

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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**Build solidarity,
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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, 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.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
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Exploitation behind the pageantry

By Clarke Benitez

Unemployed people were bussed into London and made to sleep under a bridge before working as unpaid stewards at the Jubilee pageant.

The benefits claimants were brought into London from Bath, Bristol, and Plymouth to work jobs administered by Close

Protection UK. The company said the unpaid work was a "trial" for potential paid jobs at the Olympics. It confirmed using 30 unpaid workers (as well as 50 apprentices paid just £2.80 an hour) at the pageant.

Workers had no access to toilet facilities, and were made to change into their uniforms in public. They slept on concrete under London Bridge after arriv-

ing in London in the early hours of the morning of Sunday 3 June, and then were accommodated at an outdoor campsite in Essex after working 14-hour shifts.

Some stewards were told they would be paid, only to later discover that they were expected to work for free. Close Protection UK is also accused of sacking paid stewards days before

the event in order to replace them with unpaid workers.

One worker told the Guardian: "It was the worst experience I've ever had. I've had many a job, and many a bad job, but this one was the worst."

• More on the anti-"workfare" campaign: boycottworkfare.org

Activists protested outside the offices of private healthcare firm Care UK on Wednesday 30 May, at an action organised by the Health Alarm network. Health Alarm is part of the NHS Liaison Committee, which meets on Saturday 9 June at 3:30pm at the headquarters of the Unite union at 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN. More: healthalarm1159.wordpress.com

NHS CAMPAIGN EVENTS

SATURDAY 16 JUNE: RESIST THE GRAND NHS FIRE SALE!

2pm, Castle Lecture Theatre, London Road Building, London South Bank University, London Road SE1 0AA (2 mins walk from Elephant and Castle Tube)
Sponsored by LSBU UCU; Unite; Southwark Save Our Services; Lambeth Keep Our NHS Public; Lewisham's Pensioners' Forum; Lewisham Keep Our NHS Public

SATURDAY 23 JUNE: NHS SUPPORTERS' CONFERENCE

10:15 to 4 (Keep Our NHS Public AGM 9:15-10:15) at Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

How to register: bit.ly/nhs23j

By Rhodri Evans

Thatcherism was reputed, despite its right-wing drift, to increase social mobility.

The gap between the rich and the poor increased, but maybe the chance of people from poor backgrounds becoming rich would rise.

A grocer's daughter became prime minister. Proverbially, East End barrow-boys became ultra-rich financial traders in the City.

In fact, however, social mobility is decreasing. Poor children born in the 1970s are more likely to be poor in adulthood than poor children from the 1950s.

33% of top journalists are supplied by Oxford university alone. 54% of them, as of 2006, had been to fee-paying schools. It was 49% in 1986.

75% of senior judges, and 27% of top civil servants, went to fee-paying schools. The new figures come from a May 2012 Cabinet Office report.

They seem paradoxical. In the 1950s only about 3% of young people got university degrees and today about 35% of each cohort gets a degree. Surely that must improve the chances of people from poor backgrounds "rising" socially through education?

But in the 1950s lots of people from well-off backgrounds did not go to university. Lots of well-paid jobs were open to people without university degrees.

Today, almost all people from well-off backgrounds go to university, and many big corporations demand university degrees (i.e. proof that the applicant can jump through hoops in a sustained way: the content of the course is usually irrelevant) as pre-conditions for all their better-paid jobs. Bright young people without degrees, who could rise high in the 1950s, are now blocked.

Conversely, if someone from a poor background did get to university, in the 1950s she or he was practically guaranteed a well-paid job after graduating. Many degrees from many universities today guarantee nothing. Elite occupations can restrict their recruitment to the elite universities.

As income inequality increases, the gap in living conditions between poor children and better-off children increases, and the insecurity and stress in many poor families increases too, thus limiting the chance of poor children doing well in education.

Student activists make autumn plans

By Daniel Lemberger Cooper

Student activists met in Edinburgh over the weekend 2-3 June for a National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) training event.

The event was structured around the idea that it is not enough for us to just fight against government proposals around fees and privatisation. We also need to articulate a positive vision for democratic education.

There was a wide variety of workshops, each of a high quality, ranging from NUS history to privatisation in education.

Ed Whitby, a member of Unison, and I ran a workshop on class-struggle trade unionism which delved into union structures, the problems with union bureaucracy, how to transform the existing labour movement and also how to organise transient, precarious workers. We highlighted the project at Royal Holloway Students' Union to unionise student-staff.

Arianna Tassinari and Aurora Adams ran an excellent workshop on international students. Recently the student left has made inroads within the formerly right wing NUS international students' campaign.

There was also a workshop on how to democratise student unions and university and college structures.

Most of the workshops have now agreed to produce materials, briefings and actions over the summer, ready for the new academic year.

There were plenary sessions on the future for the student movement, concentrating on how to revive the student led struggles of 2010, of which the NCAFC played a central part.

This autumn will see a TUC demonstration on the 20 October and a later (most likely November) NUS demonstration. A key

concern was setting up demonstration committees in the lead up to protests, and founding local anti-cuts groups that would exist beyond the demonstration. The politics of the demonstrations and activity were also discussed.

We agreed the central NCAFC slogan would be "free, democratic education funded by taxing the rich", and we would put pressure on the NUS to take on similar slogans.

The training event had a high quality of political discussion and plans are now afoot to produce materials and work over the summer on another training event targeted at incoming sabbatical officers and activists.

Not Shafiq, not Mursi!

By Dan Katz

In the run-off vote for the Egyptian presidency on 16-17 June, Ahmed Shafiq, a former prime minister and a long-time ally of ousted former president Hosni Mubarak, is facing the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Mursi.

In the first round both got about a quarter of the vote.

Many Egyptians have already decided not to vote in the run-off, as they find the choice — between illiberal Islamists or backers of the former regime — repulsive.

The Brothers took an overtly Islamist stance during the campaign for the first round of elections, held last month. They were trying to head off competition from a powerful salafist current (deeply conservative Islamists).

Now, however, they have shifted and are presenting themselves as the voice of “the revolution” — playing on the fears of Shafiq’s links to the old order.

In fact the Brotherhood played a limited role in the mass movement that



Mohammed Mursi

ended the dictatorship.

“We no longer present Mursi as the candidate of the Islamic current but as the candidate of the revolution,” said Murad Mohammed Ali, speaking for the Mursi campaign.

In parliamentary elections late last year, the Brotherhood won more than 10 million votes and nearly half of the legislature’s seats. In contrast Mursi got 5.7 million votes in the presidential first round — a setback.

The Muslim Brotherhood had damaged itself by insisting on Islamist domination of a panel charged with drafting a new constitution. The panel was disbanded after liberals walked out, and

negotiations to form a new committee have been deadlocked.

A part of the political backdrop to the election is the recent verdict against former president Mubarak and his interior minister Habib El-Adly, who were both given life sentences for organising the killing of protesters during last year’s uprising. Six police chiefs were acquitted of all charges against them.

The fact that Mubarak has not been sentenced to death, and his henchmen have been released, has caused outrage and further protests in Tahrir Square. Mohammed Mursi has said that he opposes the outcome of Mubarak’s trial and if elected he will re-open the case.

Unfortunately, as a consequence, some liberal Egyptians will hold their noses and vote for the Brothers.

• More: page 4.



Ireland ratifies austerity treaty

By Liam McNulty

After a campaign dominated by fear, the Irish electorate voted 60% to 40% on 1 June to ratify the EU fiscal pact.

Turnout was low, with just over half of Irish voters going to the polls. Rather than an enthusiastic endorsement of Fine Gael-Labour and EU policies, the vote reflects fears of deepening the crisis and worries that Ireland would be unable to access funds from the European Stability Mechanism. As Fine Gael junior finance minister Brian Hayes said, voters feared putting Ireland “at the centre of the storm — a bit like what has happened in Greece.” This is a reminder of the complexities of the impact of the Euro-crisis and should warn against illusions on the left that gains will be immediate or inevitable.

EU leaders and the Irish Government will be relieved at the result, which led to a short-term drop in Irish bond yields. Yet they have no call to be complacent. Amid worsening forecasts for Spain and Greece, new data has shown Eurozone unemployment to be at record levels of 11%, amounting to 17.4m adults in the single currency zone out of work. The official unemployment rate in Spain is 24.3%, with figures for young people running at over twice that. Ireland is now in its fourth year of recession with no obvious prospects for growth in sight.

The Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny has been quick to claim vindication and both he and his Labour Party



Taoiseach Enda Kenny

deputy Eamon Gilmore are arguing that the Irish Government’s hand is strengthened in negotiations with other EU leaders over Ireland’s bank debts.

Speaking to *Solidarity*, Labour Youth member Neil Warner said: “Irish voters reluctantly approved this treaty almost entirely on the basis of fears that the country would lose access to emergency European funding. As such, it should not be seen in any way as a halt in the momentum against austerity and plutocratic politics that has been building across Europe.

ASSURANCE

“Indeed many Irish people voted yes on the assurance that further amendments to the treaty, such as those proposed by Hollande, would be made subsequently.”

“The fight continues and many of us in Ireland want to be part of it”.

Beneath the 20% margin in favour of the treaty lie some worrying patterns for the Irish Labour Party.

Support for the treaty came predominantly from urban middle-class constituencies and rural voters. Amongst the five constituencies which re-

jected the treaty were Dublin South-West, Dublin North-West and Dublin South-Central, while Dublin Mid-West voted Yes by a mere five votes. What all these multi-member constituencies have in common is a large working-class electorate and two or more Labour TDs. What will worry the Labour Party is that these constituencies also all have at least one Sinn Féin or People Before Profit representative in the Dáil already and these groups are seeking to benefit most from anti-austerity sentiment.

Along with Pasok in Greece, Irish Labour’s stance demonstrates the chaos and lack of co-ordination within European social-democracy which has stemmed from its culpability in the implementation of austerity. The Labour Party’s support for the fiscal treaty puts it at odds even with moderate social-democratic voices in Europe such as the new French President Francois Hollande, who has been pushing Merkel for a renegotiation of its terms.

The result also marks a setback for the United Left Alliance (ULA). In a statement accusing the Government and EU leaders of ‘bullying’ the electorate, the ULA says it “is confident that the resistance to austerity in Ireland and Europe will deepen in the next few months.”

However, if anything the Irish electorate’s unwillingness to reject the treaty demonstrates that the left needs to go beyond “resistance” and must start offering a real Europe-wide alternative to austerity.

Palestinian hunger strikers win

By Gerry Bates

The mass hunger strikes by 1550 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention ended on 14 May with significant Israeli concessions.

Palestinian prisoners were objecting to “administrative detentions” - the policy of detention without charge or trial.

The deal between the prisoners and Israeli authorities means that these detentions can no longer be extended if no new evidence emerges. As a consequence perhaps 300 prisoners will be released before the end of the year. Israel also promised to stop the use of solitary confinement.

The Israeli state was worried that if hunger strikers died mass Palestinian protests would erupt.

Israel currently holds 4600 Palestinian prisoners,

including 300 in administrative detention

Despite the May agreement two prisoners are continuing their strikes. They say they will not stop until they are released.

Rikhawy was arrested in 2004 and is demanding his nine year jail term be reduced on health grounds (he suffers from a number of debilitating illnesses). He is demanding that the prison authority hand over his medical file prior to him appearing before a prison release committee

Sarsak, who comes from Gaza and is demanding to be recognised as a prisoner of war, began refusing food on 23 March, and went 53 days without eating before a short break when the deal was signed. He restarted his strike a day later.

However Issa Qaraqi, the Palestinian Authority’s Minister for Prisoners Affairs, has said

Israel has placed 30 Palestinians under administrative detention since the agreement was concluded.

Racist attacks on African migrant workers in Tel Aviv

Recent weeks have seen racist riots in working-class neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv, as poor Israelis (often from North African backgrounds) are incited by right-wing politicians to scapegoat black African immigrants for their economic problems.

Wafa Tiara of the Workers’ Advice Centre spoke at a recent social justice demonstration in Tel Aviv to argue that “the future is in the unity of Jewish, Arab, and migrant workers”.

• More: bit.ly/L0gRdV

Italy’s rank and file assembles

By Hugh Edwards

“The urgent need in this country is for a government of workers to decide its direction.”

So said Dante De Angeli, an Italian train driver, one among 500 delegates representing workplace and factory committees at an assembly in Rome on 3 June.

They met against a background of the economic crisis and the savage austerity programme of Mario Monti. The 20-year decline in wages and living standards is plummeting yet further.

The words of another delegate summed up succinctly the purpose of the assembly: “The unity of the trade union movement so far [i.e. the “Social Contract” of the Confed unions CGIL, UIL, CISL] has brought only disaster for

those who work. We need another kind of unity, based on the democratic involvement of the workers and their delegates as the basis for a fighting movement of resistance”.

The animating principle was the imperative to overcome the crippling historic divisions that have been a ball and chain at the feet of the Italian working class for decades.

Sunday’s assembly, following that a week earlier in Florence of the metalworkers of FIOM, which affirmed a similar militant project, points to the real possibility of ending the effective paralysis of the workers’ movement, and resistance in general — a political prostration rooted in the fatal limits of both reformism and syndicalism. The declaration at the end of the assembly, proposed by a member of the most radical BASE unions,

indicates this. The assembly’s 12-point programme of demands represents a root-and-branch challenge to the government’s assault on the popular masses as a whole.

The assembly called for an immediate mobilisation for a two-day strike on 7-8 June, in defence of Article 18 (legislation which provides protection against arbitrary dismissal). The assembly also called for occupations, marches, and simultaneous mass assemblies to further develop and widen the scope of resistance. The united front of the Italian working class is struggling to be born.

If it succeeds, we may witness very soon dramatic and powerful evidence of it, not only in Italy but as the catalyst for change elsewhere.

• Italian earthquake report — bit.ly/JJa2uO

American strikes increase

By Stewart Ward

Strike action by American workers increased dramatically over the past year.

“Serious stoppages” (strikes involving more than 1,000 lasting at least

one shift) rose from just five in 2009 to 19 in 2011. Days lost to strike action increased from 124,000 to over 1 million.

The increase comes against the backdrop of a decade of pay stagnation for manufacturing workers, whose wages

have mostly remained flat since 2000, despite a 50% increase in output.



Egypt: vote Muslim Brotherhood?

The Left

By Clive Bradley



On the face of it, there is some force to the SWP line that voting for the Freedom and Justice Party — the Muslim Brotherhood — in the final round of the Egyptian presidential election is preferable to allowing Ahmed Shafiq, the candidate of the old Mubarak regime, to win (See Phil Marfleet, *Socialist Worker* 2 June).

The argument is that a victory for the oldest and best organised opposition group would represent the continued forward movement of the revolution. Or at least a victory for Shafiq would be the opposite. The Brotherhood is unlikely immediately to crush all democratic forces. Over the last eighteen months, it has been sensitive to the demands and aspirations of the popular movement. And, so the argument goes, it would be possible to put pressure on Muhammad Mursi, the Brotherhood's dull-as-dishwater candidate, and the Brotherhood as a whole. You can say to them, you want social justice — go on, then, let's see you deliver...

DISTURBING

The disturbing truth is that so far the overwhelming beneficiaries of the last eighteen months of struggle have been the Brotherhood (not only in Egypt), closely followed by the even scarier Salafist movement which came second in the Parliamentary elections (December-January 2011-12). Millions of people have voted for them.

There must be at least an element here of people wanting stability, and voting for something familiar; and the vote reflects the weakness of the secular left in actual communities. But the Brotherhood vote must also include millions of people who participated in or supported the revolution. The left needs to find a way to relate to those millions which goes beyond lecturing them about their political backwardness. Does that include a vote for Mursi?

You could make a case that calling for a Mursi vote is a one-off thing, and doesn't commit you to any more general support for the Brotherhood. A parallel would be the Presidential vote-off between Jean Marie Le Pen and Chirac in France in 2002. The AWL was against a vote for either; but the then-LCR eventually joined in with "vote Chirac to stop Le Pen". Though I think it was wrong, this wasn't contemptible. It didn't lead the LCR/NPA into general popular

Should socialists back the right-wing Islamists of the Brotherhood to keep out Ahmed Shafiq (above)?

frontism, or whatever.

Is "vote for Mursi to stop Shafiq" the same? There is a general issue of principle involved in whether to vote for any kind of bourgeois party. But there are concrete reasons, too, not to call for "Brotherhood to power" in Egypt.

The image presented by the SWP — on the one hand "the revolution", represented in an unfortunate and distorted form by the Brotherhood, and on the other "reaction" is much too crude. Something more complex and difficult is going on.

It is likely that large numbers of Egyptians who hated the old regime, who wouldn't consider voting for its candidate otherwise, will turn out to vote for Shafiq in order to stop the Brotherhood. Many are terrified of the Brotherhood, which in 1946 the SWP's Tony Cliff described as "clerical fascists", becoming too powerful.

But question actually posed here is what small groups of revolutionary socialists (like the SWP's sister group in Egypt the Revolutionary Socialists) say to people. Their votes, and the votes of those they influence, even if they amount to several thousand, won't make any material difference to the outcome of the election. In that case what all socialists have to do is to tell the truth about the political forces involved — tell the truth about the Brotherhood. To say clearly that they do not represent "the revolution", and their victory over Shafiq is not a real victory.

So far the Brotherhood/Freedom and Justice Party has gone out of its way to present itself — to the electorate, and to the world — as a moderate Islamist movement. How they will behave now — assuming they win the Presidential election — remains to be seen. And it absolutely cannot be taken for granted. The left needs — not in a hysterical way, but clearly — to be warning of the consequences of a consolidation of Brotherhood power, and calling for the labour and revolutionary movements to be prepared for it and to defend themselves.

The FJP already has nearly 40% of the seats in the Parliament, the Nur (Salafist) party another 28%. Between them they dominate the Constituent Assembly the Parliament elected which has now been suspended by an Egyptian court (on the grounds it was unrepresentative).

Having the Presidency as well will make the Brotherhood even stronger, more confident, more inclined to ride roughshod over other secular, democratic, leftist, feminist, etc. forces.

If the Brotherhood win Egypt is entering a period where they will be the dominant political force. Their strength on the ground is enormous, president or not. Losing the presidency will be a set-back. But the basic pattern is clear. The question for the left, the labour movement, the revolutionary youth, etc, is what to do about it.

The Brotherhood/FJP isn't an analogue for a social democratic party or, say, Syriza in Greece — where you can clearly see how its election is a step forward for the movement; and so on that basis you can "put them to the test" — make demands on them, relate to their base in that way, with a "united front" approach.

Maybe the Brotherhood will adopt a softly-softly attitude, at least to begin with, towards other parties, women's rights, Christians, and so on; maybe it will hold back on introducing Islamic law; maybe it will even be — contrary to its historical record — be gentle with the labour movement (i.e., not crush strikes).

There will be a period where its precise relations with the army — which still holds effective power — are recalibrated. The Brotherhood has been, throughout all this, very concerned not to provoke the army and to reassure the US that it doesn't want to provoke the army. This will continue to be a major consideration.

NOT ALLIES

But it is inconceivable, with such a powerful showing in both parliamentary and presidential elections, that the Brotherhood's bedrock nature won't be revealed.

The focus for the left and the labour movement surely has to be: whoever wins, we need to organise to fight them. It might be right to "place demands" on the Brotherhood — but you don't have to vote for them to do that. You have to be clear about what they are, and whether they are the labour movement's allies. They are not. To call for a vote for them on the grounds that in some sense they "represent the revolution" is to paint them as something they are not.

In the long run or even sooner, it will make it harder to fight them.

• More: "The classic manifesto of political Islam" — Martin Thomas analyses Brotherhood leader Sayyid Qutb's 1964 book *Milestones* — workersliberty.org/ qutb

Their morals and ours: the case of John Edwards

Eric Lee



John Edwards was once the shining hope of American progressives; today, he's a disgraced former politician. Last week, his trial in federal court ended with an acquittal. The trial, and the public reaction to it, showed yet again a very ugly side to American politics and culture.

While it may seem ancient history to Americans, it was only four years ago that John Edwards ran for the Democratic nomination for President on a moderately social democratic platform. This put him far to the left of the two front runners, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. When the health care plans of the three candidates were compared, it was obvious that only Edwards was committed to genuine reform — and Obama came in with the least ambitious plan of all.

Edwards focussed his 2008 campaign on the notion of "two Americas", a phrase perhaps first used by James P. Cannon in his 1948 speech to the Socialist Workers Party convention.

As Cannon said at the time, "there are two Americas — and millions of the people already distinguish between them. One is the America of the imperialist ... There is the other America — the America of the workers and farmers and the little people'."

American socialist writer Michael Harrington later used the phrase "the other America" as the title of his seminal book on poverty, written at a time when everyone else was talking about "the affluent society."

Edwards probably never even heard of Cannon, but he may well have been influenced by Michael Harrington. His campaign chose to focus on the issue of poverty in America — and it resonated in the working class and on parts of the left. Unions like the United Steel Workers decided early on to throw their weight behind the Edwards candidacy.

Edwards performed well in the Iowa caucuses, but suddenly pulled out of the race very early on, on the eve of the Super Tuesday primaries.

We now know why: he had had an affair, the woman became pregnant, and hostile media had uncovered the story.

The story was made all the more scandalous by the fact that Edwards' wife, Elizabeth, had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. (She has since passed away.)

WITHDRAWAL

Edwards' withdrawal from the race left the Democrats with a choice between two centrist candidates, and rest is history.

Where Obama failed — with a very weak and limited reform of health care, and a complete failure to reform labour laws — Edwards would have done well.

Fast forward to 2012. Federal prosecutors decided to punish Edwards for his sins, and discovered that a 102-year-old millionairess named "Bunny" Mellon had paid to cover up the 2008 scandal. This, they believed, was a federal crime. Edwards had misappropriated campaign funds.

The case cost the taxpayer millions, dragged on for months, and last week the jury ruled that Edwards was not guilty of one of the six charges and couldn't reach a consensus on the others. The judge declared a mistrial.

The reaction of nearly everyone was to declare that while the trial was clearly a massive waste of money and time, Edwards was, of course, a rotten scumbag.

The fact that his and Elizabeth's children stood by him car-

ried no weight. The man, it was agreed by all, was something of a moral monster.

A liberal columnist wrote a piece for the *New York Times* pointing out just how vacuous Edwards was — triggering hundreds of comments which revealed a consensus that Edwards was somehow less than human, and was certainly a moral criminal of the worst kind.

All this to me stinks of hypocrisy — the rank kind of hypocrisy that makes America such a problematic place for the left.

What should have been a private matter between John and Elizabeth Edwards has become the concern of all, and everyone has an opinion.

Nothing about Edwards seems relevant anymore except his adultery. He has committed a mortal sin. As if he was the only American to have ever done this.

This notion of morality is almost medieval — and is part of the hypocritical morality in America that makes it so hard to legalise gay marriage or safeguard abortion rights.

Some politicians — such as the saintly John Kennedy, or the slightly-less-saintly Bill Clinton, can get away with it. Some can't.

One wonders if part of the reason for the virulent hatred of Edwards is related somehow to his politics.

After all, the American Right detested Bill Clinton, despite his decidedly middle-of-the-road liberalism. They hated John Edwards all the more, as his ideas — in an American context — smelled of something far more left-wing.

I write none of this to excuse any mistakes Edwards made. And in making those mistakes, he set the causes he campaigned for, such as fighting poverty, back by years.

But we on the left should never allow ourselves to be among those currently howling for John Edwards' blood. Their notion of morality and ours have nothing in common.

Hunt, Cameron, Osborne: all in it together

Documents revealed during Jeremy Hunt's appearance at the Leveson Inquiry have implicated George Osborne. On the day the News Corp lackey Hunt was appointed to replace Vince Cable as Media Minister, Osborne sent a text to James Murdoch saying "hope you like our solution".

But how does Jeremy Hunt get away with it? Hunt told the Leveson Inquiry last week that he sacked his advisor Adam Smith "with a heavy heart" — code for admitting he was instructed to throw his underling to the wolves in the hope of saving himself and his leader. But now that we have heard Hunt's evidence it's no wonder he was reluctant to wield the axe.

"Inappropriate contact" with News Corp while their BSKyB bid was being considered was the reason for sacking Smith. Now we know Hunt was engaging in the same kind of contact.

It was known before Hunt was appointed as Culture and Media Minister that he was a supporter of the BSKyB bid. On top of this the latest evidence to Leveson has revealed:

- When EU regulators decided not to intervene in the takeover bid Hunt sent James Murdoch a text congratulating him and describing the news as "great, only Ofcom to go". The next day he was appointed to adjudicate on the bid.

- After he was appointed Minister he continued to send frequent, personal and friendly messages to James Murdoch and the News Corp lobbyist, Fred Michel. Smith was sacked for excessive contact with the same man. (This was after legal advice that he should not meet News Corp informally once he was given responsibility for the bid.)

In a statement to Parliament on 25 April Hunt said he had had "zero" contact with News Corp over the BSKyB bid. This is why Labour has insisted that Parliament debate whether to refer Hunt for breaches of the ministerial code (13 June).

A number of Lib-Dem MPs have indicated they will vote to refer Hunt. Labour's case is based on a clause in the code that makes clear that ministers are responsible for the conduct of their advisers.

And another clause which states that "it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament... Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the PM." They want to get Hunt on his statement to Parliament he had no contact with News Corp.

NEED

Cameron quickly announced that he was satisfied with Hunt's performance at Leveson and saw no need to take any action against him.

For sure if Hunt could be ditched without serious damage to Cameron and his government he would be toast by now. He is still in office because the Prime Minister is up to his neck in the same slavish and obsequious conduct toward the Murdoch empire.

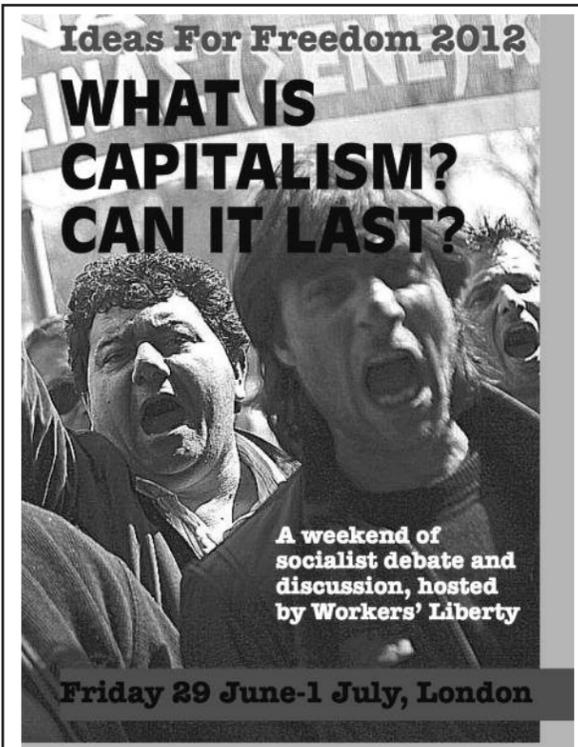
If Hunt's open support for News Corp made him unsuitable to assess the BSKyB bid then why did Cameron appoint him?

If "inappropriate contact" was a bad enough offence to finish an adviser why not a minister?

Hunt's defence is that once he became the responsible

minister he was able to set aside his views on the BSKyB bid and act with "scrupulous fairness" and "total integrity". In no other field would this horseshit be accepted. For the likes of Hunt it's fine to be on the closest personal terms with the powerful and wealthy people whose affairs he judges, to continue exchanging pleasantries with them and keep them informed.

While they savage our public services and attack our wages and conditions, cheered on by the right-wing press, they are certainly all in it together.



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Baroness Warsi, co-chair of the Tory party, is in trouble over failing to disclose a business interest in a spice manufacturing company in Pakistan when she visited the country on government business.

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Unfortunately we don't have the good Baroness's privileges. Our only source of funding comes from the donations of members and friends of Workers' Liberty and supporters of this paper. Please contribute to our fighting fund so we can take on the likes of Sayeeda Warsi and her scrounging ruling-class chums.

You can help by:

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Total raised so far: £13,206

Once again we raised only a small amount in the last two weeks — £158 — from donations and increased standing orders. Thanks to

Bryan, Eric, George, Matthew and Michael.

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Greece: fight the blackmail!

By Theodora Polenta

In the run-up to Greece's election on 17 June, the left-wing coalition Syriza and the conservative New Democracy are still neck-and-neck in the polls.

A barrage of blackmailing has been directed against Greece from representatives of the capitalist class, both national and international, both elected and unelected.

From the social democrats comes soft blackmailing — “comply, and we can sort out some concessions; but defy, and that means disaster”.

That is the soft-cop accompaniment to the hard blackmailing and threats of immediate expulsion of Greece from the eurozone by the mujahedeen of neoliberalism.

Recently Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who was “Danny the Red” in France’s May 1968 movement and is now a sort of pink-Green, added himself to the list of those blackmailing the Greek people.

Cohn-Bendit had previously been “pro-Greek”, and he switched when a left political alternative in Greece became a possibility. Now he says, as brutally as German finance minister Schäuble or more so, that the eurozone and EU will stop cooperating with Greece — i.e. stop bailing out Greece and push Greece into bankruptcy — if Syriza sticks with its promises to cancel the memorandum and reinstating people’s wages to the 2009 level.

French president Francois Hollande refused to meet Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras when Tsipras visited France, stating as an excuse that Tsipras is not an elected prime minister. However, Hollande did meet Pasok leader Evangelos Venizelos — who came third in the 6 May elections — in a desperate attempt to give life to the dead body of Pasok.

From the social democrats, the magic words are Eurobonds for development projects. But even if these come, the major developments proposed are in areas of “low employment intensity”:

1. Energy (which will involve further privatisation of the Greek energy sector, more redundancies, and a looting of our collective wealth and infrastructure)

2. Transportation and “big projects” in motorways. Many such projects remain unfinished; now they will be financed

by European bonds and presumably handed to German and French companies

3. Oil pipelines (subject to the resolution of the conflicts and decisions on which pipelines will pass via Greece).

The projects will have a nil impact on improving the majority of the Greek population’s living standards and working conditions, as they are not in areas such as industry, agriculture, clothing, food, etc.

“GREEK EXIT” AND AUSTERITY

With the social-democratic carrot comes the stick from the mujahedeen of austerity: Schäuble, Merkel, Barroso, Draghi, Provopoulos, Lagarde.

They equate Syriza getting elected with inevitable Greek exit from the eurozone, with Greek bankruptcy, and with further deterioration of the Greek people living standards and working conditions.

They terrorise the Greek people by pretending that they are fully prepared, with a plethora of plan Bs, Cs and Zs in the event of a Greek euro exit.

Reuters has “revealed” that the eurozone finance ministers are preparing plans for a Greek exit. Lagarde and other IMF representatives have stated that IMF is prepared for a Greek exit from the eurozone. Schäuble has stated that both ECB and Bundesbank are drawing up a contingency plan, and claimed that Greece exit would not have a major impact on Germany and the losses will be manageable.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has proposed a five-point shock therapy, similar to the one applied to East Germany, as her version of growth and development for Greece. It includes:

1. More privatisation and selling-off of Greek assets
2. Elimination of remaining business regulations, abolition of remaining trade-union rights, and “labour market reforms” to make it easier to fire workers
3. Lower corporate taxes (than the rates already reduced to 22%)
4. Setting up of special economic zones, where employers are exempted from those taxes and social laws that remain
5. Creation of privatisation agencies and abolition of labour-protection laws

George Provopoulos, Governor of the Bank of Greece, has offered a string of suspiciously precise statistics on the effects of Greek’s exit from the eurozone: 65% devaluation of any additional currency issued by the Greek government (restored Greek drachma or “Greek Euro”); 55% further reduction in wages; 22% negative growth; 32% inflation; 37% interest rates; 12% deficit; 373% increase in the Greek debt.

What is on offer from the pro-memorandum parties, Pasok and ND, despite their promises to renegotiate the memorandum, is more of the same: austerity measures and attacks on people’s living standards and working conditions.

The economic programme of ND leader Antonis Samaras could be summarised as “memorandum, memorandum and more memorandum”. He is very fuzzy and vague about the “social measures” and “social relief that ND is intended to implement and very precise on the anti-working class measures that “need to be implemented”.

Pasok and ND can promise the following:

1. Cuts have already been agreed and planned, worth 11.5 billion, from pensions, welfare benefits, closings of schools and hospitals.

2. Salary reductions and the dismantling of labour relations.

3. Increases in electricity bills.

4. Dismissal of 150,000 public sector workers and privatisation of 50 billion euros’ worth of public assets (infrastructure, water, energy, natural resources).

5. Creation of a special fund abroad where the country’s revenues will be directed to cover obligations to bondholders. Only if anything is left over will our diminishing wages, pensions and social services be paid.

They offer ideological terrorism and a bludgeon of fear to get people to accept the memorandum Greece of:

- over one million unemployed
- over 50% unemployment for under 25s
- one third of the people living below the poverty line
- being (according to Unicef) 21st out of 29 old-industrialised countries for child poverty
- shut-down hospitals and shortages of vital medications
- over 25,000 people homeless in Athens
- an alarming increase in suicide rates

is now just as ruthless as Osborne, and that harms (giving signals of crisis) rather than helps.

Once financiers get worried about the Spanish government’s creditworthiness, they demand higher interest rates on Spanish bonds to compensate them for the prospect that they may get a lower price for those bonds when they sell them on in a year’s or two years’ time.

Now the Spanish government can sell new bonds only by offering high “coupons” on them (interest rates as percentage of face-value: Spain is offering 5.85%), or by accepting that financiers will pay the government less than the face-value of the bonds (i.e. less than the Spanish government has to repay to the bondholders in two years’, five years’, or ten years’ time), or both. (The UK offers 4%, and gets *more* than the face-value of bonds). The Spanish government’s financial position worsens; and so its bond-market difficulties worsen further.

Many economists now think that Spain will soon have to resort to a “bail-out” — borrowing from the EU/ ECB/ IMF “Troika”, on penal conditions, rather than from the markets. A bail-out, in its turn, can worsen the economic spiral, as it has done in Greece.

To breaking the vicious circle, the idea of a eurozone “banking union” is gaining ground among eurozone leaders. Deposit insurance and bailing-out of commercial banks would become a responsibility of the eurozone, rather than of national central banks.

The German government and central bank, however, are stalling. Angela Merkel’s version of a “growth plan” for Europe, revealed by the German business magazine *Handelsblatt* on 4 June, is minimal (emphasis on “structural reforms”, i.e. on neoliberal slashing of worker-protection laws, and “stable finance”, offset only by some promises to spend from the EU budget on youth-jobs and infrastructure initiatives).

The odds must be that if Greece is forced out of the eurozone, then Spain will quickly be pushed into becoming a “second Greece”, only much bigger.

- Merkel’s plan: bit.ly/merkelplan

Why Spain is spiralling

By Martin Thomas

Spain is on the brink of an economic crash and bail-out because of the perversities of the eurozone banking system and the world financial markets.

The answer is to take high finance across Europe into public ownership, establish workers’ control over the sector, and run it as a public service for banking, pensions, and insurance. But the EU leaders will not do anything like that. The crisis will worsen.

Spain had a property-price boom in the run-up to the 2007-8 crash, like the USA and Britain and Ireland. At first its property prices fell much more slowly than prices in the USA (now down 33% from their 2006 Q2 high, and still falling, though more slowly than before) or even in the UK (house prices dropped 19% between 2007 Q3 and 2009 Q1, but have since levelled off).

By now, however, Spanish house prices are down over 20% from their 2007-8 peak, and falling faster and faster. It is not that a previous fast fall made an economic crisis; the economic crisis is now causing a fast fall, which in turn undermines Spain’s banks and causes worse economic crisis.

The economic crisis was not caused by public-spending profligacy by the social democrats in office in Spain in 2004-11. Spain’s budget-balance record before the 2008 crash was better than Germany’s. The social-democratic government made lots of cuts after 2008 — enough to fill the city squares with protesters and lose the social democrats the 2011 general election — but the Spanish economic crisis has really gathered speed since the right-wing Popular Party won office and stepped up the cuts.

Even now, Spain’s government debt is proportionately much less than the UK’s (Spain: 68.5% of GDP. UK: 85.7%). Its annual budget deficit is about the same as the UK’s

(Spain, 8.5% of GDP; UK, 8.3%).

The crisis is not caused by slack regulation of banks. Experts commented in 2008 that Spain had been saved from bank crashes in that year by having much better regulation of banks in the previous years than the USA or Britain had. The Bank of Spain had prevented banks from holding “special purpose vehicles” off balance sheet.

Spanish capital is caught in a loop. The frame is set by the eurozone’s odd system of central banking. The European Central Bank carries out some of the functions of a central bank, mainly control of the money supply, and exercises heavy control over the national central banks.

Other parts of the job of a central bank are done by the national central banks, notably guarantees to depositors of the country’s commercial banks, the bailing-out of commercial banks in trouble, and the trading of national government IOUs (bonds).

ON HOLD

The European Central Bank has bent the rules a bit in recent years. It has supplied cheap credit to banks through the LTRO and ELA schemes, and bought up some countries’ government bonds to limit their collapse (the SMP scheme). Those schemes have been limited and reluctant, and are currently on hold.

The Spanish government is being brought down by a vicious circle in which it uses its credit to save collapsing banks; its creditworthiness in global markets worsens; the burden on the government budget worsens; cuts increase; output falls; and the commercial banks become even worse off.

George Osborne may say that British government bonds are selling easily because of global financiers’ admiration for his ruthlessness in making cuts, but the Spanish government

Syriza rallies on election night last month. Can they win on 17 June? What happens next?

- 350,000 of small shops shut
- almost a third shrinkage of Greece's GDP since 2008.

Despite the deficiencies, the hesitations, and the reformist character of the program which Syriza has presented for 17 June, it should be applauded when it says clearly that Syriza will scrap the memorandum, restore trade union rights, etc.

Syriza's commitment that not even a single penny should be given to the creditors if the people's needs of decent wages, pensions, welfare state provisions have not been met should be applauded.

Despite the pressure put on Syriza to water down their defiance against the memorandum and come to terms with a renegotiation, it has not surrendered. It has maintained its links with the people and movements that have been actively supporting it.

IMMEDIATELY

Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras has pledged to immediately remove the Cabinet Act which reduced the minimum wage by 22% (32% for under-25s).

He has also pledged to restore unemployment benefits to previous levels and extend their duration, to restore and extend sickness and maternity, to restore the power of collective bargaining agreements, to cancel the debt of heavily indebted households, to repeal the regressive property tax for the poor working classes.

These policies need the support of each worker, each trade union and neighbouring community movement activist, each unemployed person, each worker in precarious or part-time flexible employment.

Syriza's program can be summarized into three main points:

- people before Greek bond holders and market forces — cancellation of the memorandum;
- write off of most of the debt and freeze interest rates and debt payments for the remaining renegotiated debt
- expansion of democracy and safeguarding of Greece's threatened sovereignty — Troika out of Greece.

(Full text: www.workersliberty.org/syriza).

The program has triggered a wave of criticism from different sections of the left.

The criticism varies. Xekinima presents comradely criticism. It advocates a vote for Syriza and support for the formation of a Syriza-led left government, but criticises Syriza

for not adopting a full socialist program.

KKE and Antarsya reject Syriza's program as a limited reformist effort far behind the needs of the Greek working class. They declare that Syriza's promise to cancel the memorandum is a hoax and allege that really Syriza is proposing a soft renegotiation of the memorandum.

They say that Syriza's political role is to be a new Pasok to replace the centre-left vacuum and provide a left face for the memorandum politics. They denounce Syriza for its pro-EU stance.

They claim that the left should advocate the cancellation of the debt tied up with an exit from the eurozone, and EU, which should be "anti-capitalist" (for Antarsya) or "under popular power and control" (for KKE).

The problem with these attitudes is not that we can trust Syriza's leaders and be sure they won't buckle under increased pressure (they may), or that we can be sure that Syriza's tactic of calling the bluff of the EU leaders will work (it probably won't).

The trouble is that, under cover of left rhetoric, KKE and Antarsya are declaring defeat in advance. They are giving up on the battle to hold Syriza to its promises, and they are helping the EU and ECB leaders by sparing them the political firestorm they will have to ride through in order to expel Greece from the eurozone.

REVOLUTIONARIES AND SYRIZA

Syriza has a serious reformist programme which, if implemented, would bring gains for the Greek and European working class.

The "Euro-Keynesian" programme for Greece is limited, and naive about the realities of class struggle, but it is not utopian in the sense of being unworkable even in principle. The resources of the eurozone are large enough that the eurozone governments could concede important relief to Greece if pushed to do so by strong enough mobilisations.

The cost to the eurozone governments of a Greek exit, let alone of a eurozone break-up, would be much greater than the costs of a real "bail-out" for Greece.

The "Euro-Keynesian" programme is reformist not because it proposes something impossible but because it is limited and naive about the ferocities of class struggle.

Revolutionary Marxists should point that out. But there is no sense in demanding that Syriza adopt a socialist programme. Syriza is what it is. Demanding it adopt a socialist programme cannot transform it into a revolutionary party. All it can do is, to some degree or another, encourage illusions among workers that a "socialist programme" is no more than the Syriza policy pushed a bit more to the left by pressure.

On the other hand, Antarsya and KKE are abstaining from the class struggle, which at this point has been transferred from the industrial sphere to the political stage. They do this by distancing themselves from Syriza and the prospect of a

government of the left — in fact, a version of what the Communist International in its revolutionary period termed an illusory workers' government which could nevertheless become a starting point for a battle to create a real workers' government.

Tsipras says he doesn't want to scrap the bail-out fund. All Syriza's spokesmen claim that they will renegotiate the payment of the debt (writing off most of it), but they will carry on receiving the instalments of the second bailout fund.

Syriza's claim is fragile as the bailout funds from the Troika have as precondition the implementation of the second memorandum.

92% of the memorandum money only passes via Greece on its way to the pockets of the Greek bond holders. Europe is "bailing out" Greece, but the money is coming straight back to the Troika and its friends in the form of interest and repayments on bonds. But Troika says it will cut off the funds.

CALLING THE BLUFF

Syriza's program is based on calling the bluff of the eurozone.

They say memorandum not only attacks workers, etc., but doesn't even work for the eurozone. Syriza's line of defence to the national and international blackmail is that the memorandum policies have been leading Greece to negative growth and stagnation and are accelerating the probability of the Greece's exit from the eurozone.

A lot of respectable economists are implicitly backing Syriza's stance. Nobel prize winning economist Paul Krugman put it succinctly the other day when he told Radio Four that "it is deeply destructive to pursue austerity in a depression". Another economist has stated that the worst choice that Greece could follow is the continuation of the memorandum policies, even with an addition of some anaemic growth measures.

A further ten years of austerity would lead the Greek economy into deep stagnation and negative growth and thus inevitably to a Greek bankruptcy, exit from the euro, and possibly the destruction of democracy by a military coup.

Syriza claims that the cost of a potential eurozone breakdown outweighs the cost to EU governments of bailing out Greece and scrapping the memorandum. There is a real basis for this attempt to call the EU leaders' bluff.

The eurozone is ill-placed to resist further disintegration if Greece falls out, and the cost of a euro break-up would be huge (between 10% and 13% of GDP according to the *Financial Times*, 17/05/12).

Estimates of the effect of a Greek exit on the eurozone differ, but, with Spain and Portugal in a bad way already the effect would be large. The contagion of the debt crisis and the potential of a euro-disintegration is gaining momentum with talk of Portugal and Ireland having to go for a second bailout funds.

Cyprus is on the brink of joining the "memorandum" club. Spain, the fourth-biggest eurozone economy, has to pay sky-high 7% rates to borrow and is experiencing a massive bank run and outflow of capital.

The third-biggest eurozone economy, Italy, is also in trouble.

In principle the ECB has the resources to offset the disruptive effect. The chance of it moving fast enough to do that seems small.

A Greek euro-exit and bankruptcy would compromise the whole concept of the eurozone and would further devalue Spanish and Italian bonds. A domino effect, leading to the end of the eurozone, would become likely.

There is also a real basis for the EU leaders' attempts to blackmail Greek voters. A Greece expelled from the eurozone would suffer economic chaos even if led by a workers' government.

The eurozone political leaders cannot be trusted to act in an objective or rational way. They could decide to force Greece out of the eurozone, driven that way by the desire to set an example and punish Greece for misbehaving and not sticking to the memorandum. Or they could stumble into it.

It is the political responsibility of Syriza and the revolutionary left to alert and politically prepare the Greek working class for the effects of Greece being forced out of the eurozone.

The key issues then will be the development of European working-class solidarity; comprehensive workers' control in Greece, including over the distribution of food and other essentials; and the development of workers' self-defence groups to deal with the threat of the Golden Dawn fascists and of a possible future military coup.

● Model motion on Greek solidarity: workersliberty.org/greeksol

● Do you really want the EU to break up? Open letter: workersliberty.org/eu-ol

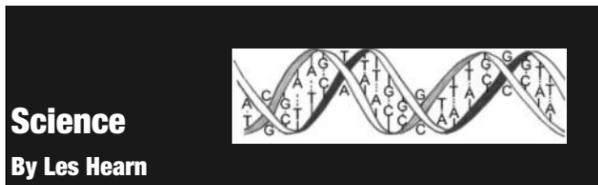
Greece: Is workers' revolution on the agenda?

Thursday 21 June, 7pm, The Lucas Arms,
245a Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8QZ

Speakers include: Theodora Polenta

More: 07796 690874

Fracking: good, bad and/or ugly?



Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, is a technique for getting methane gas out of shale rocks.

The gas, which is a fossil fuel, can then be burnt to provide energy for power stations to generate electricity. Because methane has a lower proportion of carbon than coal and oil and can be burnt more efficiently, many see it as a transitional fuel, allowing continued use of fossil fuels but reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This would buy time while alternatives were developed. According to this model, fracking would help by increasing the availability of methane.

There are two types of argument against fracking. One type focuses on threats to local environments, particularly for people living nearby; the other takes issue with the “green” claims made for methane.

ORIGINS AND EXTRACTION

Fossil fuels are the remains of plants (mainly trees) and animals (mainly sea creatures) that died hundreds of millions of years ago.

The trees fell into swamps and the sea creatures sank into sediments on the sea-bed; neither rotted due to the lack of oxygen in these environments. Instead, their bodies were subjected to heat and pressure; water diffused away; the fats, carbohydrates, and proteins were converted into impure carbon (in the case of trees) and oils and gases (in the case of sea creatures). Subsequently, some compounds were further broken down, producing more gases, mainly methane.

Some methane has been naturally escaping, giving rise to the will o’ the wisp (also known as jack o’ lantern and ignis fatuus (Lat. “foolish fire”)), which features in folklore worldwide. Here, methane seeping from marshes spontaneously ignites, causing a ghostly dancing flame.

Fossil methane is trapped in reservoirs capped by impermeable rock, sometimes with oil deposits. This is where it is found in conventional gas wells, while it is “flared off” wastefully from oil wells. It is also found “dissolved” in rocks, including “tight” sandstones and shales. These are relatively impermeable and the methane was hitherto unobtainable, except where rocks were naturally faulted. Methane is also “dissolved” in coal and seeps out when coal is mined (“fire damp”) or through natural faults.

Hydraulic fracturing of gas-bearing shales and “tight” sandstones is a technique that has been developed commercially in the last 14 years. It introduces cracks into the rock to allow the methane to come out through the greatly increased surface area.

This is done by injecting water, sand and various chemicals at enormous pressures into drill-holes. This is enough to overcome the considerable pressures in the rocks at this depth and cause them to fracture. The sand helps prop the cracks open so that the released gas can travel to the surface. The chemicals, some of which are quite unpleasant, form a gel which helps deliver the sand to the cracks. Much water can be lost to the surrounding rocks, together with the chemicals.

Hydraulic fracturing has been used in conventional, vertical, gas wells for 60 years to remove the last bits of gas. It has become more cost-effective for shales with the development of horizontal drilling outwards from vertical drill holes. This makes much more rock available for fracking.

CRITICISMS

Criticisms tend to be on environmental grounds.

Local complaints include gas coming out of water taps, polluted ground water, and minor earthquakes or tremors. Criticisms on the global scale refer to its greenhouse gas footprint.

Groundwater contamination. Despite complaints from some residents, a report from the University of Texas absolves hydraulic fracturing itself from causing groundwater contamination, hardly surprising since it takes place typically between 1.5 and 6 km depth. Contamination from the drilling process seems no worse than for conventional oil and gas extraction on land. However, this is not to be ignored and communities should demand that companies use less dangerous chemicals and take greater precautions to prevent leaks. Also, fracking has not been going on for very long and it is possible that worse problems may emerge.

Flaming water taps. The Texas report concluded that examples of tap water saturated with methane were probably natural, though there was little evidence to compare the situation before and after fracking.

It is worth mentioning that natural methane seepage from coal seams has been known for a long time. Older readers may remember the Abbeystead (Lancashire) water pumping station disaster 28 years ago. Methane seeping from coal deposits 1 km deep had built up in an empty water pipe and then been driven into the main hall by the pressure of the pumps. It exploded, causing 16 deaths and 28 serious injuries.

Fire damp has been known since coal-mining began. Methane builds up in mines and can be ignited by any

spark, the reason why taking lighters and matches into mines is a criminal offence. In the US, 128 miners have died in methane explosions in the last 30 years (compared with 43 deaths attributable to Chernobyl).

Earthquakes. It’s official! Fracking caused two tiny earthquakes near Blackpool last year.

Of magnitude 1.5 and 2.3, they were caused when water injected into shale rocks lubricated faults, allowing them to shift by about a centimetre at a depth of 2 km. These are really trivial: 1.5 would not usually be detected and 2.3 would usually only be detected by sensitive seismometers. For comparison, I have survived a magnitude 3.5 ‘quake in Nottinghamshire. This released about 70 times as much energy as the 2.3 ‘quake and all I noticed was a bang like a skip falling off a lorry and the windows rattling. A slightly bigger one that occurred at night failed to wake me.

There are about 15 magnitude 2.3 earth tremors in Britain per year. Subsidence due to mining is a far more common problem (notably in Northwich, Cheshire, due to salt mining) but ... fracking has only just started here!

The US Geological Survey reports a rise in earthquakes greater than magnitude 3 which coincides with the introduction of hydraulic fracturing. While these are small, it is not impossible for larger tremors to be triggered.

EFFECT ON GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Cheaper and more widely available methane is going to encourage its use to generate electricity.

This involves burning lots of it and therefore releasing carbon dioxide, a “greenhouse” gas. In principle, this is just as bad as burning any other fossil fuel. In fact, methane is only 75% carbon, compared with heavy oils and coal at about 90% carbon. Also, gas-fired power stations are about 50% more efficient than other fossil fuel power stations. All other things being equal, switching to gas would reduce carbon dioxide emissions and help mitigate climate change.

This has led some to see it as a bridging power source, taking us towards a lower-carbon future. However, methane is itself a potent greenhouse gas, some 70 times worse than CO₂, and it escapes from fracking operations.

This has been analysed by researchers at Cornell University, NY, who conclude that hydraulic fracturing releases substantially more methane than conventional gas wells and that, over 20 years (when we need to greatly reduce GHG emissions), it would have a much worse impact even than coal, let alone ordinary methane and oil.

To sum up, the adverse effects on local environments of fracking seem to be exaggerated, though evidence is limited. However, switching to shale gas would make global warming worse and on those grounds alone it should be opposed.

Fifty years since the USSR’s biggest post-Stalin massacre of workers

By Piotr Suda

On January 1, 1962, wages were lowered by 30 to 35 percent at the largest electrolocomotive plant in Novochoerkassk.

On the morning of 1 June the government radio announced that there would be a sharp “temporary” increase in the price of meat and dairy products (up to 35%). [Sparked by an insult from a manager, the workers struck].

There were about 14,000 workers at the plant. The workers went out to the plant grounds and filled the square near the plant management office. The square could not hold all the strikers.

At about noon the word spread amongst the strikers: “The militia has come!” ... On seeing the menacing wave of people the militia ranks dissolved immediately. Wrathful as they were, the workers were not violent; they did not even touch the remaining militiamen and saw them off with the advice not to poke their noses into strikes.

By the end of the work day the first military detachments of the Novochoerkassk garrison arrived at the square but they were not armed. Having approached the people, the soldiers were immediately absorbed by the crowd. The soldiers and the strikers began to fraternize, to embrace and kiss each other.

Then the armoured carriers with officers began to arrive at the square. The authorities had determined that the soldiers of the Novochoerkassk garrison were unreliable, and decided to rely upon the officers.

At 5 o’clock [the next] morning I was awakened by the

Contemporary graphic. Russian reads, “Meat, butter, pay rise”

noise of tanks and left for the plant... We all observed that the railway along the plant and the plant itself were surrounded by soldiers with sub-machine guns...

Columns of marchers were converging on the city from everywhere and there appeared red flags, portraits of Lenin. The demonstrators were singing revolutionary songs. Everybody was excited, full of belief in their power and in the fairness of their demands. The column of demonstrators was becoming larger and larger...

The demonstrators were seething in front of the city CPSU

committee building. The building itself was full of soldiers from the Caucasus. The demonstrators exchanged heated remarks with the soldiers through the door. One Caucasian lost his temper, broke the glass of the door with the butt of his sub-machine gun and through the hole struck a woman with it. Under the pressure of the indignant demonstrators, the door of the building swung open. The crowd broke through and... the City Committee building was completely occupied by the demonstrators.

A rally began [outside the building]... the soldiers were commanded to open fire... Not a single bullet is likely to have been wasted: the crowd was too dense...

The soldiers near the party committee building were also ordered to open fire, though there had been no assault, no violence there. Curious children were sitting high in the trees in a small public garden in front of the party committee... The soldiers opened fire. First upwards, at the trees, at the children who fell down, killed, wounded, frightened... Then the machine guns were pointed at the crowd...

Trucks and buses were driven to the site. The corpses were hastily thrown and thrust into them. Not a single body was given to the family to be buried...

A period of trials followed. The most blatantly cruel was the trial of 14 of the participants in the strike and rallies... Seven of the fourteen were sentenced to be shot. [Many other strikers were jailed].

• Story (by a participant) originally published in *Russian Labour Review* (Moscow), and extracts here taken from www.libcom.org

Building a workers' "third front" in Iran

Maziar Razi, a leading member of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxist Tendency, visited Britain recently and spoke at an informal question-and-answer session organised by Workers' Liberty on 31 May. Notes from Maziar's presentation, taken by Daniel Rawnsley:

Iraq has a unique theocratic regime. Other states in the region have called themselves Islamic states, but in Iran, uniquely, the clergy is in power.

How did it come to power? The industrialisation and urbanisation drive by the Shah's regime, linked to the so-called White Revolution, fell into crisis. The clergy wanted concessions from the Shah and were pushed into opposition. They managed to rally millions of petty bourgeois and pauperised petty bourgeois ruined by the economic crisis.

The left in Iran was drawn into the "anti-imperialist", "anti-US" trap of backing Khomeiny. Only two left groups clearly opposed the clergy, Peykar and the forerunner of the IRMT. And we were defeated. The rest of the would-be Marxist left backed Khomeiny. Some even collaborated with him. Some of our comrades became political prisoners within a month of Khomeiny taking power.

The masses who had come on the anti-Shah protests did not want a regime like Khomeiny's to replace the Shah. In 1978-79 we saw the formation of shoras (workers' councils). They organised the general strike which broke the back of the Shah's regime. However, because there was no adequate alternative leadership, even the working class accepted the leadership of the clergy.

The Islamic government has had an internal contradiction from the start. Its medieval ideas are incompatible with modern capitalism. Thus within the regime two tendencies have constantly emerged and re-emerged: the fundamentalists, and more directly pro-capitalist factions which want a quicker deal with the West. Every time the clergy and the fundamentalists eventually reassert control.

Rafsanjani started out in the fundamentalist camp, moved towards pragmatism in power, and was then pushed aside. Within Ahmadinejad's camp now there is a trend seeking a more "moderate" approach to the West.

The issue of Iran's nuclear programme is a secondary one compared to the longstanding internal contradiction. Fundamentally, the clergy have expansionist and sub-imperialist plans in the region.

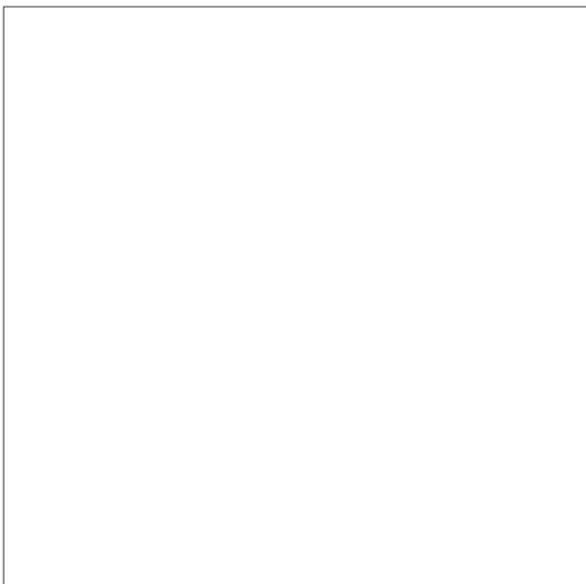
WORKING CLASS

Despite severe repression, the working class has staged strikes and protests continuously since 1978/79, with the exception only of the early period of the Iran-Iraq war.

"Underground workers' committees" have developed, not tied to individual factories and workplaces. They are based on networks of people who may know each other as friends, family etc. They have been strong enough to organise May Day protests, and resourceful at finding ways to meet and discuss outside the control of the regime.

Politically, however, the activists in the workers' committees have tended to have a syndicalist bent. They'd seen the "Marxists" backing Khomeiny, or turning to terrorist resistance, and they reacted against that.

Our main political challenge has been dealing with that syndicalist bent. We have had to be gradual about introduc-



For many years the Tehran Bus Workers' Syndicate have fought for their right to organise. Photo taken in 2008.

ing the idea of Leninism. We also researched the concept of a "Leninist organisation", and had to rethink it in some ways.

The workers' committee activists have tended to conclude that they cannot bring down the regime, so they should aim to pressurise the regime to get some space in which they can gain concessions on trade-union issues. And in fact the regime has created a tripartite system of industrial negotiation system where a workers' representative meets with a representative of the regime and a representative of the bosses.

The regime doesn't want to give concessions. The syndicalists have fought bravely, but the regime's tactic now is not to kill the worker militants but to exhaust them by repeated prison terms, harassment of their families, etc. It often works. For now the syndicalists are not very active.

We oppose ultra-leftist disdain for the syndicalists. We draw the lesson that organisation has to be clandestine, and that revolutionary organisations must keep their leaders underground.

We also have to go further than the ideas of syndicalism, and demand political freedoms.

WAR

How will workers respond if there is war between Iran and Israel or the USA?

At some times during the war with Iraq in the 1980s the regime was very popular. It was difficult for us to advocate our position of refusing to support Iran in the war. We said to workers that they should demand their leaders arm them, rather than volunteer to go and fight under the banner of the regime.

Today the regime is more isolated. Its solid base is around 12% to 15% of the population. These are supporters re-

cruited from poor villages — Basijis — who are given a job that pays well, a house in the city etc. The regime has bought a section of society. They will be with the regime come what may.

But many who have been brutalised by the regime, or had family members raped or killed, are more inclined to welcome the prospect of a US invasion. We say oppose the regime, but don't trust US imperialism, or the Israeli armed forces, to get rid of it. We believe we can construct a third front opposed both to the Iranian regime and to Israel and the US.

There is a good chance that a nationalist tendency will exist when imperialists attack, but the reactionary nature of the regime will limit it. A few years ago people demonstrated in great numbers in support of the reformists, and the regime responded with extreme brutality. A very deep hatred towards the regime exists in the population.

However, at present I think war is unlikely.

REGIME

You can compare Iran with 1930s fascist states in Europe in some way, but there is a big difference between Iran and even the "clerical-fascist" regimes of the 1930s like Spain and Portugal: the clergy holds state power. In modern history elsewhere we haven't seen the clergy come to power; it has been on the sidelines supporting the regime.

The percentage of business that is state owned is still very high, around 70%, despite a privatisation policy, and although it is difficult to get precise figures.

Economic sanctions have had an effect. Some factories have stopped producing because they can no longer get supplies. The most important industries are state owned: oil, petrochemicals). The biggest struggles take place in the car industry. Iran Khodro employs around 30,000 workers, and workers have won disputes there.

Turkish comrades whom we have discussed with [Marxist Tutum] argue that "sub-imperialism" has emerged, and cite Iran and Turkey as examples. Certainly Iran has a different position in the world from, say, Bangladesh. We need to discuss the Turkish comrades' ideas more, but they seem to make sense.

The majority of people are religious and observant. Many syndicalists whom we have worked with are religious, and argue that the regime is not truly Islamic. Religion is stronger in the villages. Young people in Tehran, especially women, tend not to be devout. Young women bend the strict dress codes.

The situation is also different in Kurdistan. There, people have a history of resistance to the regime, and the political situation is more open.

The regime restricts the internet, reducing connection speeds at certain times for example, and monitoring people's usage. But Facebook has helped us a great deal. We were able to use the internet to start discussions and meet some social democrats and anarchists online. We formed a Marxist sub-group to start discussions on the Communist Manifesto, and people in this online group set up physical groups where they live.

Twitter and Facebook have been important for demonstrations. During the protests two years ago the regime cut off mobile phone use.

The long slump and the global working class

Paul Hampton reviews *Global Slump* by David McNally

There is no definitive Marxist assessment of the current economic crisis or of the period leading up to it, but there is a vibrant debate among Marxists trying to grapple with the underlying causes of the world we're in. David McNally's book provides one of the most panoramic and provocative accounts with many insights.

He argues that the crisis of 2008 represents the terminus of a quarter-century wave of economic growth — neoliberal expansion — and the transition to a protracted period of slump. He defends three broad arguments:

1. From 1982 an era of severe capitalist restructuring took place in which capital, by attacking working class living standards, reorganising production and spatially reconfiguring global production chains, succeeded in raising the rate of exploitation and increasing profitability.

2. The upward trend in profit-rates from the early 1980s sustained a wave of capitalist expansion that began to falter in 1997, with the crisis in East Asia.

3. A wholesale reorganisation of capitalist finance occurred, stimulated by a metamorphosis in forms of world-money.

Of these, the first thesis is most significant. It can be subdivided into three substantial claims:

1. A sustained government and employer offensive against workers, unions and the social wage beginning in the late 1970s reduced working class shares of national income and real wages, leading to a significant increase in the rate of exploitation of labour.

2. Substantial processes of industrial restructuring took place, with massive downsizing, mothballing of old plants and equipment, introduction of new technologies, speed-up, and the development of systems of lean production that raised the productivity of labour. Robotics, computerisation and the widespread application of new production methods are evidence of decisive processes of technical change that boosted labour productivity, increased relative surplus value, and contributed to rising profitability.

3. A dramatic spatial-geographic reorganisation of capital has seen the creation of a new centre of capital accumula-

tion in East Asia, with the tripling in the size of the waged labour force in China as its economy emerges as a crucial workshop of the world.

The virtue of McNally's approach is to examine the world economy as a totality, rather than as simply the sum of national economies. In doing so, he avoids the subjective trap that generalises trends in the US and major Western economies to the world economy as a whole.

The book emphasises the tremendous growth in the international working class; it has at least doubled in size across the neoliberal era, with something like half of it living in East and South Asia. The last two and half decades have witnessed one of the great migrations in world history. For the first time ever, a majority of humankind will live in cities and towns. We have probably passed the tipping point, whereby the majority of the world's direct producers do waged work rather than peasant agriculture. The social weight of the working class has never been greater.

Continued on page 10

Long slump

From page 9

According to the figures used by McNally, of a global labour force of roughly three billion people, more than half today live in East and south Asia combined".

In the twenty-five years after 1978, China's employed working class tripled, growing from 120 million to 350 million. By 2002 China "had more than twice the number of manufacturing workers than the world's largest industrial nations, the G7 combined", with 109 million compared to 53 million. These workers are not only producing low-cost manufacturing, such as footwear, clothing, sporting goods and toys. They are also producing electronics and information-technology hardware.

McNally dissents from the views of many on the revolutionary left, ranging from the SWP in Britain to Robert Brenner, Andrew Kliman and *Monthly Review* in the US, who see the last forty years as one of uninterrupted crisis or "long downturn". Such assessments "either ignore or thoroughly downplay the dramatic social, technical and spatial restructuring of capitalist production that occurred across the neoliberal period, all of which significantly raised profitability, and led to a volatile but nonetheless real process of sustained capitalist expansion, centred on East Asia".

McNally argues that the current crisis is fundamentally the result of over-accumulation and generalised problems of profitability. When the first signs of a new phase of over-accumulation set in, with the Asian Crisis of 1997, gargantuan credit expansion, increasingly fuelled by record-low interest-rates and the extraordinary build-up of fictitious capital (stocks, bills and other paper claims to wealth), postponed the day of reckoning, while greatly "financialising" relations between capital and labour.

When financial markets started to seize up in the summer of 2007, underlying problems of overaccumulation and declining profitability meant that financial meltdown would trigger global slump. It is therefore not simply a financial crisis, though it does have some unique financial and monetary features. Financialisation is not about the rise to prominence of a stratum of financiers or rentiers, who have twisted capitalism to narrowly financial ends, nor is it simply about neoliberal policies of financial deregulation.

Ultimately the book argues that the world economy has entered a protracted slump involving "a whole period of interconnected crises — the bursting of a real estate bubble; a wave of bank collapses; a series of sovereign debt crises; relapses into recession — that goes on for years without a sustained economic recovery". McNally believes that the slump drives capital to destroy value in order to restore the conditions for its own reproduction. The crisis will induce measures such as an enormous centralisation and further spatial re-organisation of capital, upset the balance of global economic power and probably witness more draconian restrictions on the movement of migrant-labour. But despite the hardship and suffering, there will be opportunities for socialists to offer our own coherent answers and to mobilise workers to resist the onslaught.

Our job now?

- Pay attention to the development of working class politics in Asia, particularly China, and do everything possible to promote labour movement solidarity.
- Rethink left orthodoxy on imperialism and globalisation, in particular the recognition of the emergence of new imperialist and sub-imperialist powers. Knee-jerk, one-eyed, purely anti-Western "anti-imperialism" is no use in this global configuration.
- Rebuild and recreate the labour movement and other "organised infrastructures of dissent".

Neither victims nor executioners

We continue our symposium of recollections and reflections from activists involved in the "third camp" left in the United States with a piece by David McReynolds. Although not from the Trotskyist third camp tradition, David worked closely with many who were, including Max Shachtman.

He joined the Socialist Party of America in 1951, and in 1958 was involved in negotiating the merger of the Independent Socialist League into the SP. In 1980, he became the first openly gay man to run for the US Presidency.

My first contact with the term "Third Camp" was probably in 1950, at a joint conference of the Socialist Party and the Socialist Youth League (youth arm of Max Shachtman's Independent Socialist League) in Los Angeles.

I had not yet joined the Socialist Party, and the YSL objected to my being seated, since, in the days of McCarthy, I might be a government agent. The SP vouched for me and I took part, listening with care to the definition of the Third Camp by the SYL speaker. (At that time I was a radical pacifist, who had come under the influence of AJ Muste and Bayard Rustin — I joined the Socialist Party a year later).

My sense was that the definition of "Third Camp" held by those close to Shachtman was essentially some kind of "third armed camp", with little awareness that the events of August 1945 required radical new thinking by socialists.

In 1953 AJ Muste urged me to go to Chicago for a "Third Camp" conference, sponsored by a radical pacifist group called The Peacemakers. I did go, and was entrusted by Muste with the first draft of the program for an official Third Camp movement. That project didn't go anywhere — Muste had made what I felt was the error of setting up a group which would consist of any organisation which subscribed to the Third Camp document — but the only two groups that could sign were the Peacemakers and Shachtman's Independent Socialist League. The project died on the vine.

Muste had his hands full with projects. Shachtman, for his part, was moving toward trying to enter the Socialist Party (which he did in 1958). So the abortive Third Camp movement of 1953 ended without immediate offspring.

Muste, who was committed to revolutionary change (nonviolent — he was a Gandhian) felt that in the 1950s the scene in the US was hopeless, and the hope was in places such as Africa.

The War Resisters League, in 1953, sent Bill Sutherland to Ghana to aid in training people in nonviolent resistance. At that time Ghana was called the Gold Coast. Bill remained in Africa until just a year or two ago, when he returned to the US due to ill health. He worked also in Tanzania. Both Muste and Bayard Rustin had close ties to the anti-colonial forces in Africa and, of course, in India.

So while this didn't fit Shachtman's definition of a Third Camp (and Max himself had, by the time of his death, moved far to the right, essentially joining one of the camps), it was the hope that in a nuclear armed world the neutral forces of India, Africa, and the Communist Parties that were breaking away from Moscow offered hope of an international force independent of the "two camps".

MORAL

There is no question in my mind that at the start of the Cold War, when the US was allied with every right-wing dictatorship, and Moscow had presided over a police state in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, many good people felt they had to make a choice between one side or the other. Those of us who took a Third Camp position did so in part from a moral revulsion against the two camps.

In 1962 the third camp took on new life and new meaning when Muste, and Bayard Rustin, flew to London to join the campaigners around the Committee of One Hundred and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to set up an organisational framework which would reject affiliations from either Washington or Moscow.

This group was called The International Confederation for Disarmament and Peace (ICDP). Several groups affiliated with it, including a French campaign led by Claude Bourdet, the official Yugoslav Peace group, at least one social democratic peace group in Sweden, the War Resisters League in the US and, eventually, also the American Friends Service Committee and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. I think (but am not sure) that the Socialist Party was also affiliated.

It should be noted that Shachtman's Independent Socialist League was not involved at any point in the formation of the ICDP. The true heart and soul of the ICDP was Peggy Duff, who had played so key a role in the Aldermaston Marches, and who came out of the Labour Party. (Of which she was in fact an active member until finally, during the Vietnam War, she felt she had to resign from the Labour Party).

The World Peace Council (WPC), a framework organised and funded by Moscow, had sent representatives to London in hopes of being able to affiliate with the ICDP, but their application was gently rejected. (Moscow would, at times,

David McReynolds

refer to ICDP as a "Western agency", but the fact the Yugoslavs affiliated to the ICDP, and later the two main Japanese peace groups, one dominated by the Communist Party, the other dominated by the Socialist Party, made the charges baseless).

The ICDP held Council meetings in Canada, in Iceland, and at one point in Milan, at a time when the Italian Communist Party controlled the city and was able to provide hospitality to ICDP. At crucial points — such as the Warsaw invasion of Czechoslovakia — ICDP was absolutely clear in opposing Soviet intervention, as it had been clear in condemning US intervention in Vietnam.

In some ways the most useful thing the ICDP was able to do was to establish, in cooperation with the World Peace Council and the War Resisters International, a conference in Sweden on the Vietnam situation. This was something the Vietnamese had desperately needed — a window to the West which couldn't be written off as Soviet dominated (as would have been true if only the WPC had sponsored the conference).

Peggy Duff was in close contact with the Vietnamese officials, both in Paris, and in her trips to Vietnam — the two of us went to Saigon in 1966 to meet with dissident Buddhists and she later went to Hanoi.

The problems when led to the decline of ICDP (it eventually merged into the International Peace Bureau, situated in Geneva) were simple. The ICDP was too radical for the American pacifists — except for the War Resisters League. After all, the ICDP was on good terms with the Italian, Yugoslav, and Japanese Communist parties — as well as excellent terms with the independent peace movements in Europe, and the social democratic peace groups in Finland, Sweden, etc. Without serious funding it was impossible to move beyond the two people who ran the office in London.

Finally, Peggy Duff fell in with cancer, and died — there was no one to take her place. At her death she had begun to open doors to democratic secular movements in Palestine and there were surely whole chapters that needed to be written.

The great power of the European nuclear disarmament movement was, I am convinced, one of the reasons Gorbachev felt he could risk moving to end the Cold War. I was happy to serve on the Council of ICDP during its life time, and travelled in Europe and Japan helping build foreign opposition to the US intervention in Vietnam.

The Third Camp movement of ICDP could have taken as its slogan Camus' line "Neither victims, nor executioners". It reflected a realisation that nuclear war was a genuine threat to human survival, and that neither Washington nor Moscow could escape from that trap. The hope was in those countries which were non-aligned, and those movements within the two blocs which were in the process of breaking away (i.e., the Italian CP, etc.).

ICDP succeeded, to the degree it did, precisely because it did not have a rigid statement of political goals, and sought to align itself to the forces in the Third World which were trying to avoid being drawn into the Cold War.

• Third camp symposium: tinyurl.com/thirdcamp

The real meaning of Jubilee

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Jubilee

1. A year of emancipation and restoration provided by ancient Hebrew law to be kept every 50 years by the emancipation of Hebrew slaves, restoration of alienated lands to their former owners, and omission of all cultivation of the land.

2. A religious song of black Americans usually referring to a time of future happiness.

The Hebrew usage is said to be based on a custom by Babylonian kings of decreeing, irregularly in the Babylonian case, a general cancellation of debts. Thus the Jubilee Debt campaign demands the cancellation of debts for poor countries.

Somehow it's been misappropriated by the government as a word for an anniversary on which, not the poor, but the royal rich, have huge amounts of public money spent on them.

Tube workers get no-strings bonus

By Darren Bedford

Tube union RMT has reached a deal with London Underground bosses that secures an Olympics working bonus for Tube staff whilst defending collective agreements.

All operational staff will receive £100 dependant on meeting targets and up to £400 attendance bonus. On top of this, most workers will receive a £350 lump sum, which will not be conditional on working outside of existing agreements. Drivers will receive a higher bonus (£500). While the disparity is unfortunate, it stems largely from the eagerness of drivers-only union ASLEF to rush into a unilateral deal

that traded drivers' working hours for a little extra money.

Although not perfect, the Olympics deal shows that bosses' threats to effectively rip up collective agreements can be fought off if unions stand their ground and refuse to sell workers' rights for a few more pounds in members' pockets.

This deal does not mean the end of problems for London Underground workers concerning the Olympics though, and RMT activists are on standby for battles with the company over allocation of duties, over-stretched staffing and potential breaches of safety.

The union is pursuing a separate dispute relating

to Incident Customer Service Assistants (ICSAs), administrative staff trained in just a single day to cover CSAs' duties. London Underground is insisting on counting ICSAs towards the minimum number of staff who must be on duty on a station for it to remain open. In doing so, the company is putting passengers' safety at risk, as well as preparing to further slash stations jobs once the Games are over. Activists are pushing for a ballot for action short of a strike over this issue and are agitating amongst RMT's members in the Station Supervisor grade to refuse to open stations where ICSAs are used to plug staffing gaps.

On Monday 11 June, RMT will declare the re-

sults of three other industrial action ballots of London Transport workers. London Underground service control staff are fighting shabby treatment by their employer; Cubic workers, who fix ticket machines and gates, are demanding decent pay and Olympic reward; and Transport for London staff are furious at the company refusing to allow them to take leave during the Olympics and denying some staff any bonus at all. Janine Booth, RMT's Executive member for London Transport workers, told *Solidarity*: "Co-ordinating these three ballots to conclude on the same day allows the union to co-ordinate the action too. Each workforce will feel less isolated than it might

otherwise do, and we can hit the employers with a heavier punch. Rank-and-file members will discuss their ideas for action before the union decides on tactics and dates."

RMT is also preparing to ballot its members working on the municipal bicycle hire scheme ("Boris Bikes") for strike action, and action short of a strike. TfL has refused these workers any financial reward for the significantly increased workload they face during the Olympics, and is imposing unpopular changes to their shift patterns and working hours.

A strike ballot conducted by Unite of its 21,000 bus workers members is ongoing.

Ballots off in train dispute

By Stewart Ward

RMT and Unite have called off strike ballots of their members working for East Midlands Trains (EMT), leaving drivers-only union ASLEF as the only union in a position to take strike action in the immediate future.

Workers are in dispute over changes to their pension scheme. According to the RMT, EMT bosses have made some concessions over how pensions

contributions are calculated. They plan to put management's new offer to their members with a recommendation to accept.

Unite also called off a ballot of EMT maintenance staff, who were poised to strike over the Jubilee weekend. Until Unite and RMT members vote on managements' new offers, their disputes remain live.

ASLEF is currently discussing its next steps and could take more action.

Sparks' wildcat wins reinstatement

By Darren Bedford

Wildcat strike action by electricians at Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station in Nottinghamshire secured the reinstatement of a victimised union rep.

Unite rep Jason Poulter was accused of "bullying" a colleague after an incident in which he attempted to stop the unsafe use of a mechanical saw and faced a six-month sus-

pension.

600 workers walked off the job on the morning of Tuesday 29 May.

Jason Poulter said: "We were just trying to

stand our ground through this, because I'd rather be unemployed than have unjust and untrue allegations going on my personal record."

Airport workers strike against pay cuts

By Ollie Moore

A four-day strike by baggage handlers and ground staff at Stansted Airport took place over the Jubilee weekend.

Members of the GMB and Unite unions employed by contractor Swisport struck from Saturday

2 June in an ongoing dispute over unilaterally imposed changes to workers' rosters which could result in pay cuts.

GMB organiser Guy Pearce said: "GMB has offered several alternative shift patterns and working arrangements but the company refuses to listen."

Doctors to strike

Members of the British Medical Association, the professional association representing doctors, will take industrial action on 21 June. Its members will refuse to carry out non-urgent duties.

79% of doctors who voted in the ballot backed action short of a strike,

and 63% backed full strike action. The action is in response to reforms to doctors' pensions, which could see them face a 14.5% reduction in pay (to cover increase pensions contributions) by 2014.

This is compared with a reduction of just 7.35% for civil servants on equivalent pay.

By a local government worker

Trade unions in local government have accepted a "deal" on pensions not very different from what we went on strike against on 30 November.

The only actual "improvement" is on the increase in members' contributions. Contribution rates will, for now, be unchanged for many workers, and lower for some part-time workers, though higher for workers on over £43,00 a year.

Among other things, public sector unions have conceded that the retirement age will go up in line with state pension age (so if you're under 37 now

that's likely to be 70), as well as the switch to a career average scheme, as opposed to final salary (which is against the policy of Unison, the biggest public sector union)

As Unison activists we have been expecting the leadership to come forward with a shoddy deal at some point. This deal is worse than even we expected. The lack of transparency and consultation has also been outrageous. Our conference starts on 17 June; without a fight this deal will not be discussed in any meaningful way there and delegates will not get a vote.

RESPONDED

The leadership has responded to a call for a debate at conference by suggestions that conference is "unrepresentative", and may make the "wrong decision".

This attack on the limited democracy we have is unacceptable; conference should be our highest decision-making body, and is more representative than any other body as it is made up of elected delegates from branches.

There has even been a

suggestion that a ballot on accepting the deal will be conducted in August, guaranteeing a low turnout. So much for wanting the decision to be representative.

We need to organise ourselves not in terms of a self-defined "left", but as people who want to see a union that fights. Our first task is to fight for this deal to be debated at conference, and for conference to make the recommendation for the ballot. Any ballot must be conducted in term-time to include all members and give the best opportunity for a high turnout. It should also be made clear that members have the right to reject this deal, as our colleagues in the NHS did when they voted on their equivalent offer, and that there is an alternative.

Unison members in local government branches need to pass emergency motions by 8 June calling for this issue to be debated at conference.

• Local government workers in the GMB and Unite unions will also vote on the deal.

PCS votes to wait for others

By Charlie McDonald

Delegates gathered in Brighton from 23-25 May for the annual conference of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS).

The main debate facing the conference was the future of the national pensions, jobs, and pay dispute.

The debate focused on an emergency motion from the National Executive Committee (NEC), and an amended emergency motion from the Independent Left grouping. The NEC's motion argued that there must be other unions prepared to take action on pensions before the PCS could act. The Independent Left motion argued that, while we should seek the widest possible unity in action across the public sector, this should not be a pre-condition for further action. Unfortunately the conference decisively backed the NEC. Another lively debate was also around an Independent Left motion, which called on the leadership to establish a voluntary levy (i.e. strike fund) to fund selective action. On a card vote this motion was defeated by 142,000 to 50,000. This means over a quarter of delegates now support the Independent Left position. This is progress, albeit far too slowly.

The NEC's motion on closer working with Unite was guillotined but was picked up, and discussed and carried, in the guillotine section. PCS faces a financial crisis because of the haemorrhaging of jobs and therefore members. The union faces a shortfall of £5 million a year if the current rate of loss of membership continues. I wonder if this is what is motivating the desire for closer working with Unite?

Whilst it doesn't make obvious industrial sense for the two unions to merge, there are an increasing number of PCS members working in the private sector due to privatisation.

Any merger should be assessed on the concrete terms and crucially on how much control the rank-and-file has over both the merger process and the direction of the merged union.

More industrial news online

• UK Uncut unites with union activists to build solidarity for Newcastle Metro cleaners' strike — tinyurl.com/newcastlemetro

• DVLA workers being month of action to stop office closures — tinyurl.com/dvlastrike

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

"100 days on strike, 100 days of contempt"

Support Quebec's striking students!

By Vicki Morris

In Canada, talks between the right-wing Quebec Liberal Party government and student groups resisting tuition fee rises have broken down.

The government representative said after four days of talks that the gap between the two sides was too wide. The students are continuing their protests.

Partly as a legacy of past struggles, particularly around the issue of Francophone Quebec's status within Canada, tuition fees in Quebec have been much lower than in the rest of the country. Fees are currently \$2,168 per year and the government wants to increase them by \$1,625 over five years, taking them closer to the Canadian average of \$4,000 per year.

As a result of the Quebec students' protest, opinion polls show that a majority of students throughout

Canada now support lower tuition fees for all.

Earlier talks between the two sides had resulted in government offering to bring in the increase more slowly, but democratic assemblies of students rejected this proposal.

The government has suspended classes in response to the now 14-week strike by up to 300,000 students; classes are now due to restart in the autumn.

But since the government brought in its emergency "Bill 78" in May, to restrict protests, the students have kept up their campaign. They have demonstrated every evening in Quebec's largest city, Montreal, and there are protests in other cities. In Montreal the students have been joined by lawyers protesting against the possibly unconstitutional nature of Bill 78.

The police have violently broken up student demonstrations throughout the

three-month strike, including blinding two protesters. They have made more than 2,000 arrests. While opinion polls show most people back the tuition fee rises, the tide could be turning against the Quebec government as they react with more brutality and restrictions on protest.

Quebec's unpopular premier Jean Charest has also said the students are damaging the economy.

The students plan to target cultural events over the summer including a protest at the Canadian Grand Prix in Montreal on Sunday 10 June. Fearing disruption, the organisers have cancelled a planned open day at the racetrack on Thursday.

On Wednesday 30 May there were solidarity demonstrations with Quebec's students across Canada and internationally. In London around 150 people marched to the Cana-

dian Embassy.

The students are organised by a number of different student associations who currently agree on holding out till the fee hike proposal is withdrawn. The most militant of these associations, Classe (Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante – broad coalition for student union solidarity), is setting the pace of the struggle.

It campaigns for free education.

- Classe urgently needs funds. Send donations, payable to ASSÉ, to: Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante, 2065, rue Parthenais, local 383, Montréal, Québec, Canada H2K 3T1
- Solidarity meeting, with film showings and more. Organised by Plan C. 22 June 2012, from 7pm. 21 Gloucester Place, Marble Arch, London W1U 8HR

Syria crisis deepens

By Dan Katz

As the killing-rate in Syria speeds up, the underlying sectarian nature of Syrian society and the decades-old sectarian policy of the Assad dictatorship is increasingly being reflected in the violence on the ground.

The opposition — which, for the first few months of the rising against the dictatorship, was almost exclusively peaceful, and was demanding freedom and democracy — increasingly rests on local, mainly Sunni, militias.

The peace plan brokered by Kofi Annan, which demanded removal of heavy weapons from urban areas, release of detainees and respect for the right of oppositionists to protest was never going to be respected by the state. If even this limited plan were implemented the regime would be overruled — it is now only able to remain in place if it uses extreme violence against its own people.

In February, the government siege of Homs killed around 1,000 civilians in mainly Sunni areas. On 10 May a suicide bomber — possibly a Sunni Islamist — killed 55 in Damascus. And on 25 May, in Houla, 108 mainly Sunni villagers, including 49 children, were slaughtered by sectarian Alawite militiamen backed by government troops.

The sectarian violence has spilled over into Lebanon. Last weekend 14 people were killed and dozens injured as pro- and anti-Syrian opposition forces fought each other in Tripoli. The Lebanese army moved into the Sunni area, Bab al-Tebbaneh, and the

Liar

mostly Alawite neighbourhood of Jabal Mohsen, to stop the fighting. The division reflects a split in Lebanon's political parties. The opposition backs the revolt in Syria while the ruling coalition, which includes Hezbollah, supports the Damascus regime.

Syria's president, Bashar Assad, compared the actions of his government — which is guilty of mass detention and torture, and murder on a vast scale — to a surgeon working to save the life of a patient. He is a liar. And he is presiding over a country not only paralysed by a low-level civil war, but grinding to a halt economically. The economy shrank by over 3% last year and is forecast to contract by 5.9% in 2012.

Western imposed oil sanctions have cost Syria \$4bn. Inflation is now well over 30%.

The Syrian regime continues to receive diplomatic and military support from Russia and Iran.

Last Friday, Russia, China, and Cuba voted against a resolution passed by the 47-member Human Rights Council in Geneva condemning Syria for the massacre in the Houla area. Russia condemned the motion as "unbalanced".

Rank-and-file teachers organise

By Ira Berkovic

National Union of Teachers activists will meet in Liverpool on Saturday 16 June to found a new network based on local branches (divisions and associations) of the union.

The Local Associations for National Action conference is the product of rank-and-file initiatives at this year's NUT AGM,

where teachers angry at the leadership's caution and ultimate capitulation over the pensions fight organised together to intervene into the conference debate, holding fringe meetings attended by up to 150 people. The conference will discuss a statement drafted by the steering committee elected at the AGM fringe meetings, with delegates being invited to submit amendments.

Workers' Liberty teachers, who were integral to

initiating the conference, plan to bring amendments arguing for the network to be open to all school workers (not just teachers).

Although still an embryonic project, the conference represents one of the most important initiatives in the British labour movement today.

The current model of union "broad lefts" is of loose agglomerations of like-minded individuals

which function essentially as electoral machines or as mechanisms for getting policy on the left's favoured international issues passed through unions conference. The 16 June conference seeks to break with that model and organise rank-and-file union members on the basis of a shared commitment to militant industrial strategy and union democracy.

The network could

help reinvigorate genuine rank-and-fileism in the education sector and across the wider trade union movement.

• Conference website: tinyurl.com/16juneconf

• The conference takes place from 10:30am on Saturday 16 June at the Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BT.