives the doctor the most money.”

Condemned

Privateisation was condemned even by those that stood to gain.

Fay Selvan, Chief Executive of a social enterprise, predicts “The private sector will cherry-pick the most profitable services, leaving the NHS without the critical mass to provide healthcare.”

Lord James Adebowale, the CEO of Turning Point (charity dealing with mental health, drugs and alcohol problems), thinks the market favouring the big health giants: “There is a real danger that the procurement process will favour the organisations from the for-profit sector who lack any track record in health and social care because they have the capital and the right access.”

Even advocates of the Bill are worried. GP Johnny Marshall is a major player in the National Association of Primary Care – a shaky organisation that receives large portion of its funding from private health firms and has been lobbying vociferously for GP commissioning. Marshall thinks the Bill will fail because GPs will renege and the NHS will resist this level of change. He emphasises how smaller GP consortia will have to outsource commissioning to the private sector.

Uncritically

Like New Labour, these professionals have un-critically accepted of the government’s class ideology of austerity.

While maintaining parity with the most astute middle-class professionals in the campaign against the Bill, we must also raise our own banners for independent working-class politics.

The founding principle of the NHS was the right to state-of-the-art, comprehensive healthcare free at the point of need. Until recently it was well-understood that this requires a radical redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor through general taxation.

In 1948, the Labour government kept the top rate income tax rate of 98% in order to create the welfare state. Nowadays the tax burden is felt most sharply by the poorest in our society.

If the NHS is under-funded then this is due to social policies that have re-worked our national health service and the鞹ent of successive governments to turn the welfare state into a slash fund for the rich.

We must not only fight the Bill, but also fight to reverse our current economic model of socialism for the rich and replace it with a welfare state that benefits the working-class majority.

By Ed Whitby

Chancellor George Osborne wants to make public sector pay rates “market-facing” and real, private sector pay rates.

Regional pay bargaining is to be introduced, starting with some departments in the civil service.

Osborne claims that public sector pay has risen twice as fast as private sector pay in the last four years. This ignores the fact that bank nationalisations in 2008 initially increased “public sector” pay and decreased private sector pay. Anyway, relatively higher union membership in the public sector should mean that we win bigger pay rises.

This new attack on our pay follows two years of pay freezes in the private sector (three years in local government) and a proposed limit on public sector pay rises from 2013 at only 1% for the next two years. Last year’s increase of £250 for the lowest-paid workers was inconsistently applied, with those in local government not receiving it, despite nearly 75% of council workers earning below the £21,000 low-threshold.

13% cut

Council staff pay has been slashed in real terms by 13% between 2009 and 2012.

The Chief Execs of counties were to receive massive increases in pay over the last 10 years between 27% and 50% according to the Audit Commission.

Regional pay bargaining is all about opening up the contract for private firms to make fatter profits from a cheaper public sector workforce. With almost three million public workers out side London and the south east, the government plan will take billions out of workers’ pay packets, and out of regional economies.

Campaigning on low pay will be a powerful weapon for workers who have nothing to lose. We should not wait for national or regional unions to produce leaflets and reports or to lobby government.

We need to build campaigns through our local unions to push the union leadership into a serious campaign.