

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

**Libya at a
crossroads**
page 2



**Politics of the
Eurozone**
pages 6-8

**Student-worker
organising**
page 10



They are to blame for the double-dip! TORIES • BOSSES • BANKERS



PM David Cameron, resisting pressure over links with Murdoch;
Lakshmi Mittal, UK's richest man with personal wealth of £12.7bn;
Bob Diamond, Barclays boss, fought off shareholder revolt over size of his bonus

Fight for a workers' government and European unity See page 5

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.



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

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

We stand for:

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- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
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Libya: the struggle for a constitution

By Martyn Hudson

Those comrades who live near the poshest million-aire villas at Winnington Close, Hampstead, may have noticed the removal vans over the last few days shipping out the Picassos and the Chagalls from number 7.

This pad, worth about £10 million, was the British residence of the erstwhile Saadi Qaddafi, now hiding out in exile in Niger. It is in the process of confiscation as part of criminal assets by the National Transitional Council in Libya. Saadi Qaddafi is disputing their claim — although he may be stretching it a bit if he thinks Hampstead will again one day be the backdrop to his playboy antics.

Pro-Qaddafi forces within Libya itself have been physically destroyed, exiled to the south of the country, or keeping a very quiet profile in the face of attacks by militias who

have still not been brought back under control by government forces and who are themselves deeply suspicious of the anti-federalist, anti-tribal regime.

Shokri Ghanem, who was the head of the National Oil Corporation under the old regime, was found dead last Sunday in the river Danube in Vienna where he had fled in the closing days of the regime — ostensibly because of Qaddafi's brutal crackdown but probably in reality because he knew which way the wind was blowing. His death signifies the marginalisation of the personnel of the old regime and the total hostility of the NTC to accepting those who didn't jump ship quick enough into the government.

Revelations about the close ties between the British government and the old regime have resurfaced in recent weeks particularly around MI5 giving details of dissidents, resident in

Britain, to Qaddafi's security services. It's also clear that naval forces (European, US or UK) left 72 African migrants to their fate off the coast off Libya in the early days of the uprising — only 11 survived, only to be returned back to Libya itself.

The NTC is struggling with the militia question and in early April there were significant workers' and women's protests against the rule of the militias in Libyan towns and cities. The government has not bowed to some of the tribalist and autonomist demands of the militias.

The NTC is also wary of the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya which has now founded its own "Freedom and Development" party to stand in the forthcoming general elections, which will write and deliver the new Libyan constitution. The NTC has issued a ban against religious parties, which the

militias have taken as another sign that the government is losing patience with them

The early statements on religious freedom from the Democratic Party of Libya clearly point to a hostility towards the Islamists on behalf of the new Libyan liberal democracy — particularly their idea that the measure of the success of Libyan democracy is the return of the longstanding Libyan Jewish population to Benghazi and Tripoli after their expulsion by the old regime.

The general elections in two months' time will be critical for what kinds of constitution and immediate political settlements will pave the way for workers' and women's organisation in the country, and how far the political gains already won can be defended against an assertive and ebullient new political Islam in North Africa.

Dave Spencer, 1940-2012

By Martin Thomas

Dave Spencer died on 24 April 2012, at the age of 71.

He was one of the very first people to join the Workers' Fight group, forerunner of the AWL, when it "went public" in the British labour movement in October 1967.

Before that Workers' Fight, a tiny group formed in a faction fight within the Militant group, had put all its publishing efforts in working on *Workers' Republic*, the theoretical magazine of the Irish Workers' Group, hoping to help consolidate the IWG as a Trotskyist organisation.

Like many of the early Workers' Fight members, Dave had first (from about 1960, I think) been active in the Socialist Labour League (SLL), led by Gerry Healy. The SLL was then, and would be until the early 70s, the most active of the revolutionary socialist groups.

In 1967 it was lurching through sectarianism towards craziness; from 1976 it would sell itself to Arab despots in order to sustain its daily paper, and then in 1985 it would explode, leaving almost no trace today.

Most ex-Healyites were deeply marked by the intense activism and sect regime of the SLL. Dave was less so. He was matter-of-fact, commonsensical, affable, where the Healyites were ostentatiously "theoretical" and shrill.

Dave would debunk the Healyites' ballyhoo about their "theory": in the hyper-active SLL, he would say, "theory" was what you did in the bus on the way to "practice". He would recount how Healy had told him to "get rid of" his wife Margaret, a devout Catholic. Dave had had no qualms about refusing. Most Healyites had many qualms about defiance.

In 1968 Workers' Fight took up a unity call from IS (forerunner of the SWP), and became until late 1971 a "tendency" within IS. In most of the few areas where there were WF members, by late 1969 IS was anathematising and ghettoising them.

Dave, in Coventry, remained unmarginalised even though he was a minority of one in the local IS. In part, I guess, that was because the majority saw him as no threat; in part, it was Dave's way.

BELIEVED

In debate he was good-humoured, and even when you disagreed entirely with him, you thought he really believed what he was saying.

He wasn't striking a pose, or defending an interest, or seeking prestige. In the first years after WF was expelled from IS in December 1971, Dave was something of a one-person minority arguing for us to turn more to the Labour Party. (I was especially vocal against him, and I was wrong).

Dave was well-known

and well-respected in the Coventry labour movement, as well as being for many years the Workers' Fight organiser in the city.

He parted ways with us politically in 1984. In 1981 we had merged with the Workers' Socialist League, a group led by Alan Thornett.

The fusion went bad, in part because the WSL was more demoralised than we had thought at the time of fusion, and disintegrated within the fused organisation, generating one after another dilute-Healyite subgroup which would rage against the "Pabloite" ex-WF core.

In the factional zoo which developed, Dave became a member of a small subgroup which agreed with the majority (mostly ex-WF) on all the big disputed political issues, but differentiated by being "for unity" above all else.

Early in the 1984-5 miners' strike we finally resolved the impasse by expelling the rump group round Thornett, maybe a quarter of his 1981 crowd. It was already in a state of cold split.

We had to force a split or be paralysed in the great miners' struggle; in fact, after the split, we bounded forward. But Dave and his subgroup rallied against the expulsion and allied with Thornett (whom they disagreed with) against the majority (whom they largely agreed with). Dave condemned us (and would to the end condemn us) as having once been healthy

but then after 1984 become "a sect".

After a short period of independent existence, Thornett's reconstituted group went into the ISG (today Socialist Resistance). Dave went with them, but only briefly.

After that he ended up (in my view) stuck in repeatedly proving that the most sincere advocacy of unpretentious common-sense, anti-sectarianism, unity, and building-from-below may produce paradoxical results. He hiked through collaboration with or membership of a bewildering string of small splinter groups (ISG, SLP, DSA, CPGB, CMP, Commune, and I don't know what else), and an endless series of storm-in-a-teacup faction fights.

In the 1990s sometime, I visited Dave in Coventry, and he described how he'd found the ISG intolerable.

Our conversation was friendly and it looked like we might re-establish dialogue or even collaboration. It didn't happen. I regret that.

● **Funeral:** 10 May, 2.15pm, Canley Crematorium, Cannon Hill Road, Coventry CV4 7DF.

Expelling London's poor

By Clarke Benitez

The local council of Newham, east London (the main site of the 2012 Olympic Games), has written to a housing association in Stoke-on-Trent (160 miles away) in an attempt to re-house 500 families.

It claims this is due to "overcrowding", and the difficulty of finding private-rental homes for housing benefit claimants following the Tories' introduction of a benefits cap.

Gill Brown, the chief executive of Brighter Futures, the Stoke housing association approached by Newham, said they would decline the offer and de-

nounced the plan as "social cleansing".

Waltham Forest borough council confirmed that it had *already* re-housed 14 families in Luton and 5 in Margate. It also revealed that it has acquired "affordable accommodation" in Walsall, near Birmingham — 138 miles from London.

Tory-run councils in Westminster, Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham are investigating similar proposals and are considering an offer from the East Midlands-based Smart Housing Group to relocate 150 families to Nottingham and Derby.

When the housing benefits cap was first an-

nounced in 2010, even London's Tory mayor Boris Johnson feared it could lead to a "Kosovo-style social cleansing" (no mass graves in Newham but we get his point). He said "The last thing we want to have in our city is a situation such as Paris where the less well-off are pushed out to the suburbs." As it has turned out, his fears were understated.

Stoke, Derby and Nottingham are not "suburbs" of London. Working-class families are not simply being pushed out of the suburbs, but out of the capital altogether.

There is a simple solution to the housing crisis; scrap the benefits cap and

guarantee decent accommodation for all with a massive programme of council-house construction across the country. Take housing stock sold off to Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) back in-house, and regulate rents.

Landlords have already begun evicting tenants hit by the benefits cap. Trade unionists and community campaigners must be ready to take direct action to resist eviction or relocation, as well as taking the political fight for decent, affordable housing for all to the government.

London must not be allowed to become a city for the rich only.

Profiteers bleeding the NHS dry

By Todd Hamer

Last Tuesday, private health giants Capita and United Healthcare introduced themselves to London's leading GPs with Andrew Lansley as matchmaker.

With the sinister language of a self-help book, the multinationals claimed the conference was "designed to ensure that Clinical Commissioning Groups are fully empowered, liberated and able to define their future."

In fact, this was a shallow marketing exercise designed to woo the new masters of NHS into handing over large amounts of public money. The effect of the Health and Social Care Act will be to "liberate" the private health firms to make huge profits at the expense of patients and healthworkers.

VIRGIN SUCCESS
It is estimated that since the Health and Social Care Act became law, Richard Branson's Virgin Care has won over £1 billion of contracts.

The biggest contract is in community services in Surrey, but Virgin have also won contracts in Milton Keynes and Brighton and West Sussex.

Research by Eoin Clarke (Green Benches blog) shows that employees of Branson sat on the Clinical Commissioning Groups that awarded the contracts. Branson's operation has positioned itself in certain areas to hold the NHS's purse-strings and then has awarded contracts to itself. So much for patient choice and accountability!

West Riding Assura LLP (a subsidiary of Assura Medical, forerunner of Virgin Care) recently took action against North Yorkshire and York PCT after they failed to win a

contract for musculo-skeletal services.

The case was taken to the Cooperation and Competition Panel for NHS Services (CCP) in late 2011. Ironically, they claimed that the NHS hospital's bid was too low to deliver quality care. They also complained that the bid failed to protect patient choice as the hospital could refer elective patients

to itself.

The CCP dismissed the first claim, showing that the NHS tends to be more efficient than its private sector competitors. However, they did uphold the second complaint about "patient choice". It is not known whether legal action will follow but these aggressive tactics are just another layer of bureaucratic waste that bleeds the NHS and taxpayers' money.

SERCO
Serco's £140 million contract for community services in Sussex made the headlines by coming just days after the Health and Social Care Act came into force.

Left victories at student conference

By AWL students

This year's National Union of Students conference (24-26 April, Sheffield) saw left-wing student activist groups, most notably the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, defeat the NUS (Labour-led) leadership on a range of issues.

The conference voted, against the leadership's militant opposition, for "the abolition of all fees; no hidden course costs; a living grant/maintenance allowance... stop the cuts... tax the rich and business" and for a national walk out of college students in the autumn.

It voted to "campaign against the government's whole Higher Education agenda, including all private providers, and for a public university system", for "students and workers to unite", "tax the rich to fund education".

It voted for a national demonstration "against

cuts, fees, high interest on student debts and privatisation" in the autumn term. There was no vote on one of the central controversies of recent years: whether to call for free education for undergraduate students, as the left advocates, or stick with the existing policy of supporting a graduate tax. Activists must campaign for the new National Executive Council to agree policy for free undergraduate education when it meets.

The left also won votes on extending student union democracy, including support for general meetings, on opposing the anti-trade union laws and on defending the right to protest, including opposition to police violence.

The conference voted to reaffiliate to Unite Against Fascism, against our opposition. A more radical motion on anti-fascism, from NCAFC supporters, was not discussed.

The conference saw an act of anti-semitic vandal-

ism against the stall of the Union of Jewish Students. The stars of David on the UJS banners were plastered over with "boycott Israel" stickers. The issue here is not one's view on boycotting Israel per se, but the targeting of Jewish students — and the poisonous atmosphere which "left-wing" agitation on the question of Israel-Palestine has helped to create.

Workers in the NHS must prepare to fight to stay in the NHS — the alternative is a race to the bottom on our terms and conditions, under aggressive business regimes that will set out to smash workers' self-organisation.

Left candidate Vicki Baars, who is currently one of NUS's LGBT officers, won the position VP Union Development. This is the first time the left has won one of the VP positions for over a decade.

Other left candidates got substantial votes, but did not come near winning.

The NCAFC stood three candidates for the part-time "Block of 15" section of the executive. The results will be out on 3 May.

• Abridged from: www.workersliberty.org/nusconference2012report

Confront the EDL in Luton

By Pdraig O'Brien

Anti-fascists will mobilise in Luton on Saturday 5 May, as the English Defence League prepare to demonstrate in what many EDL supporters see as their organisation's spiritual home.

Although the far-right "March for England" was routed by anti-fascists in Brighton on Sunday 22 April, the EDL remains sufficiently confident to physically attack left-wing activists, including recently hospitalising two people after attacking an SWP-run stall in Lewisham, south east London.

The new alliance between the EDL and the British Freedom Party, a 2010 split from the BNP, will increase the EDL's activity in the formal "political" sphere. EDL chief Stephen Yaxley Lennon ("Tommy Robinson") is set to become the BFP's deputy leader, creating the potential for a new far-right political force.

The 6.5 million votes garnered by French fascist Marine Le Pen in the first round of France's recent presidential elections, and the ongoing centrality of Geert Wilder's "Party for Freedom" to the governmental shake-up in the Netherlands, could further bolster fascist confidence in Britain.

The Luton anti-fascist mobilisation will take place in parallel to the EDL's demonstration on Saturday 5 May — it may well be kettled by police. That is not good enough. Anti-fascists need to organise to stop the EDL from marching or at least disrupt their plans, as anti-fascists did in Brighton.

Physically confronting the EDL doesn't necessarily mean pitched street fights, but it does mean using creative tactics — including blockading roads — to prevent fascist mobilisation.

• For details of the UAF mobilisation, see bit.ly/Hqk4pm

Pdraig O'Brien

Organising against anti-choice bigotry

On 28 April the Society for Protection of the Unborn Child organised a series of "vigils" (i.e. demonstrations) against abortion, in towns across the UK.

They were met by pro-choice protests.

In Sheffield SPUC numbered around twenty. We were 30 or more. The vigil was next to Meadowhall shopping centre, so was very busy with traffic. The vast majority of public support was for us, lots of cars honking, smiles and waves. There was a peaceful atmosphere, lots of young feminists as well as some older men and women.

The Liverpool SPUC event was attended by about 20 anti-abortionists and 30 pro-choice activists. North West Infidels had said they would turn up but they didn't. The demonstration was held outside a church by a busy roadside in Childwall. The counter protest was lively and we effectively stopped their placards being seen by covering them with our own. We came up with chants raising the positive demands necessary for a woman's right to chose, which really put the pro-life lot on the defensive.

Our demo was on the whole very young and mainly anarchist with a few trade unionists present.

Rosie Huzzard, Rebecca Galbraith

Unison leader calls for TUC demo

On 25 April Unison general secretary Dave Prentis called on the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to organise a national demonstration in autumn 2012.

The demonstration, says Prentis, will "bring together an alternative coalition opposed to the government's damaging policies including public spending cuts, heavy job losses, damaging privatisation and the unfair pay freeze..."

"We need the TUC to organise the biggest demonstration in our Labour movement's history. Today I am calling on the TUC to set plans in motion to show the government that there is a real alternative. This must include ditching plans to cut taxes for the rich in our society, while those on low incomes and communities all across the country pay a heavy price for the double dip recession".

The call for a demonstration is welcome.

Activists also want democratic debate in the unions about fighting the cuts here and now, with industrial action.

Gerry Bates

Socialists and crises

Dave Osler

Recent capitalist history has thrown up sharper economic declines and higher levels of unemployment than the ones we are currently witnessing in Greece and Spain. It's just that they haven't occurred in nice Mediterranean countries that Britons visit for beach holidays and long weekends.

So while the latest estimates from the local central bank suggest that Greek GDP will fall 5% in 2012, marking a cumulative drop of 13% since 2008, it remains true that the Asian financial crisis of 15 years or so ago was far worse. GDP plunged 13% in Indonesia in 1998 alone, with reductions of 11% in Thailand and 7% in South Korea and Malaysia.

Yet Asia recovered relatively rapidly, and the official line from the European Central Bank (ECB) is that Greece will see stagnation next year, followed by the resumption of growth in 2014.

But given the sharp reductions in wages and public spending, collapsing consumer confidence, capital flight, an investment strike and — most important of all — the absence of export-oriented manufacturing industries, many observers regard that outcome as unlikely.

Meanwhile, unemployment in Spain has hit 24.4%, and twice that for young people. That puts a developed first world economy in the same ball park as Belize, Gabon and Bosnia Herzegovina. Indeed, Spain now has a higher proportion of joblessness than the most recent figure I have been able to find for Iraq, or Britain in 1932, come to that.

Marxist economists are divided in their assessment of the causes of all this, broadly between those who attribute explanatory primacy to a 40-year secular decline in the rate of profit and those who — more convincing, in my view — regard what is happening as the unravelling of the contradictions inherent in neoliberalism.

But what we clearly do have here is an immanent critique of the free market orthodoxy; textbook Friedmanite theory doesn't work, even by its own lights.

FIX

Far from being self-regulating, in the manner that the political right has maintained for the last three decades, capitalism has shown itself utterly dependent on state intervention for its survival.

The clearest recent demonstration of this is the so-called long term refinancing operation mounted by the ECB, which pumped one trillion euros worth of ultra-cheap three year loans into the European banking system. Despite the name, the measure is likely to prove only a short term fix.

Ever since I first became politically active, and before even that, revolutionary socialists have shown themselves all too prone to describe whatever state the economy happens to find itself in as “a crisis”, and to link that analysis to a perspective of rapid radicalisation of the working class, on a scale that could catapult their particular sect to mass party standing more or less overnight.

Sometimes it really has been stated as crudely as that, as those of us old enough to remember the Workers' Revolutionary Party will recall. Rather more often, the assumption has been unvoiced but obviously implicit.

We need to be that bit more nuanced. An occasional recession, tough as it is on those who find themselves on the dole queue, is no biggie in the wider scheme of things. Then again, what we are facing right now is shaping up to be rather more than yet another easily shrugged off downturn.

The prospect of some sort of rerun of the Great Depression is higher than any sane person would like them to be. Yet projects for socialist transformation have not so far enjoyed any breakthrough in either Greece or Spain, any more than they did in Asia in the late 1990s.

Overt fascist forces are now polling well above the 3% threshold needed to secure parliamentary representation in Greece, while the anti-capitalist left Antarsya remains below it.

In short, if socialists are going to make any progress, it will be by our own efforts in popularising our ideas, rather than sitting back and expecting things to fall into our laps.

North Korea: why are unions silent?

Eric Lee

The week leading up to May Day is commemorated each year around the world as “North Korea Freedom Week”, though you'd hardly know that if you were active in the British labour movement.

British unions pride themselves on their solidarity campaigns in support of workers in Palestine, Colombia, Venezuela and Cuba, but never speak out in defence of those workers who live in North Korea, a country that is effectively a giant prison.

This year, there was a commemoration in the House of Commons and three North Korean refugees spoke, as well as someone from Amnesty International (AI). Several people commented on the fact that while public opinion can lead to pressure on a number of countries that violate human rights, one hears very little about North Korea in spite of its abysmal record.

This is particularly true in the labour movement. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) publishes an annual report on violations of trade union rights around the world. For each country, there's a general description, a few words about the legal situation of workers, and a page about violations of rights. For a country such as Israel, the ITUC publishes a long list of rights violations. But the page about North Korea is blank.

Following the same formula for all countries, the ITUC has this to say about North Korea:

“Report violations — 2011. Murders: none reported. Attempted murders: none reported. Threats: none reported. Injuries: none reported. Arrests: none reported. Imprisonments: none reported. Dismissals: none reported.”

One of the mechanisms unions can use on a global scale to combat violations of union rights is the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a UN body. The ILO has a committee on freedom of association which hears reports of such violations. In its most recent report, the committee mentions the word “Korea” no fewer than 38 times. But every single reference is to South Korea.

Worse than this, some unions actually welcome representatives of the state-controlled North Korean unions as honoured guests at their conferences. Recently, some major

South African unions invited the nearly-defunct “World Federation of Trade Unions” (WFTU) to hold a high profile meeting in their country. During the Cold War, WFTU was the home for Stalinist unions but in recent years is host more to various tin-pot dictatorships such as the Libyan and Syrian regimes. Heads of the North Korean unions spoke at the WFTU events and at South African union congresses. There were no reports of them being booed off the stage, or better, of them being disinvited.

One of those unions, the public sector union NEHAWU (a sister union to Unison), proudly lists “international solidarity” as one of its six core principles. And yet they invite representatives of the North Korean regime to speak at their congress, and publish their speeches on the NEHAWU website.

The argument may be made that the reason why so little attention is paid to North Korean human rights is that there is so little information leaking out of the country. While it's true that information about, say, violations of Palestinian human rights is ubiquitous, it is more difficult to find news about North Korea.

More difficult, but not impossible. LabourStart has just launched a news page, updated daily, which includes stories about workers in North Korea. Recent stories focus on the decision by the regime to export North Korean workers to China as cheap labour. Other stories from AI and the BBC shed new light on North Korea's network of slave labour camps.

It turns out that there are plenty of sources of information about the terrible situation faced by working people in North Korea, a country in which an estimated 200,000 people live in labour camps. That information is out there because of groups such as AI, Human Rights Watch and many groups dedicated specifically to North Korea. There is no reason for trade unions to pretend ignorance any longer.

Workers throughout the world are up against brutal regimes, battling austerity budgets, anti-union campaigns by employers and governments, struggling for the basic human right to join and form trade unions.

But nowhere in the world is the situation worse than in North Korea. For that reason, the international labour movement should sever relations completely with the state-controlled trade unions there and instead campaign in support of North Korean workers, building genuine solidarity with them.

And they should start that campaign right now.

● LabourStart on North Korea: <http://nk.labourstart.org>

Salmond, Murdoch — best of mates

Scotland
By Dale Street

SNP leader Alex Salmond's best-of-pals relationship with Rupert Murdoch and his son has been thrust into the limelight by the Leveson inquiry.

In an email dated 11 February last year Frederic Michel (a Mr Fixit for Murdoch Jr) told his boss: “I met with Alex Salmond's adviser today. He (Salmond) will call Hunt (the Tory Culture Secretary) whenever we need him to.”

On 1 March 2011, Salmond had dinner with the editor of the Scottish version of the *Sun*. The *Sun* pledged to support the SNP in the Holyrood elections taking place in two months time.

The following day Salmond phoned Michel and asked if he could ensure that Murdoch Jr could “smooth the way” for the *Sun* to come out in support of the SNP. Michel then emailed Murdoch Jr: “Alex Salmond called... The *Sun* is now keen to back the SNP at the election. Alex wanted to see whether we could help smooth the way for the process.”

Salmond, the email continued, wanted to host Murdoch Jr and Michel for dinner some time before the launch of the election campaign in late March. The email concluded: “On the Sky bid, he (Salmond) will make himself available to support the debate if consultation goes ahead.”

On 3 March, Salmond duly booked a call with Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt so that he could argue in support of News International (NI)'s bid to take over BSkyB. (The call did not take place, as Hunt announced the same day that he would allow the takeover.)

Salmond has not denied the above sequence of events, but he has denied any formal trade-off. We're meant to believe it was all just a coincidence!

In a debate in Holyrood last week Salmond claimed that in backing the NI bid he was merely fulfilling his role as Scottish First Minister and protecting jobs. His stance had been vindicated, he claimed, by the decision of BSkyB call-

centre contractor, HEROTsc, to “bring 900 jobs” to Glasgow.

But Salmond was unable to cite any advice from civil servants or economic advisers that defending Scottish jobs required support for the Murdochs' bid for Sky.

Nor did he attempt to explain why, if the takeover of BSkyB was good for Scotland, did SNP MPs in Westminster oppose it and co-sponsor a Labour anti-takeover motion.

And the 900 call-centre jobs he referred to had been announced in April of this year, several months after the attempt to buy out BSkyB had failed. In any case, 800 of them were existing jobs which had simply transferred to HEROTsc after the collapse of another company.

Salmond's willingness to lobby Hunt was part of a broader pattern of close relations between the Murdochs and the politician. According to Murdoch Sr, who was personally involved in the *Sun*'s decision to back the SNP: “I would describe [this relationship] as warm. ... I enjoy his company. I don't know much about the SNP. I have met Mr Salmond a few times and find him an attractive person.”

Evidence provided to the inquiry by Murdoch Sr refers to four face-to-face meetings and five phone calls between the two men since 2007. Topics covered in the meetings included “Scottish independence”, investments in Scotland by NI, and Murdoch's Scottish ancestry.

The most recent meeting took place in February this year, in the aftermath of the revelations about phone hacking and the subsequent closure of the *News of the World*.

As Scottish Labour Party leader Johann Lamont put it, the meeting took place at a time when Murdoch's papers were being investigated for bribery, phone-hacking, perverting the course of justice, perjury and destroying evidence.

Just a few days later Salmond wrote an article for the Scottish version of the *Sun on Sunday*, and included in his article his planned date for the referendum on Scottish independence — which not even the Holyrood Parliament had been informed of.

Salmond's cosy relationship with the Murdochs — and other millionaires, including Fred Godwin, Brian Souter, Tom Farmer and, formerly, Donald Trump — shows up the hollowness of the SNP's claims to be on the side of ordinary working people.

Osborne is to blame!

If there is high unemployment, and little buying power for goods and services, then government cuts raise unemployment higher, cut buying power further, and thus snowball a slump.

And yes, that is what has happened with George Osborne's economic policies. Statistics now show a decline in output for two quarters (six months) in a row, which is the rule-of-thumb definition of a recession. Real life shows continuing high unemployment, at best levelling off, and steadily dropping real wages.

In the Great Depression of the 1930s, there was a quicker recovery. By 1934, four years after the slump of 1930, economic activity had recovered and risen above its 1930 level. In this depression, output is still way below 2008 levels, and most of Osborne's cuts are yet to come.

Labour shadow chancellor Ed Balls is right to say that the Tories' "austerity plan is self-defeating and cutting spending and raising taxes too far and too fast would badly backfire".

He is also right that "far from the eurozone being to blame for Britain's woes, it was only growth in the EU and the rest of the world which kept us from going into recession earlier. Excluding exports, the domestic UK economy has now been in recession for a year".

LACKING

Despite the calamities in Greece, Spain, and other countries, in aggregate the eurozone and EU economies have been doing not as badly as Britain.

In 2011 EU output rose by 1.5%, eurozone output by the same figure, US output by 1.7% — and UK output by 0.7%.

British capital has had modestly expanding export markets, all the more so because it has a bigger proportion of its exports going to the slightly-less-sluggish USA than do other European countries. The recession in spending within Britain, and output for sale within Britain, has been even bigger than the overall recession.

Lacking from Ed Balls, and Ed Miliband in his "five priorities for the Queen's Speech" (30 April), however, has been any real alternative to Osborne. Miliband denounced the Tory / Lib-Dem government as "too close to the rich and powerful; out of touch with everyone else". But his own proposals were piffling:

- restoring the 50% top tax rate, reversing the cuts in tax credit;
- pressure on the utility companies to restrain electricity and gas prices;
- a limit on train fare increases;
- stronger public restraint on rip-off surcharges by banks, airlines, etc.;
- money from a tax on bank bonuses into a youth job

scheme.

Nothing about reversing the cuts in the NHS (now running at 7% a year) or in schools (10,000 teachers' jobs lost last year). Nothing about funding so that local councils reverse their cuts in jobs and services.

Nothing about a concerted effort to tax the rich, or to establish public and democratic control over the banks and high finance.

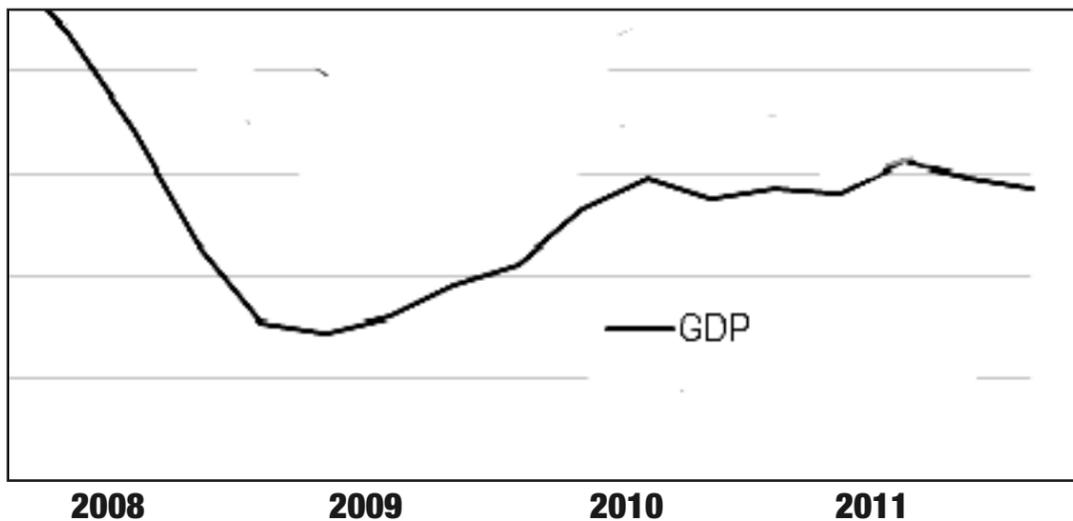
Osborne's argument is that social spending cuts reassure global financial markets, so enable the British government to borrow at continually low interest rates, and so enable private capitalist business to borrow and expand without being "crowded out".

It rings hollow, for a start, because bank lending to business is still way down. But the real reason for Osborne's cuts drive is not the same as the official "good reason".

Cutting social spending and using high unemployment as a lever to worsen workers' wages and conditions or even to crush union organisation may lengthen a recession — but it makes sense for the rich because it sets the conditions for a capitalist recovery, later, to start with low costs, high profits, and stricter control over Labour.

Alan Budd, who was an economic adviser to Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, recently summarised the guideline for Tory policy in the 1980s: "raising unemployment was an extremely desirable way of reducing the strength of the working classes — if you like, that what was engineered there in Marxist terms was a crisis of capitalism which re-created a reserve army of labour and has allowed the capitalists to make high profits ever since".

Osborne's is the same policy now.



A wealth tax could cancel the cuts

Just one thousand wealthy people in Britain increased their wealth by £19 billion between 2010 and 2011. If that extra loot were taken from them in tax — leaving them still super-rich, only no more super-rich than in 2010 — that alone would yield enough revenue to offset all the Cameron government's benefit cuts.

If the bulk of their wealth were expropriated — leaving them merely rich, with £1 million each — that would pay off about half Britain's total government debt, leaving the country with no "government debt problem" at all even from the viewpoint of the most conservative economist.

The top thousand suffered losses between 2008 and 2009, as the rich obviously do when businesses go bust and share and property prices fall. But now they have recouped all those losses, and more.

Real wages are still falling. By June 2011, they were on

average down 7.4%. And the "social wage" of benefits, pensions, and public services is falling too.

Apologists used to excuse inequality by saying that it encourages enterprise which lifts everyone's prosperity, and so long as the majority advance it is just peevishness to complain about the extra rewards for a few.

Studies like the book by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level*, show the apologists are wrong even in their own terms. More unequal societies generate more illness, worse education, more crime, even if on average they may provide more cars or more flat-screen TVs.

Now the apologists' excuse falls down completely. The richer are getting richer while average standards are getting worse, and set to get worse for many years to come.

This can be changed only by a working-class fight-back.

Help the AWL raise £20,000

The *Sunday Times* Life in the Day feature invites their readers to enter the world of brave, talented and otherwise interesting people. Petra Ecclestone, the heiress daughter of the Formula One boss, who featured on 29 April, did not qualify on any of those counts.

She thought she had been very brave to withstand people being mean to her at school. Maybe that meanness had something to do with Petra's complete lack of self-awareness.

Se blathered on with the iron sense of entitlement that only the very, very, very rich possess. How her chef pours her Alpen every morning and her butler serves it up. How if her new very, very, very rich husband didn't stop her, she would buy hundreds of Birkins (a posh bag, apparently).

Our demands are much more modest. We would make do with the equivalent budget Petra has for "popping to the shops" ... on Rodeo Drive. We promise to spend it much more wisely.

If you think you can help us please do!

● Taking out a monthly standing order. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and below. Please post to us at the AWL address below.

● 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.

● Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

More information:
07796 690 874 /
awl@workersliberty.org /
AWL, 20E Tower Workshops,
58 Riley Rd, SE1 3DG.

Total raised so far: £12,793

We raised £680 in the last week through donations, increased standing orders and sales of fundraising merchandise. We are on target to raise our £20,000 by September, so please keep it up!

— Thank you Dave, Ed, Eric and Laura.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)
..... (its address)
.....
.....

Account name:

Account no.:

Sort code:

Please make payments to the debit of my account: Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month)

20 (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

Fight for a workers' government!

Trotsky explained the method of transitional demands

By Martin Thomas

The labour movement can and must push back the Tory government on individual policies. To do more than damage-limitation, however, the labour movement needs to drive this government from office.

Seriously to propose policies like heavy taxation of the rich, or expropriation and democratic control of the banks and other big financial outfits, we need also to propose a government which might carry them out.

Yet Labour, under Ed Miliband and Ed Balls, promises only slight tweaks to Osborne's policy. Routine labour movement pressure can make those tweaks bigger, but tweak-plus still falls short of what we need.

These days it falls short of what we need even to stop social regression — widening inequality, increasing subordination of human life to the cruelties of the market, and ecological destruction.

A revolution, one day? Yes, but what now? How can we begin to map out a path from now to a socialist revolution?

Leon Trotsky argued that active socialists should develop "a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class, and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat" [working class]. These would be "a bridge between present demands and the the socialist program of the revolution".

Progress across the "bridge" depends on how and when large numbers of workers mobilise. That cannot be guaranteed, or predicted exactly, by deft tactics or deft analysis from the active minority. But the transitional-demands approach enables us, as Trotsky put it, to "base our program on the logic of the class struggle".

STRUGGLE

It cannot enable us to leap ahead from or bypass the working-class struggle; but it can enable us always to be pushing forward.

As a summarising "bridge" demand, knitting together the others and making them coherent, Trotsky proposed: "Of all parties and organisations which base themselves on the workers... and speak in their name we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' government..." At the same time we agitate for the working-class demands which require a responsive government to carry them out.

In Britain today the "workers' government" means a system of demands aimed at the labour movement:

- Calling for adequate social and economic measures;
- Proposing the radical democratisation of the labour movement;
- Advocating a rebuilding and revitalisation of the labour movement at rank and file level.

AWL proposes such demands, and works to unite the widest possible working-class ranks round them, including workers who agree on immediate demands but think that our talk of "revolution" is fantasy.

Q. How would a workers' government come to power? Would it need a revolution, or could a workers' government be elected through the existing parliamentary system?

Genuine working-class revolutions are not explosions dropping from the sky, or military operations concocted by a radical minority. They are the culmination of a vast process of self-awakening, self-education, self-mobilisation by the working class.

Especially in a country with strong parliamentary traditions like Britain, that process can well result in the election of a "left Labour" government before a showdown over

state power. In fact, it is unlikely that either the capitalist class or the working class will move the political struggle out of the parliamentary framework without that framework first being tested to the limit.

Once a "left Labour" government is elected, there will then be a battle over whether it becomes a real workers' government — i.e. whether the labour movement is powerful enough to control it and enforce radical measures. If it does, the bourgeoisie will deploy its back-up resources — the obstructive powers of the House of Lords, the monarchy, and the courts; and, if the elected government defies those unelected powers, then some sort of military coup.

In dull 2012, it seems fantasy to talk about a military coup in Britain. Yet we know, through subsequent admissions by army Chief of Staff Michael Carver, that in February 1974, "fairly senior officers were ill-advised enough to make suggestions that perhaps, if things got terribly bad, the army would have to do something about it".

In Australia, as "constitutional" a country as Britain, an only mildly-reforming Labour government was arbitrarily removed from office in November 1975 by the Queen's representative, the Governor-General, using the unelected powers of the monarchy.

In other words, the political struggle would, if the labour movement continued to mobilise, progressively burst out of the parliamentary framework. The labour movement would build new organisations like workers' militias and workers' councils.

The future always turns out richer and more convoluted than we expect. It would be wrong to take a schedule of revolution developing from battles around a left-Labour parliamentary government as a dogma. But an instructive possibility? Yes.

Q. How is "workers' government" different from "socialism"?

In strict Marxist terms, "socialism" is a stage of development a large time after a socialist revolution, achieved only when socialistic development has got far enough to wash away all class conflicts and contrasts.

To counterpose "socialism" as "the answer" to the plight of capitalism is like saying that the answer to the perpetual chill of the Arctic is to move to a warmer climate, without saying how to get there. Not untrue, but not adequate.

Q. How is a "workers' government" different from a reforming Labour government of the 1945 type?

In Britain, a workers' government would probably, in the first place, be a reforming Labour government of a sort — that is, a Labour government based on a revitalised labour movement and mandated by it into radical pro-working-class measures.

But a reforming Labour government may be much less than a workers' government; or (to put it another way) a workers' government of a very limited and stopped-short variety.

The 1945 Labour government introduced reforms, and was much more accountable to the labour movement than recent Labour governments have been. And the Tories raged in Parliament against measures like the NHS. But most ruling-class strategists recognised that in the aftermath of World War they had no choice but to concede reforms, and saw that Labour administration as a relatively "safe" though not ideal vehicle for that.

Q. Does a workers' government require a revolutionary party, or parties, or just a trade-union party?

Not just any labour movement can create a workers' government. Only a mobilised, confident, democratic, and politically-sharp labour movement can do that.

And making the labour movement democratic and politically-sharp is not an automatic process. It requires the more politically-alert, more revolutionary-minded, more democratically-minded minority to organise in advance, to organise effectively, to develop and redevelop clear ideas and policies, and to win serious influence.

In that sense, a workers' government is impossible without the emergence of at least a minority revolutionary party.

A small revolutionary socialist organisation like Workers' Liberty can use agitation for a workers' government to help educate those around it, to win influence, and to build towards the revolutionary party necessary to make reality of a workers' government.

- More: workersliberty.org/node/18782

Will a Hollande Euro-economic

John Palmer, former European editor of the *Guardian*, spoke to *Solidarity* about the background to, possibilities of, and implications of the call by François Hollande, who looks likely to win the presidency of France in the run-off poll on 6 May, for a reshaping of European Union economic policy.

Hollande's position to some extent reflects a shift in the thinking of important sectors of capital and the political elite outside social democracy. It is clear that even among finance capital there is growing scepticism about the coherence of a deflationist austerity strategy.

There is a broader shift in the economic consensus taking place, which is both reflected by and contributed to the position which has been taken by the French Parti Socialiste.

That shift is also reflected within German social democracy, at least as far as some parts of Hollande's programme are concerned. There have even been sympathetic and supporting noises coming from the centre-right Monti government in Rome and the beleaguered conservative regime in Madrid.

The significance of Hollande's position is all the greater for it being related to these other developments.

There are already negotiations taking place between Merkel's officials and the Parti Socialiste on what exactly they have in mind for the fiscal compact. It is clear that we're talking about addendums rather than structural changes.

The crucial question is how far will the Merkel regime go to meet Hollande. It is clear that Hollande will go, and has already gone, some way to meet the German conservative position. He is for example no longer calling for Eurobonds to deal with sovereign debt, but Eurobonds to enlarge the capital base of the European Investment Bank so it can lead an investment-led recovery.

MERKEL

On the Merkel side, there are signs that she is ready to give ground because of the domestic political situation in Germany. There are elections next year.

If she wants to stay in office, it looks as if she will be obliged to do a deal for a Grosse Koalition [grand coalition] with the Social Democrats, and therefore she wants to put herself in a good position for that result. She can't go into the election with too big a gap between her and the SPD.

So I think there is likely to be some result. How effective will it be? I think the measures will be of limited effectiveness. The likely programme of an investment-led recovery, Eurobonds for the EIB, a further increase in the so-called firewall to deal with potential new crises in Spain and Italy — those things and some other measures will almost certainly go through.

The European Commission is coming forward with proposals which are aimed at the European Council summit meeting in June. We may get some flavour of them at an informal summit which van Rompuy is considering for May.

But as against that, the double-dip recession danger in the US, in Britain, and in the European Union is increasing. The ground they have to cover to mend the downward spiral in the economies is increasing. The steps they are taking will fall short of what is necessary. What is necessary, I think, is the programme that Euro-memorandum and others have outlined, which goes to the heart of the fundamental internal crisis of the euro-area, which is the asymmetry of the economic cycles and the economic management of the key euro-area economies.

The need for growth measures is the position of sectors of capital. The intellectual milieu around big capital has been shifting in that direction for some time. That reassures the social democrats that their programme is not going to be overtly confrontational, or that they can exploit the space where there are divisions over what to do within capitalist opinion.

The IMF position in favour of growth measures is to do with the French director-general. That has been her position for some time. And the facts of the deflationary course of the crisis — i.e. the spiral of stagnation, the deficits increasing notwithstanding austerity — are shrieking out now, so it's not surprising that there are shifts taking place.

Social democracy has been a marginal force in European politics in recent years. Twelve years ago the great majority of EU governments were led by social-democratic parties, and today

Ande victory change omics?

budget.

Any government, including a workers' government that took over and was operating in the global system and not attempting a North Korean party, would have to look at its budget deficit position.

In Greece the left position should have been to focus on issues like the arms deal with Germany [under which Germany insisted that Greece go through a contract to buy submarines from Germany] and the refusal to collect taxes from the rich.

There is a caricature Keynesian position that says that there are no problems with deficits. There are problems with the deficit. The class differences relate both to the scale and the speed of the adjustments, but also the nature of the adjustments — whether they focus on armaments, wealth taxes, bank reserves, profits, and so on.

An issue which has been under-debated on the left in Britain, in my opinion, is the enormous cash reserves which non-financial companies have accumulated, and they don't know where to put them. The left should have a position on that issue.

I don't say that it is reactionary or unprincipled for a left party to have measures to reduce the deficit. If borrowing will be necessary to fund essential services, how do you prevent the cost of that spiralling out of control unless the overall deficit is dealt with in some way?

But the whole issue of deficits should be conducted on a European-calculated basis. Any budget policy which is calculated on a purely national basis, from the left or anywhere else, will inevitably end up in a reactionary position because of the inherent contradictions.

Social democracy and other progressive forces are running behind the shift that is taking place among sectors of capital: I think that's true.

I don't accept either the position that the current EU policies are shaped by a German drive for domination, or the one that they are shaped by German ruling-class stupidity.

Certainly there is a bias in all bourgeois state policies to seek state advantage and to seek the extension of national power and influence. That is not unique to Germany. In fact since World War Two it may have been less true of Germany than of other EU member states, for obvious historical reasons.

CONSPIRACY

I think the conspiracy theory, that current EU policies are shaped by German ambition for a Fourth Reich, is entirely mistaken. And I do not think the position can be entirely put down to intellectual stupidity in the ruling classes.

It is down to the incompatibility of the traditional framework of national-state politics and the necessity for a broader politics. It is analogous to the contradiction which the German statelets were experiencing in the run-up to and immediately after Prussian-led German unification.

The German national market was a reality which their politics could not encompass. The same sort of thing is true of globalisation and in particular of Europeanisation today.

The whole construct of the national debate, set by bourgeois forces including social democracy, is incapable of understanding that the contradictions of the system have moved beyond national borders and require solutions which transcend national borders.

That is the genesis of the fact that everywhere states have been making calculations which, when aggregated, cannot produce a solution to the crisis they face.

Added to that is an ideological factor. The media moves politicians. In Germany *Bild-Zeitung* came out with the famous headline, "Alle wollen unser Geld!" — everyone wants our money! That was a very powerful *Sun*-type articulation of a politics that was shamelessly nationalist (not so much imperialist, but rather nationalist).

Just as the politics of the Murdoch empire captivated Conservative and Labourite politicians here, so the chaotic nature of the system means that a factor like the media can exploit the vacuum and articulate a populism which is a very powerful driver of irrational policies.

Look at Cameron. What drives his stance of vetoing the fiscal treaty and then urging the other EU countries to integrate as fast as possible? He is driven not by British capital saying that is the optimal policy, but by fear of the media.

Agitation by the *Bild-Zeitung* (German equivalent of the *Sun*): "Alle wollen unser Geld!" — "They all want our money!"

there are only a few countries where they have any role in government.

There are also divisions emerging on the political right, with the growth of populist and far, which also in a distorted way reflects this sense of failure of the system, has also has opened up space.

In France, a section of the Parti Communiste vote went to the National Front, and maybe a section of it will be returning to the social democrats in the second round of the presidential election. That shows the instability of that vote.

The social democrats are coming back from a long time out of influence. The Social Democrats are back in office in Denmark, and there are signs of the political pendulum swinging in other countries, but not everywhere as yet.

If the Parti Socialiste is seen to be changing the direction of euro-area policy, in however restricted a sense, that will probably encourage other social democrats in other countries to join in.

[In the Netherlands there has been a government crisis over budget cuts, ending with a new coalition for a cuts package. But no major party in the Netherlands has been ready to propose a "euro-Keynesian" policy of deliberately continuing a deficit in a country like the Netherlands, which has a relatively mild debt problem.]

The Dutch Socialist Party, the ex-Maoist party, has called for tax increases of various kinds, but they haven't supported the reductions in course. The Labour Party, the PvdA, is not joining the new coalition government — not because it is against any cuts, but because it is against *these* cuts. But the scale of the cuts in the Netherlands is tiny compared to the scale of the cuts in Greece and Spain and Ireland so on.

The Green Left party in the Netherlands calls for an expansionary Euro-area strategy, although it has supported the new

No Keynesians in the Netherlands?

By Chris Reynolds

The Netherlands' right-wing, neo-liberal, fiercely pro-cuts coalition government collapsed over the weekend 21-22 April, unable to agree on measures to reduce the country's budget deficit to the EU's 3% target in 2013.

This collapse should, and must on some level, strengthen the hand of the labour movement in arguing against cuts.

The *Financial Times* (25 April) reports, however: "Anyone expecting the Netherlands to turn towards the anti-austerity prescriptions of neo-Keynesian economists in London and New York has another think coming..."

"The idea that wealthy countries like the Netherlands, with its manageable national debt of 65.2 per cent of GDP, should be running a big budget deficit to generate demand that could lead to growth in weaker eurozone economies, such as Spain, is nowhere to be found in the Dutch political landscape..."

"Left-wing parties such as Labour and the Socialists oppose demands by the European Commission to bring the 2013 budget deficit below the EU limit of 3 per cent of gross domestic product. They want to cut the budget deficit to some 3.8 per cent in 2013, and meet the 3 per cent target in 2015. Their proposals rely on tax hikes that would hit higher earners harder, measures that take longer to kick in..."

The *FT* seems to be right. The SP, a left social-democratic party of freakish Maoist origin, is possibly the strongest electoral party to the left of mainstream social democracy anywhere in Europe. In some recent opinion polls in the Netherlands, it has had more support than any other party, and in the latest polls it still scores as the second-strongest party, likely to win 30 seats in the proportional-representation parliament and only marginally behind the right-wing VVD on 33.

Yet SP leader Emile Roemer declares: "I realise very well that we should bring the budget in order, but we should not cut too hard and too fast because that is disastrous for the economy and society."

The roots of this stance must be partly, of course, the SP's turn to parliamentary and electoralist "realism".

Part of it also, probably, is a national narrowness of outlook which the SP shares with other left groups.

The SP has attitudes to Europe indicated by slogans like: "Netherlands wants less Brussels". Thus, if the Netherlands can reduce its deficit without much pain, which maybe it can if it gives itself until 2015 to do it (and if no new international economic catastrophes intervene before that), why not?

The Euro-Keynesian argument is being rejected, not so much because it is limited and reformist and Keynesian, but because it is European, because it looks at the issues on an international scale.



Socialist Party leader Emile Roemer

Halfway answers will not serve workers

Theodora Polenta reports on the run-up to Greece's general election on 6 May.

People on the left in Greece are beginning to believe that a united and electorally empowered left, and a left-wing government, can be the initiator of a popular pro-working-class exit from the crisis.

But there are many political problems along the way.

In the last two polls the combined percentage of what is reckoned as the left (Democratic Left, Syriza, KKE, Greens, Antarsya) was above 30%. The combined percentage of Pasok and the conservative New Democracy party (ND) were below 40%.

But three main left wing forces — KKE, Syriza and Democratic Left — have come up with three diametrically different responses.

KKE is vehemently rejects not only all calls for electoral unity but even minimal cooperation and coordination on the left.

KKE rejects even a united front to confront racism and fascism, and a time when ultra-right chauvinistic, racist and openly neo-Nazi forces are gaining momentum.

In contrast, Syriza incorporates within itself forces with very different stances on the euro and the eurozone, on the debt, on the character of parliamentary democracy and the necessity of a workers' anti-capitalist revolution — 13 groups, from ex-Eurocommunist reformists through Maoists to Trotskyists.

Its largest section, Synaspismos (the ex-Eurocommunists), is still stuck with its utopian Euro-Keynesian response to the crisis — Eurobonds, Euro-financed productive investment, and progressive democratisation of the European Union and eurozone.

Since becoming synonymous with the youth protests in 2008, Syriza has oscillated between a militant youth section and a political leadership, coming from Synaspismos, which aims for a human centered capitalism.

Until recently Syriza refused to call for nationalisation of the banks under workers' control. Instead it supported "monitoring and controlling the banking system". Instead of refusing to pay the Greek debt, Syriza asks for renegotiation, postponement and freezing of debt payment, the creation of Eurobonds, etc.

Syriza aims for an electoral alliance, as broad as possible, which will record the anti-cuts sentiments of the population in a very loose way.

Despite the fact that the 6 May election takes place after 16 general strikes and amidst ongoing industrial strikes and unrest, Syriza's electoral manifesto does not mention the words struggle or movement.

Less than three years ago, in its 2009 manifesto, Syriza stated that it was "going to utilize its increased electoral appeal to make more politically effective its support to the evolving social struggles". Today's Syriza manifesto is centred around a formation of a government "of a new social and political majority with the radical left at its centre".

"Give us a vote for power, give us a vote to govern Greece", said Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras in a pre-election

KKE do not make working-class struggles their central concern

meeting, explaining that "Syriza knows what it is doing. It has capable members and leaders with scientific knowledge, political experience, and resilience". The role that the leaders of Syriza allocate to its supporters is that of passive supporters.

Tsipras has repeatedly stated that Syriza is not only a "negative" force of denunciations and resistance, but a force with a left-wing proposal to govern Greece in the "here and now".

Syriza states that it is aiming for a government with the left at its centre and other progressive forces. It has formed an electoral coalition with disillusioned MPs from Pasok, some of whom left Pasok from the onset of the cuts but some of whom voted at least for the first cuts memorandum.

Tsipras argues that a left-wing anti-memorandum government should be in a position to demand the end to austerity measures from the EU/ ECB/ IMF Troika and the initiation of an era of development without being expelled from the eurozone, because it would contradict the strategic interests of the eurozone to expel member states.

TSIPRAS

He has stated that he is prepared to be prime minister on 7 May. In a desperate attempt to build bridges to the KKE he stated that he does not exclude the possibility of KKE secretary Aleka Papariga being prime minister.

Tsipras has been calling for various forms of electoral alliance to both KKE and Democratic Left, from a comprehensive electoral common front to tactical electoral cooperation.

However, a united front of any form between KKE, Democratic Left and Syriza is politically impossible because the three parties disagree on the eurozone and euro and many other issues.

Democratic Left split away from Syriza in 2010. It points to the potential of cooperating with sections of Pasok and ND in favour of a slower, smoother enforcement of the second memorandum, and has vehemently oppose the calls for a left united front from Syriza. It declares it will refuse to cooperate with irresponsible and extreme forces that will pull Greece out of the eurozone. Its electoral priorities are: Securing Greece's position within the Eurozone; Revitalise the economy, Increase the morale of society and deal with corruption and scandals.

Democratic Left voted against the second cuts memorandum, but now it commits to honouring that memorandum and any agreements signed with "our social partners" (Merkozy, ECB, IMF). It differentiates from Pasok and ND in "fighting for alterations and adjustments and re-opening negotiations with our social partners within the already-agreed memorandum framework".

Both Pasok and ND, in the electoral campaign, talk about modifying the memorandum. But Democratic Left leader Kouvelis emphasises that he does not demand "a total and comprehensive renegotiation of the memorandum" but only for piecemeal changes and adjustments in stages "provided that there are important political changes within the German-French axis or our fiscal measures improve significantly".

Democratic Left not only did not participate in the student movement and the "indignant citizens'" movement in the city squares, but opposed them. It vehemently opposed

George Papandreou's call for a referendum on the 26 of October cuts agreement.

Tsipras has also declared that he is prepared to accept a "vote of confidence" from Panos Kamenos and the Independent Greeks, an ultra-right, nationalistic-chauvinistic, but supposedly anti-memorandum split from ND. Kamenos party, which is polling around 8%, is a product of ND's u-turn from its supposedly anti-memorandum stance and, to a lesser extent, the deterioration of the electoral appeal of the previously dominant right-populist force, LAOS.

Kamenos made a long political career within ND and had an active political role in all the ND leaderships and governments from Mitsotakis through to Samaras. In the ND leadership contest at the end of 2009, Kamenos supported the ultra-neo-liberal and ultra-pro-memorandum and pro-USA Dora Bakogianni against Samaras.

Kamenos pretends to "fight against the establishment", but he has formed a party staffed with spoiled rich kids. The daughter of the leader of the "Pro Royal National Organisation of Greece" is a prominent member of his party.

In Tsipras's theoretical scenario of Syriza needing Kamenos's votes in order to form a "government of the left", Kamenos would not hand over those votes without political preconditions. And those would probably be for Syriza's "government of the left" not to attack the capitalists, the employers, the bankers, the businessmen, and the shipowners whose class interest Kamenos represents; not to nationalise the banks and big business; not to reverse the privatisations of the public sector; not to rebuild the welfare state and provisions; not to tax the rich. Kamenos would demand that Syriza comply with his racist anti-immigration policy and his nationalistic policy against the Turkish minority in Thrace.

For a formation of a robust political united front of the left a "minimal" programmatic agreement should be reached based upon at least three preconditions.

The first precondition is that the left give answers on the reasons for the current crisis. It should be agreed that the current crisis is a systemic, endemic crisis of the global capitalist system, and not a Greek crisis or a debt crisis or a golden boys' crisis, or a matter of blunders by the "neoliberal forces". The "minimal" program must be of an anti-capitalist and socialist character.

The second criterion should be the stance on the debt. The debt is a class weapon of the ruling class. It was created because the state's revenues were eaten away due to the state-protected tax evasion of the rich and the state bailouts handed out to bankrupt companies and banks. Our answer should be: not a penny for the creditors.

The third criterion is that the left wing anti-capitalist proposal should not be "another stage" towards the struggle against capitalism and for socialism. It should be the occupation of a strategic position of the enemy during a class war which leads towards a truly democratic accountable radical socialist society.

A program of transitional demands is of paramount importance as it guides us in the immediate demands that we fight for, and also points to the need to change the way that society is organised. It links the struggles of today with the world that we are trying to build in the future.

**MAY DAY
GREETINGS
from
Nottinghamshire
Trades Council
SOLIDARITY
CAN WIN!**

The legacy of Agnes McLean

By Ann Field

Publicity for this year's Glasgow May Day demonstration and rally refers to the celebrations including "a tribute to Agnes McLean."

McLean's politics and activities were representative of a particular period in the history of the West of Scotland trade union and labour movement. But how far one should pay "tribute" to them is another question.

McLean's generation grew up in the shadow of "Red Clydeside". Her father was a member of John MacLean's Scottish Workers' Republican Party. As a child she attended a Proletarian Sunday School and then a Socialist Sunday School.

It was a generation which gravitated towards Stalinism. The Communist Party (CP) in the 1930s proclaimed itself to be the standard-bearer of the October Revolution (even as it stood foursquare with the Stalinist counter-revolution) and the champion of anti-fascism (even as it hailed the Hitler-Stalin pact).

And it was a generation which often ended its days leading a humdrum existence in or around the Labour Party, with their former socialist aspirations and vision of a different society replaced by personal aspiration for elected office and immersion in local quangos.

Born in the Kinning Park district of Glasgow in 1918, McLean initially worked as a bookbinder before getting a job at the Rolls Royce Hillington plant on the outskirts of Glasgow in late 1939.

She joined the Transport and General Workers Union, but later transferred to the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU, which reversed its ban on women joining the union only after a membership ballot in 1942).

Women workers at Rolls Royce — and throughout the whole of industry — were on lower rates of pay than their male counterparts. Briefly in the autumn of 1941, and then on a larger scale in October of 1943, women workers walked out on strike.

QUESTIONS

McLean is frequently described as one of the leaders of the 1943 strike. If she was, then this raises a number of questions.

McLean had joined the CP in 1942. After the German invasion of Russia in June of 1941 the CP dropped its anti-war line, backed the British war effort, and opposed strikes.

The CP claimed a membership of between six and seven hundred in the Rolls Royce Scottish plants. It played a key role in the shop stewards' committee. And it opposed the 1943 strike.

In October 1943 the pay agreement which had been reached between Rolls Royce and union officials and which was so inadequate that it acted as the trigger for the subsequent strike was hailed in a headline in the *Daily Worker*, the CP newspaper: "Huge Pay Rise for Women Follows Aircraft Works Inquiry."

During the strike itself, while the *Daily Worker* carried dark warnings of "Trotskyist strike fomenters working behind the scenes", the CP distributed a leaflet calling for a return to work on the basis of a promise from management to speed up negotiations.

And the shop stewards' committee, in which the CP played such an important role, also opposed the strike and worked with union officials to bring it to a speedy end. In the space of eight days the committee held four mass meetings at each of which it proposed a return to work, being successful only on the fourth occasion.

So, if McLean really was a leader of the 1943 strike, how can this be reconciled with her membership of the vigorously anti-strike CP? Or was it a case of "leading" the strike in order to lead it back to work?

And why do the standard labour movement histories of the 1943 strike leave aside the anti-strike role played by the CP?

In the post-war years McLean rose through the ranks of the AEU: delegate to the AEU's first conference for women (1948); delegate to AEU national conference (1949, attended by just seven women); first female member of the AEU National Executive (1954).

McLean also "rose through the ranks" of the CP, first becoming a member of the CP's Scottish Committee, and then a member of the CP National Committee. While many of her contemporaries flooded out of the CP after the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, McLean never wavered in her loyalty.

Playing on her status as a member of the AEU National Executive, McLean attended international conferences as a representative of the so-called World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

The WFTU was a Stalinist front organisation, consisting in

Rolls Royce women workers c. 1942. Agnes McLean is in the front row, second from left

the main of the fake "trade unions" of the Eastern bloc, plus a few CP-oriented unions in Western Europe.

It was not an organisation which represented the international working class. It was a mouthpiece of the Stalinist bureaucracy which atomised the working class and which crushed and outlawed genuine trade unionism wherever it came to power.

But, as a loyal Stalinist, McLean was happy to lend her support to it.

"Peace was also a crucial issue for Agnes," as her "official" biographies put it. In practice, this meant that McLean was active in the various one-sided "peace campaigns" of the 1950s which denounced nuclear weapons (unless they were the property of the Soviet Union — see below).

McLean was active in the Stockholm Peace Appeal, a mass petition launched in March of 1950 by the World Peace Council (another Stalinist front organisation, run by the International Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party).

STOCKHOLM

The opening speech at the Stockholm conference which launched the Appeal claimed that "the Peace Front" had been "considerably strengthened" by "the victory of People's China", the creation of the "German Democratic Republic" and the development of the atomic bomb by the Soviet Union!

Pravda warned, in rather less than pacifist terms, that anyone who refused to sign the Appeal was "an accomplice and henchman of the warmongers".

Organisers of the Appeal eventually claimed that it had been signed by more than 273 million people, including the entire adult population of the Soviet Union and the other Stalinist states.

In Bulgaria the number of people who supposedly signed the Appeal was larger than the country's population. And the number of signatories claimed for Hungary meant that the Appeal had been signed by everyone over the age of five.

But this was how CP member Agnes Mclean campaigned for peace.

In the late sixties McLean again became involved in equal pay disputes. The Scottish CP had decided to launch a campaign around equal pay, which was resurfacing as a major issue.

McLean spoke at a series of CP-organised public meetings in support of equal pay and at the 1969 STUC special conference of on equal pay. At that year's STUC congress it was McLean, as a delegate from Glasgow Trades Council, who moved the composite motion on equal pay.

On the Hillington industrial estate, where she still worked in the Rolls Royce plant, McLean helped organise strike action in support of the equal pay campaign. But, in typical CP-fashion, it was brief, tokenistic, and organised in a top-down manner.

A 90-minute strike in Hillington in October of 1968, for example, saw women workers marching out of work at three o'clock in the afternoon, attending a rally addressed by Rolls Royce convenor George McCormack (also a life-

long CP member), who informed them that "further token stoppages might (sic) be necessary", and then dispersing.

Beating Jimmy Reid to it by seven years, McLean resigned from the CP in 1969 and joined the Labour Party.

Her explanation was: "I felt the party was unable to convince people that they, the CP, were the party of the future, in spite of splendid work on behalf of workers in factories or unions."

By the mid-1970s McLean had been elected as a Glasgow District Councillor. From 1978 onwards, shortly after having retired from working at Rolls Royce, she was a Strathclyde Regional Councillor and a member of the Labour Group executive until 1988.

De-selected as a councillor in March of 1994, McLean tried to secure a seat in the East End of Glasgow but was out-voted at the selection meeting. She died in April of the same year.

During her near twenty years as a District and Regional Councillor McLean had variously been a member of such august bodies as the Scottish Opera Advisory Council, the Theatre Royal Board of Management, the Glasgow Association for Conference and Tourism Services, and the Regional Economic and Industrial Committee.

Today's new generation of union and political activists need to learn from the failings of Agnes McLean's generation. Paying uncritical "tribute" to her is a deliberate exercise in mis-education.

(In fact, the January meeting of Glasgow Trades Union Council agreed that this year's May Day celebrations would not be used as a commemoration of Agnes McLean. Members of the Executive Committee were presumably otherwise minded.)

The West of Scotland trade union movement — and indeed the trade union movement everywhere — should be prepared to confront its past and the damage wrought on it by Stalinism. It should cease transforming its history into a mythology which functions as a political comfort blanket.

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How student workers got organised

By Daniel Lemberger Cooper (Royal Holloway Students' Union President, University of London Union Vice President-elect, and Youth Officer, GMB K19 branch)

Our campaign at Royal Holloway began as an awareness-raising campaign about rights at work. We put out posters and leaflets around campus which focused on basic rights around pay, terms and conditions, health and safety, and made the basic case for trade unionism.

We held "know your rights" meetings, which we targeted both at university staff and campus students. We established a relationship with the existing GMB branch on campus and found out shift-change times for cleaners, porters and grounds staff so we were able to leaflet them.

We held a meeting for student workers employed by the Students' Union in November 2011 aimed at discussing what people's issues were. About 40 people came, and there was a lot of really good discussion as well as a lot of enthusiasm to start campaigning around the issues facing working students.

Workers themselves ran the meeting, and decided to organise an informal reps' structure with elected reps for each section of the workforce (bar staff, catering, tech, etc.). The idea was that those reps would be points-of-contact for people to go to with concerns or issues at work, but also make the case for trade unionism and organisation amongst the wider student workforce.

DEMANDS

The meeting also produced a list of demands based on what people felt the key issues were. The three focuses agreed upon were breaks, pay and representation.

The demand around breaks was simply for people to be able to take the breaks they were legally entitled to, which is an endemic problem in a lot of service and retail sector workplaces. The pay demand started off as a demand for a small increase but as the campaign has become more ambitious it's shifted to demanding the London Living Wage for student workers. The demand for better representation started off by calling for an improved staff forum, but that's since shifted onto demanding that the SU management recognises the GMB and begins to bargain collectively with the workforce.

The campaign produced an industrial bulletin called *Student Worker* which brought all our demands and ideas together. People found that hugely useful, because it was a concrete tool to approach your workmates with and start a discussion. As well as people leafletting their workmates, activists also leafleted workers on the busy SU nights on Wednesdays and Fridays.

The campaign has already won some real concessions. People are taking their breaks now, which is a big material improvement in people's lives at work which wouldn't have happened without our campaign. There's also been a small

The Royal Holloway Students' Union. SUs employ students as well as represent them

degree of levelling-up of pay between different grades of workers at the SU, and we're now beginning to lobby the university to fund a pay increase for SU staff to bring them all up to the London Living Wage. We're also making progress on the issue of recognition and are attempting to go through processes necessary to win formal recognition.

We had to take a decision early on about how much to foreground the issue of joining the GMB. We decided that we wanted the focus of the campaign to be organising, rather than recruitment, so we decided not to make signing a membership form the first thing we asked people to do. A lot of the workers didn't know what a trade union was, and many of those that did, didn't feel it had any relevance to their lives. We had to build up basic level of consciousness and confidence around collective organisation before we could push the issue of trade union membership.

SELF-ORGANISE

That's not to say we avoided talking about it; we always had membership forms available at every meeting, but we wanted to run a campaign that was about helping workers self-organise to win change at work, rather than a campaign that was simply about recruiting people to the GMB. Around 25 workers have joined the union, which is a good start.

Our model has been very "industrial" in the sense of being fundamentally based on a group of workers in a given workplace — the Royal Holloway SU — self-organising around concrete, material issues. We don't want to set up a servicing hub for student workers or co-opt a couple of activists to just do casework. Getting people to think of themselves as workers, and making the basic case for fighting trade unionism, has been a key part of what we've been doing since the beginning. We've tried to go beyond the idea of pushing trade union membership as "protection" or as an insurance policy and towards building a conception of collective organisation that sees a union as a tool you can use to fight your boss and win change at work.

One of the wider reasons we wanted to do this was to

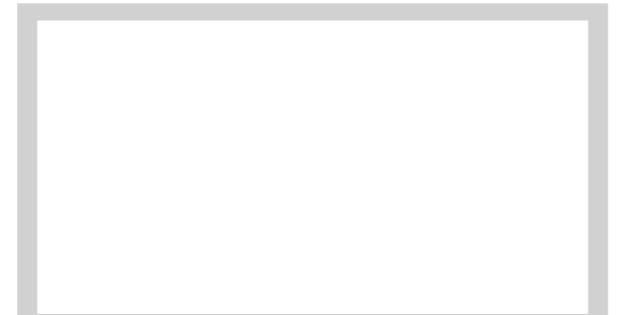
challenge some of university management's discourse about work and "employability". University bosses and the government see education as training for the workplace. There's a lot of pressure on students to see their time at university as being about them making themselves a more attractive commodity for their future employers.

Big corporations come onto campus to push their graduate schemes and talk about the wonderful jobs we can get if we do well at university, but the reality is that most of us won't have access to those "good" jobs — we'll be getting low-paid, semi-precarious jobs in the service, retail and hospitality sector. As a socialist, I want people to be leaving university with an understanding of work that's based on class and class struggle. Helping people develop a class consciousness and see themselves as workers while they're still on campus is an important part of that.

The campaign has also been about connecting students to the existing labour movement. At one of the campaign's meetings, we also discussed the public sector pensions dispute and how student workers could support the strikes. I wanted to build up an idea of the campus as a workplace, and show how nothing happened on campus, or in wider society, without someone's labour power making it happen, and show working students how they were a part of that.

Ultimately I'd like to see this model of student worker organising rolled out on every campus. I'll be Vice President of the University of London Union next year, so I can have a direct relationship with 22 SUs in London. I want to link up with people on those campuses who are interested this work and see if we can push it across London.

What we've done at Royal Holloway has shown that the model can work. It's powerful positive propaganda against those people in the labour movement who say you can't organise transient workers in semi-precarious, low-paid jobs.



Daniel will speak about the campaign at Student Worker Solidarity 2012, a networking and skills-sharing conference for young workers and working students hosted by GMB Southern Region Young Members' Network and co-sponsored by GMB Goldsmiths, Goldsmiths SU, SURHUL and People and Planet. SWS2012 takes place on Saturday 12 May at Goldsmiths College. More: tinyurl.com/sws2012

CWU: not just a partner for Royal Mail and BT!

By a conference delegate

At this year's Communication Workers Union (CWU) conference (22-26 April), the controversial issue of the CWU's role in "workfare" schemes in Royal Mail (RM) was swept under the carpet.

The CWU Executive supported a motion from South Central No 1 branch (which is influenced by the SWP) full of sound and fury about the principle of workfare, but which stopped short of criticising the current use of the system in Royal Mail!

Although the scheme agreed between the union and Royal Mail contains negotiated guarantees for those taken on, the interaction with the benefits system is unchallenged and of course gives trade union "cover" to the Government's initiatives on unemployment. In his speech, Dave Ward the Deputy General Secretary (Postal), who is responsible for the scheme attacked "obscure political groups" who had criticised the CWU. He said it was the job of trade unionists to "get our hands dirty".

An emergency motion restating the CWU's opposition to the privatisation of Royal Mail was passed at the general conference (the union's two sectors — postal and telecoms — have separate, parallel conferences).

At the postal conference, there were debates on the role of TNT providing delivery services (TNT are not unionised by CWU, and have a sweetheart deal with the Community union). The Postal Executive and many postal branches are still wedded to an approach that fails to take account of the

liberalised nature of the industry and is based on protectionism rather than an outward looking, ambitious effort to organise the private firms and level up pay and conditions across the industry.

EXACERBATED

This position is exacerbated by the fact that there is recognition in Royal Mail, but not in other firms, which inevitably results in a closer relationship with management.

What is not inevitable is the current love-in between Royal Mail and the CWU, which resulted in the postal conference being addressed by Royal Mail CEO Moya Green. The fact that this invitation was issued on the eve of a possible Royal Mail sell-off by the Government indicates that any CWU campaign against privatisation may just be tokenistic. The fact that the Government is picking up the bill for Royal Mail's pension schemes deficit makes its purchase much more attractive to capitalists.

The general conference also debated the union's relationship with the Labour Party. A motion from the Greater London Combined branch called for the CWU to use its influence as an affiliate to fight for democratic reforms to the Labour Party which would allow the organised working class to reassert itself in the political sphere.

The substance of the motion was support for the demands of organisations such as the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the Labour Representation Committee: for more accountability in Labour Party policy making

processes, more motions to Labour Party conference, the ability to amend policy documents, and retaining the role of political levy payers in the selection of the Labour leader. The motion was opposed by those arguing for disaffiliation, but as in previous debates on this subject at CWU conference, affiliation was reaffirmed with fewer than 25% voting against.

There was a small victory for democracy in the CWU at the Rules Revision Conference. The attempt by the Telecoms Executive to move the telecoms industry conference from annual to bi-annual was defeated. The so-called "Left Activist Network" (which is actually a centre-right faction), which currently controls the Telecoms Executive, was unsuccessful on this issue. However, they managed to deflect criticism of their industrial record over the past year.

Criticism of the Executive's record on pay, including a recent deal which let BT off the hook with an unconsolidated bonus payment in lieu of a proper pay increase (which has seen BT profits soar and real wages fall), failed to achieve the support of more than a third of the conference. Likewise, criticism of the Executive's ability to rollback BT management's draconian "Performance Management" policies failed.

The CWU Broad Left needs to be renewed to take on the "company union"-type policies of the current Executive towards BT, and address the lack of a strong class-based approach to union organising that takes account of the interests of all workers in the communications industries.

Vote rejects pension terms

By Todd Hamer

Despite the best efforts of the Unison leadership, Unison members in the NHS have voted to reject the government's pensions offer and take "sustained industrial action".

50.4% of members voted to reject the deal and for more strikes, against 49.5% to accept, on a turnout of 14.8%. Given that the official union propaganda that accompanied the ballot papers obscured the issues, presenting the improved "deal" in glowing terms and scaremongered about the effects of further strikes, this is a surprising result.

CLEAR

Whatever else can be said about the vote, this is clear indication that the membership is not endorsing the leadership's strategy on pensions.

Rather than use this vote as the start of efforts to reinvigorate the pensions campaign, unelected head of Health, Christina McAnea has already announced: "The low turnout coupled with the close vote shows there is no mandate to endorse the pensions' proposals, but equally no mandate to take

further industrial action." She adds: "The turnout is disappointing but in some ways is not unexpected."

Indeed, having given every indication that the leadership is unwilling to lead a fight, it is hardly surprising 85% of the membership abstained on the vote. However, it is a lie to say there is "no mandate" to take further industrial action. Unison has a live ballot for industrial action and this result is a mandate in its own right.

Although 7% of the union want to accept the offer, there are also 7% who are up for taking "sustained industrial action" — which is probably the most militant statement on the pensions dispute from any union to date.

Also, given the way the

ballot was framed ("improved proposals" vs. "sustained industrial action"), the 85% of abstentions must be considered as passive rejections.

If members had been convinced that this was a good offer then they would have voted for it. There is plenty of raw material here for reigniting a fight on pensions.

A principled leadership would now attempt to mobilise the 7% rejectionists, some 25,000 workers, to create a new layer of activists to agitate amongst the remaining workforce for the strikes and other industrial action that we need.

PRINCIPLED

A principled leadership would start a discussion about effective industrial strategy in the NHS and name a calendar of future strikes to show that they are serious about winning.

A principled leadership would raise the alarm about impending attacks on our terms and conditions and launch a media strategy that linked our industrial battles in the period to come with the defence of the NHS.

But Unison does not have a principled leadership. They were so scared

of organising further strikes that they deliberately tried to talk up the pensions offer in the hope that an ill-informed membership would capitulate and give them the mandate to give in. The membership has shown it is not going to be duped.

DEMAND

It is now for this same membership to demand action and hold our leaders to account.

If they are unwilling or unable to lead a strike movement then we must build our own rank-and-file organisation to provide an alternative leadership. Unison activists should look to the example of the NUT, where the Local Associations for Action on Pensions is organising to reclaim control of the dispute for rank-and-file workers.

Unite members in the NHS will take "industrial action" of some form on 10 May, along with Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) members and members of the University and College Union (UCU) in FE colleges and "post-92" universities.

The 25,000 Unison members who have voted decisively to join them should fight for their right to do so.

Unite debates political strategy

By a Unite activist

The biennial policy conference of the Unite union takes place at the end of June.

It is important that Unite members take the opportunity to argue for policies which would help make Unite fight politically and industrially against the Tories, and against the Labour Party leadership.

Over the last six months, Unite has produced a political strategy which outlines its view on how to transform the Labour Party — a policy which, if implemented, would involve Unite fighting against the right-wing political leadership of the Labour Party, for trade union backed MPs, a restoration of democracy and for policies which would commit the Labour Party to improving employment rights and opposing all cuts. At this year's policy conference, there will be some debate on this strategy.

REVIEW

Some motions call for Unite to redirect some of its political fund (currently spent on Labour Party affiliation) into its own strike fund, while others call for a review of the link if the Labour Party doesn't speak up for Unite policies.

There are no motions calling for the union to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. This debate will be lively, but the response from the Unite leadership is likely to be that Miliband is already toying — at least rhetorically — with the idea of reforming or reducing the Labour Party-union link, so Unite should not help him with the task.

Motions on issues of employment rights and the anti-trade union laws have been submitted by a large number of branches, with the issue of attacks on facility time also raised by many.

On international issues, there will also be a debate on Europe, with four "anti-EU" motions and one, weak, "pro-Europe" motion. It is difficult to tell what the outcome will be on this issue. The Communist Party/*Morning Star's* Stalinist-nationalist politics dominates the general approach of the union on international issues, but the economic collapse and the need for European workers' unity against austerity could convince delegates that advocating UK withdrawal from the EU would cut across attempts to build such unity.

NHS

The other issue that has attracted a large number of motions is the defence of the NHS.

If Unite passes policy to fight to defend the NHS, it will allow union activists to argue for campaigns which link community and trade-union based campaigns with a political campaign to defend public healthcare.

The policies likely to be passed on these issues will set the general approach for the union for the next few years.

The role of socialists in Unite is to try and develop networks of rank-and-file activists in the union that can, amongst other things, fight for such good policies as are passed at this year's conference to be implemented.

Ford strike ballot as bosses slash pensions

By Stewart Ward

Unite will ballot its 2,500 members at Ford plants across the UK for strike action after the motor industry giant announced plans to close its final-salary pension scheme to new starters.

Attacks to private-sector pension schemes are becoming increasingly com-

mon. Retail manufacturing company Unilever made a similar move in 2011, sparking several days of strike action in early 2012. According to Ford's figures, 80% of private-sector employers have closed final-salary schemes to new starters.

Unite officer Roger Maddison said: "We fiercely oppose the closure of Ford's final salary

scheme to new entrants. This is the thin end of the wedge. Ultimately we believe Ford will try to close the entire scheme.

"To make matters worse the company is trying to create a two tier workforce by making new starters work for 10 per cent less money for doing the same job as existing staff. This is totally unacceptable."

Elsewhere in the indus-

try, workers at BMW's Oxford plant have accepted a two-year pay deal, comprising a 4.5% pay increase in 2012 and 2.3% in 2013. If inflation is higher than 2.3% in 2013, the difference will be added to a bonus.

They had voted by 97% to reject the company's previous offer, comprising an increase of just over 2%.

Tube Lines strikes "rock solid"

By Darren Bedford

Tube union RMT has declared the first three days of strike action in an ongoing battle for pensions equality by maintenance and emergency response workers as "rock solid".

The workers, employed by Tube Lines (established in 2002 a Public Private Partnership initiative owned by Ferrovial and Bechtel but bought back in-house by Transport for London in 2010), struck for three days from 24 April. Emergency Response Unit (ERU) vehicles, normally

driven by Tube Lines workers, were taken out of depots by non-ERU staff, showing that management's commitment to breaking the strike outweighs their commitment to having emergency vehicles operated only by properly trained staff!

During the strike, a tunnel ceiling on the Bakerloo Line partially collapsed. An RMT statement said: "Whilst not a direct result of the action, the shutdown of the Bakerloo line due to the partial ceiling collapse has highlighted the need for fully trained experienced professionals working as part of the

Emergency Response Unit.

"We firmly believe that in dealing with this extremely serious incident on the Bakerloo Line, ERU coverage of the rest of the network was at best seriously understaffed and at worst non-existent.

As *Solidarity* went to press, the RMT's General Grades Committee was due to meet to discuss the next actions in the campaign.

Workers are demanding the levelling up of their pensions rights and travel privileges to bring them in line with the conditions of other Transport for London workers.

More industrial news online

• Tanker drivers vote on bosses' latest offer; Unite recommends rejection — bit.ly/ICVjft

• Greenwich librarians strike against privatisation — bit.ly/IOcksp

• Sunderland College strike ballot in pay fight — bit.ly/IOcksp

• National Union of Journalists back at Murdoch's Wapping site after 25 years — bit.ly/IOcksp

MMP lock out fight continues

By Jane Gallagher

Workers from the Mayr-Melnhof Packaging (MMP) plant in Bootle, near Liverpool, and their supporters have been continuing to organise protests in Britain and internationally against the ongoing lock out, sackings and the planned closure of the Bootle factory.

On 25 April, the workers organised a protest at an MMP shareholders' meeting in Austria. There have been other international protests in Spain, Austria, Germany, Tunisia, France, Chile and America.

Workers in the UK and internationally have expressed their opposition to how the workers in Bootle have been treated. So far the main focus of the campaign by Unite, the workers' union, has to be to try and "embarrass" MMP in front of its major clients, which include Kelloggs.

Such publicity campaigns are fine, but what is needed is a radical campaign that will give MMP workers in other plants, and Kelloggs workers and workers for other MMP clients, the confidence to take industrial action — unofficially if necessary.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Murdoch scandal: Is Cameron next?

By Pat Murphy

There is now a serious possibility that the evidence uncovered in the Leveson Inquiry might bring down David Cameron.

The Tory leader had set up Leveson to isolate himself from the phone-hacking scandal and to manage any damage from his relationship with special adviser and ex-News International editor, Andy Coulson. This also meant Cameron distancing himself from Murdoch and his empire after years of working to get as close to him as possible.

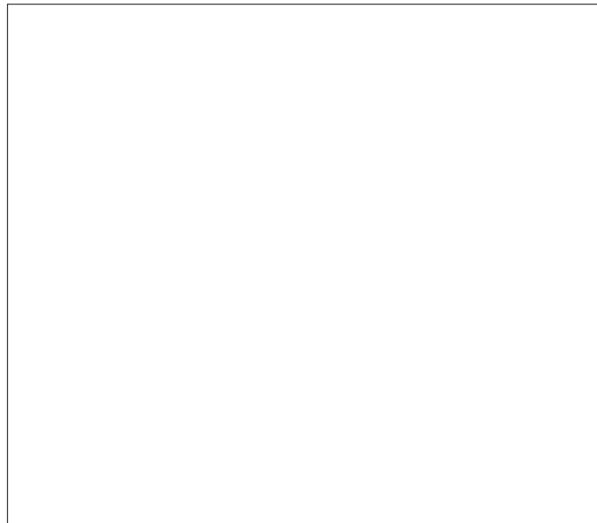
When Murdoch gave evidence to the Inquiry last week he made it clear that the Tories' attempt to slip quietly out of bed with News International would come at a price.

REVEALED
He revealed that the Culture Secretary, Jeremy Hunt had been working to help the media mogul gain full control of BSkyB when his job was to scrutinise whether the take-over bid broke competition rules.

Hunt only got his cabinet post because his predecessor, Vince Cable, was considered to be biased against Murdoch and deemed therefore lacked independence. Such was the controversy surrounding the proposed takeover that the media regulator Ofcom advised Hunt to pass the issue over to the Competitions Commission. He insisted on handling it himself and on his ability to be independent.

It turns out that, while declaring his honesty, he was (to paraphrase Oscar Wilde) stealing our spoons.

Murdoch drew attention to nearly 200 pages of emails and texts between News International and the Hunt's office which demonstrated how much they were trying to facilitate the multi-billion pound deal. One key email showed that Hunt's decision not to refer the merger to the Competitions Commission was aimed at removing obstacles for NI.



Later a group of media companies who had opposed the deal described how they were blocked from getting any access to Hunt to put their case.

So Cable being biased against Murdoch was a problem, but favouring him and his empire was, it would seem, absolutely fine.

Hunt was immediately under pressure to resign. But, as Dennis Skinner pointed out in Parliament, he did what all posh boys do when they are in trouble, sack the servants — in this case Hunt's special adviser, Adam Smith.

It's inconceivable that this will be enough to save Hunt. The media debate after Smith's departure was all about where and how soon Hunt is made to explain himself. Cameron wanted it done soon by moving forward his appearance before the Inquiry; this attempt at queue jumping was firmly rejected by Leveson.

Cameron is currently resisting an investigation into whether Hunt broke the Ministerial Code. He knows that will probably end in his Culture Minister being removed.

But waiting for Hunt to take his turn at the Leveson Enquiry means many more weeks of pressure and embarrassment and is no more likely to save Hunt or shut down the growing scandal.

The crisis is, however, getting closer and closer to Cameron and his government.

On the Andrew Marr Show on 29 April Cameron

admitted to having a conversation about the takeover with NI Chief Executive, Rebekah Brooks and James Murdoch, at a Christmas party in 2010 (when the BSkyB deal was being considered).

He claims that nothing "inappropriate" was said and responds with shock to suggestions that there was some "grand deal" to reward Murdoch for his support for the Tories.

But it is the shock expressed by Captain Renault in Casablanca when he discovers that gambling is going on in Humphrey Bogart's cafe (before being handed his winnings).

DOUBLE STANDARDS
In my day job I often defend workers who face allegations of misconduct. Increasingly they are suspended on full pay on grounds that their presence at the workplace might interfere with the investigation.

I usually argue that suspension is excessive and unnecessary. Why not instruct them not to discuss the allegations and consider suspension only if there is evidence that they have broken the agreement? Sometimes this argument works.

Here we have the leader of a government charged with investigating the appropriateness of a media takeover worth over £8 billion, attending a lavish social event at the home of the boss of the predator company and admitting to having discussed the deal.

Since we don't have a

tape of the conversations Cameron asks us to trust him and believe that it was all above board and nothing inappropriate was said. No worker would last five minutes with a defence like this. The very fact of being at the same event and admitting to the discussion would see them found guilty and sent home. Yet again more proof that we are absolutely *not* all in this together.

The worst scenario for Cameron and the Coalition is that the Tory leader is found to have acted improperly and no differently in all fundamentals to Hunt or Smith. In that case it would be difficult for him to remain in office. He appears before Leveson in the summer and, although the Inquiry remit does not cover the behaviour of government ministers, his evidence will be poured over for guilt of corruption in dealing with Murdoch as any of his minions.

The immediate damage to the government is, though, unavoidable and maybe terminal. They are now all associated with trying to oil the wheels of a voracious and monopolistic takeover in return for the political support of the most powerful media company in Britain. By extension they are linked to the phone-hacking scandal and all the other excesses and arrogance of News International.

All this at a time when the credibility of their flagship austerity programme is crumbling, economic data has confirmed that Britain is in a double-dip recession and Labour have opened up a lead of close to 10 points without putting up any sort of fight.

Rupert Murdoch has behaved like a betrayed marriage partner ripping up the best suits in the wardrobe, pouring red paint all over the Ferrari and most damaging of all, letting the world know what a treacherous and untrustworthy piece of work his old lover is.

Cameron is hurting and the worst pain is probably yet to come. Good.

Solidarity can win London school fight

From the Tower Hamlets Class Struggle bulletin

After the 24 April strike against pay cuts and restructuring at Central Foundation Girls School in East London, school management are showing signs of shifting. They have backtracked from cutting support staff pay this year.

This has only happened because of the united action taken by members of the NUT and Unison. But management still plan to cut pay next year.

CFGS workers plan another strike around 11 May.

This dispute is a breath of fresh air blowing through the local labour movement, which had been demoralised by the surrender of the national union leaderships in the pensions battle.

What are the lessons to be learned from the CFGS dispute so far?

Unity: The NUT and Unison have worked together and prevented management from dividing them by using different tactics, holding separate staff meetings and offering different solutions for teachers and support staff.

Organisation: From the start of the dispute, both unions held regular joint meetings, ensured the use of a strike fund and produced a strike bulletin for all the staff in the school. No member of staff is uninformed about the dispute or uncertain as to how they can get involved.

Democracy: All decisions made in relation to the next steps in the dispute have been made by the members themselves and on the basis of regular votes. The reps have provided leadership, but

it is not the stifling, top-down version provided by the national executives of our unions.

The attitude throughout has been: why would we agree to lie down and do nothing when you are cutting our pay and jobs? Why would we allow you to do this to us without a fight? Why do you think we would agree to pay with our livelihoods for a budget crisis that is not of our making? There is no reason why we should.

We must not take any responsibility for the crisis — whether local or national. When governments need to find cash to resolve a crisis that they want resolved they can.

The government found £1.5bn in February this year to pay off PFI bills in the NHS because they knew it would be too damaging if the NHS crumbled too quickly. In Tower Hamlets in 1998, the Rotherhithe Tunnel was closed for maintenance works by Tower Hamlets council. The works were likely to be shut through Christmas, affecting the takings of the shops in Docklands and Canary Wharf. The businesses pooled together and paid up £100k to get the work done.

When bosses and the rich need the money, it's there. They just choose not to spend it on us, and then try to tell us there isn't any. This is nonsense. We must not fall for it.

What will help CFGS workers win? Solidarity. Other schools and public services in Tower Hamlets must invite speakers from CFGS, support them on their picket lines and, more importantly, when they are faced with restructures and cuts, follow suit using CFGS as a template for how to win.