

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 255 5 September 2012 30p/80p

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For a workers' government

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RESCUE

THE

NHS!



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The **NHS** Liaison Network

**MANCHESTER,
30 SEPTEMBER**

**Join the protest at
Labour conference**

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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New "poll tax" for the poor

By Andrew Fisher,
(joint secretary,
Labour
Representation
Committee)

Welfare cuts are at the centre of the coalition government's agenda. Just a month after being elected the Chancellor George Osborne, in his Emergency Budget, announced £18 billion cuts to Britain's welfare budget.

That has now expanded to over £30 billion, with the latest £10.5 billion yet to be specified.

The main themes will be familiar: workfare for the unemployed, work capability assessments for the disabled and cuts, caps and freezes to benefits and tax credits.

But many people are only just waking up to the

next attack as the government announces a 10% cut to Council Tax Benefit, to be administered by local councils.

Currently every council in the country is consulting on who should continue to get council tax benefit — that is, exemption from council tax.

Pensioners are statutorily protected, but the disabled on employment and support allowance or disability living allowance, single parents with children under five, students and the unemployed could all now pay some council tax.

In my local area, Croydon Council proposes to protect the disabled and single parents, but those on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) will be subject to an effective 5% weekly tax — paying £3.50 out of their £71 JSA. For the rising number of youth unemployed, this represents an

even greater proportion of their allowance, which is just £56 per week. The same rate will apply to students, just as they are hit with the first year of £9,000 fees.

Unlike council tax this will not be a household tax on student or unemployed households, but a poll tax on individual students and unemployed people.

Consultations are happening in every council area, so your first step is to find out what your council is proposing. Then start organising locally against the proposals — building links between student unions, local disability groups, unemployed workers' centres or Unite community branches, and other activist groups.

We have to make sure we are not divided — sacrificing the disabled to exempt students or the unemployed for single parents —

and work together to lobby local councils and councillors.

We have until 1 April 2013 until this new locally set "Council Tax Support" replaces council tax benefit. I know of only one council that is currently proposing to use its reserves to maintain full exemptions — but even they admit that can only stave off the inevitable for a year or two.

Aside from the electoral implications, if councils raise council tax overall to compensate they will lose the grant they got from the government to freeze the tax. And the other alternative would be further cuts in local services. There really is little room to manoeuvre.

We need to work with councils and councillors to lobby government and force them to withdraw this new welfare attack.

So far 870 Spanish doctors have signed a manifesto which states: "My loyalty to patients does not allow me to ignore my ethical and professional duty and abandon them".

They are defying a government decree to refuse public health services to 150,000 migrants.

Six of Spain's 17 regional governments — all those not run by the ruling right-wing Popular Party, and one that is — have also announced they will ignore the law and continue to provide free healthcare to migrants.

Madrid's new law requires all non-EU citizens without residency cards to pay a charge for health services unless they are under 18, pregnant or involved in an accident or other medical emergency.

Between 1,000 and 2,000 anti-fascists protested in Walthamstow (north-east London) on Saturday 1 September, against only 150-300 marchers from the far-right English Defence League (EDL).

About 200 anti-fascists occupied the square where the EDL were intending to have their rally and surrounded the EDL leader Tommy Robinson. It could have been more if the other anti-fascists had not been kettled by the police and told (wrongly) that the EDL had already been stopped, but it was enough to stop the EDL rallying.

Labour should plan a wealth tax

By Liam McNulty

On 29 August Lib-Dem leader Nick Clegg floated the idea of a "wealth tax" on Britain's wealthiest. Clegg's call for a "time-limited contribution" from the super-rich is motivated by a fear of further social unrest.

Relations are getting worse between the coalition partners, and the Tory right was swift in denouncing Clegg's proposals as the "politics of envy". Chancellor George Osborne also poured cold water on the idea.

Labour's response was equally predictable and demonstrates the party's utter failure to offer an alternative which goes beyond sound-bites and parliamentary manoeu-

ring. Bereft of positive proposals, the shadow Treasury minister said:

"Nick Clegg is once again taking the British people for fools. He talks about a tax on the wealthiest, but he voted for the tax cut for millionaires in George Osborne's budget."

A wealth tax is not a radical proposal. Variations of it already exist in France, Norway, Switzerland, and several other countries. Labour should be supporting a severe and permanent wealth tax as a very basic plank of any social democratic programme.

That the loudest exponent of a wealth tax in this country is an opportunist right-wing Liberal is a damning indictment of the Labour Party opposition.

AWL meets on 27-28 October

A meeting of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's [AWL's] National Committee on 1 September kicked off the discussions leading up to AWL's annual conference on 27-28 October.

The National Committee is 19 members elected by last year's conference to lead our activity month-by-month during the year. The new conference will decide our broad lines of policy for 2012-3 and elect a new committee.

The National Committee has commissioned seven main documents and reports for the conference, all in circulation now or within the next few days.

Minorities on the NC, or members or groups of members outside the NC, can put in alternative or additional documents, or amendments large or small.

Some years much of the life of the conference is in a big debate over some political difference within the AWL — Iraq? the Labour Party?... Some years there are no big differences, and most life is found in detailed constructive amend-

ments to a broadly-agreed perspective.

A conference web forum has been set up for AWL members, and the documents will also be circulated in printed hard copy. We organise so that every member at conference has carefully considered all the proposals on the agenda, and discussed them collectively before conference itself, rather than responding off the cuff on conference floor. There will be two rounds of regional pre-conference meetings (23 September and 6-7 October), as well as two further NC meetings before the conference, and discussion in AWL branches.

All AWL members are due to attend the conference. Observers from revolutionary socialist groups in other countries with which AWL has links are also invited, and some sympathisers and friends of the AWL come too.

If you're not an AWL member but would like to come to the conference, talk with your local AWL organiser or email awl@workersliberty.org.

Islamists push forward in Egypt

By Clive Bradley

On 1 September, several secular opposition leaders in Egypt, including Mohammed al Baradei and Hamdeen Sabbahi, the Nasserist politician who came third in the presidential election, declared a new coalition to oppose the Muslim Brotherhood's "Freedom and Justice Party" [FJP] in new parliamentary elections.

Those elections are currently planned to be held two months after a new constitution is approved by referendum.

It is likely, of course, that the new constitution will reflect the Islamists' current strength — which has been, from the outset, the fear of secular, liberal and leftist groups.

LEADERS

Leaders of the new coalition said that they aimed for a "civilian counterpart [to face] the control of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the religious currents in general..."

"The civil current in Egypt is the one that carried out the struggle, and has the most credit for the January 25 revolution".

In what has been called a "civilian coup", on 13 August Egypt's recently-elected president, Muhammed al Mursi, dis-

missed senior military figures from the government.

The move followed the "Sinai debacle" on 5 August — an attack by Islamic militants at the border with Gaza which left 16 Egyptian soldiers dead. The incompetence of the military chiefs was widely blamed for the disaster.

Mursi's cull hit the very highest level. Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi was Defence Minister, head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and the effective ruler of Egypt since the fall of Hosni Mubarak. Sami Anan was Chief of Army Staff. Mursi has replaced them with (relatively) younger and probably more docile military figures.

To increase his leverage vis-a-vis the pro-SCAF constitutional court, Mursi has appointed reformist judge Mahmoud Meki as his vice president.

He also — and perhaps even more significantly — nullified a previous constitutional declaration by SCAF, which had given the army vast powers and reduced the strength of the presidency.

Mursi replaced it with his own declaration, one that gave him broad legislative and executive powers and, potentially, a decisive role in the drafting of Egypt's still unfinished new constitution.

This is a remarkable

turnaround, and must have been planned in advance, Mursi only using events in Sinai as a pretext. Prior to the presidential election the country's military leaders staged a bloodless coup of their own — dismissing the elected parliament. That was in June. In less than three months, Mursi has managed to turn the tables decisively.

CANDIDATE

Mursi was elected as the candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood — the largest and most powerful Islamist movement in the region.

Secular forces — both those sympathetic to the old regime and those who took part in the 2011 revolution — regard the new power of the Brotherhood (as well as the presidency, they won a majority in the parliament) with suspicion.

Mursi's "coup" is a big step towards establishing control over all institutions of the state.

The week after the "civilian coup", Mursi announced his team of assistants and advisers, which includes senior Brotherhood figures (such as Essem al Erian, probably the movement's best known spokesperson). Six of the team — out of (so far) 21 — are from the Brotherhood; a further

QCH wildcat strike

650 construction workers at the giant Queensland Children's Hospital (QCH) site in Brisbane have been on (illegal) strike since 6 August, and the dispute is linking up with other big construction conflicts in Australia.

The strikers' main spokesperson is Bob Carnegie (right), a former Builders Labourers Federation organiser invited in by the workers after courts handed down injunctions banning all union officials from the site.

The workers want a union enterprise agreement with the main contractor, Abigroup, and an industry sub-contractors clause which will "enshrine in a legally-binding document that those men and woman on the job that are doing the same work should be paid the same rates of pay".

In Melbourne the construction union CFMEU is in a huge dispute with the builder Grocon. On 29 August the QCH workers marched on the Grocon site at Elizabeth St in Brisbane and closed it. 2,000 people were there.

Carnegie has been holding weekly meetings on Mondays at the Serbian Hall near the site. The numbers were low to start with, but on 3 September 650 workers were there at 5.30am.

Determination to see it through to the bitter end is rising, and the dispute could go on another 30 days again!

three are from the even more conservative Salafist Nur Party (which came second in the parliamentary elections); the rest are divided between various Islamist and liberal groups. Two are Coptic Christians.

Presumably, senior figures in the military approved the "civilian coup", or there would have been more resistance to it. The Brotherhood's relationship with the army has been, since February 2011 when SCAF took power from

Mubarak, ambivalent.

The presidential election, in the end, was a face-off between Mursi and and SCAF's man, Ahmed Shafiq. Mursi won — but only just, and on a less-than 50% turn-out. As the *Asia Times* put it, "his mandate was less than 'overwhelming'" (Aug 22).

But for much of the past eighteen months relations have been friendly between the Brotherhood and the army. And Mursi is unlikely to seek a break with

the United States, which has backed the Egyptian military to the tune of tens of billions of dollars.

Democratic and secular groups need to be on their guard against efforts by the Muslim Brotherhood to seize even wider control.

The young labour movement, too: it needs to find a way to political independence rather than leaving opposition to the Brotherhood in the hands of economically conservative liberals.

Marikana: a defining moment for ANC?

By Martyn Hudson

To add unmitigated insult to violent injury, South African prosecutors charged 270 Marikana mine workers with the murder of their comrades at the Lonmin platinum mine on 16 August.

After wide protests, the charges have now been "suspended"; but, using the notorious "common purpose" law, prosecutors at first wanted to blame the miners for the deaths because of their involvement in the demonstration.

Most of the workers to be prosecuted were unarmed and peacefully protesting. Accounts vary about the massacre itself

but it is apparent that the police were trying to kettle the demonstrators when the miners began to fight back.

Many of the workers are migrants from Lesotho and all of them are paid a pittance and have long campaigned for higher wages. Most of the workforce stayed away from work after the massacre and there is a high degree of solidarity for the demands of the striking miners in the South African labour movement, if not among the leaders of the official ANC backed National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the main union federation, COSATU.

Julie Malema

The mine-owner, Lonmin, is a piratical extractor of resources in South Africa and has a long history of vicious assaults on its own workforces long pre-dating the first demo-

cratic elections of 1994.

Cyril Ramaphosa, former NUM leader and then a leader of the ANC in the transition to power, is now a executive director of Lonmin.

He exemplifies those within the ANC who see their portfolio as personal enrichment to the detriment of the vast majority of the South African working class who live in poverty and poor housing.

The vague social democratic settlement of the early 1990s engineered by the "progressive" elements of the old National Party state under De Klerk and the ANC and the South African Community Party has been replaced by a

much more hawkish internal regime where dissent and freedom of expression are decreasingly tolerated by the ANC state — leaving Capital unchallenged and unthreatened and the mass poverty of the townships unchanged.

The best-known challenger to the ANC's old guard is one-time Zuma supporter Julius Malema, who came to prominence as the head of the ANC youth league.

A populist and demagogue, he has been accused of hate crime against the white majority with controversies around the "Shoot the Boer" anthem used by himself and his followers.

WEALTHY

He is also a wealthy resident of Joburg's previously white-only northern suburbs and is an expert in personal enrichment much like the rest of the ANC leadership.

He is a long-time proponent of the nationalisation of the mine industry.

That might make Malema look like a left-wing politician, but he is

Greece: 13 hours a day, six days a week, to feed the bankers?

By Gerry Bates

On 4 September a letter from the "Troika" (European Union, European Central Bank, and IMF) to Greece's government was leaked.

As well as demanding more cuts, the Troika insists that Greece "increase

the number of maximum workdays to 6 days per week for all sectors; set the minimum daily rest to 11 hours; eliminate restrictions on minimum/maximum time between morning and afternoon shifts".

The coalition government is already planning

11.9 billion euros of new cuts.

Cops demonstrated in Athens after the government said that their wages and bonuses would not be exempt.

Backbenchers from New Democracy, Pasok, and Democratic Left have deplored the new cuts,

but it remains to be seen how many actually vote against.

But, if parliament votes through the cuts and other measures, how will be enforced without the support of the police?

Resistance is rising after a summer lull.

Putin has blood on his hands

Evgeny Legedin, a Russian left-wing activist living in Britain, writes about the Pussy Riot prosecutions.

The day is the 20 January 2012. It is a frosty and windy day in Moscow. Several girls in balaclavas and colourful dresses go to Red Square and sing a song:

"Revolt in Russia,
 Putin pissed Himself!
 Riot in Russia — go with the protest
 Riot in Russia — Putin pissed himself
 Riot in Russia — we are here, we are real
 Riot in Russia — riot, riot, riot
 Go on the street
 Occupy Red Square
 Show them the freedom
 Of civic anger!"

Yes, it is cold in Russia now. The frost dramatises political life and Putin's winter still lies over the country. Outside the windows there is an authoritarian dictatorship: it is scary, violent and punitive. Activists and journalists die; protesters are beaten up; an unacceptable political regime is in place. It cannot be improved; it can only be flushed down the cesspit of history.

The rigged Duma and presidential elections stirred up strong anti-Putin feelings but, unfortunately, Russians are greatly influenced by the cowardly opposition leaders like Boris Nemtsov, Sergei Udaltsov and others. Their aim seems to be appeasement and the resolution of conflict. So Moscow protesters are led away from the Red Square and the Kremlin like a flock of sheep and all the while Putin navigates the ship of state practically without any deviation.

The feminist punk rock band Pussy Riot's peaceful protest in Red Square and in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour

Members of the punk band Pussy Riot

contrasts painfully with the blind obedience of both left- and right-wing opposition leaders. When I first saw the video of "Putin pissed himself" I wrote on my blog: "These handful of daring and brave girls give an example to all Russia — where and how to protest: in the heart of the country — at Red Square — under the radical slogans."

The Pussy Riot Punk Prayer "Holy Mother, Chase Putin Away!" is a slap across Putin's face. In response, the leash has been taken off the authoritarian system and it shows its muzzle to the world.

Orchestrating the prosecution of the three arrested members of Pussy Riot, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 22, Yekate-

rina Samutsevich, 30, and Maria Alyokhina, 24, Putin has tried to portray their "performance" as an act of blasphemy or "hooliganism, motivated by religious hatred" as the official charge stated. These three young women were imprisoned and tried in a Stalin-type show trial: they were denied food and sleep and spent up to ten hours in a glass cage in the courtroom. The puppet judge Marina Syrova granted the girls only two days to respond to an almost three thousand page indictment and refused almost every defence witness.

On 17 August, these city guerrillas were sentenced to two years' imprisonment an unwise and miscalculated sentence. It harms Putin and will divide Russian society.

I had assumed that the authorities will take the obvious way out by giving them a two year suspended sentence. But Putin and the authorities are stupid and are digging their own grave.

Now I want to say a few words to you, Mr Cameron. How can a serious politician shake hands with a bloody and dishonest dictator? I am talking about your talks with Mr KGB a couple of weeks ago during the London Olympics while the Pussy Riot trial was going on.

Putin sheds skins and grows new ones like a rattle snake. He drops the old slogans and takes new ones. He thinks that he is not responsible for what he has been doing since 1999. But before Putin changes his skin again, he has to answer for his crimes. For 13 years he has crushed opposition activists, persecuting and incarcerating them. I urge you Mr Cameron to demand that Mr Putin answers for the murder of 12 opposition activists, of 150 journalists including Anna Politkovskaya, of the several hundred victims of Nord-Ost and Beslan.

Putin has blood on his hands!

Assange should answer rape charge, but is right to fear extradition

Letters

Ecuador has made the following absolutely clear:

1) Julian Assange can be questioned at their London embassy in connection with these allegations (at the moment he is only wanted for questioning);

2) If the Swedish government had given an assurance that Assange wouldn't be extradited from Sweden to US in connection with his wikileaks journalism, they would have asked him to leave their embassy and return to Sweden to face questioning long ago.

To be fair Assange himself has said the same. If you recall, he volunteered to be questioned by the Swedish authorities in September 2010 before leaving for London.

The Swedish government has the discretion to give these assurances about extradition to the USA (the executive makes the final call in extradition cases and can refuse requests which are politically motivated) and it has decided not to. In the absence of such assurances Assange is right to fear extradition from Sweden to US and Ecuador is right to offer Assange asylum.

Solidarity [254, 22 August] is wrong to support Assange's

return to Sweden in the absence of such assurances. Rape suspects are held in solitary confinement in Sweden and rape trials are conducted in secret; this would give the US the perfect opportunity to begin an extradition bid.

It would take many years to extradite from UK to US (the system of appeals being such as to delay any extradition for a long time), where as the "temporary surrender" provisions in Sweden's extradition treaty with the US allows a much easier transfer of a suspect to American custody.

Assange should face justice in connection with these rape allegations, but Ecuador is absolutely correct to insist on safeguards in this case. In the absence of safeguards, they are right to offer him asylum and *Solidarity* is wrong to support his return to Sweden.

Paul Field, London

Too British? Too Russian? Too German?

At Ideas for Freedom 2012, Paul Hampton from Workers' Liberty gave an instructive talk on the question "Is Marxism Eurocentric?"

The debate called to mind a controversy which raged in this country in the 1920s following the publication of Trotsky's *Whither England?* in 1925. A slew of critics, ranging from the Independent Labour Party's H N Brailsford to the philosopher Bertrand Russell, upbraided Trotsky for his alleged lack of knowledge and understanding of British conditions. Some went further, arguing that the theory and practice of Bolshevism was merely an untenable generalisation from Russian conditions and circumstances.

Trotsky did not fail to note the irony in the arguments of his British critics; Russian anti-Marxists of the previous generation had accused the Bolsheviks of transplanting the historical experience of British capitalism on to Russian soil without sensitivity to the particularities (and there were many) of the Russian Empire. "On every pretext", wrote Trotsky, "we were reminded that Marx created his theory of economic development in the British Museum and through observing British capitalism and its contradictions".

In both cases, the Russian and the British, those who were politically hostile to Marxism conveniently argued that there countries were, from one reason or another, exempt from its analytical reach. As Trotsky recalled: "Our own Fabians, the Russian Mensheviks and the so-called Social-Revolutionaries brought against us, all the same arguments which today we hear from Lansbury, Brailsford, Russell and their more right-wing colleagues, presented as the conquests of a pure British philosophy".

Which is it to be? Marxism cannot both be a Eurocentric theory based on observations about nineteenth-century British capitalism and a doctrine applicable only in largely non-European societies with fragile political institutions and a weak civil society, such as Russia in 1917.

Either way, Trotsky did not fail to miss the political character of these critics' objections: "In the final count resorting to the question of national peculiarities forms the last tool of any ideological reaction in shielding itself from the revolutionary demands of the time".

Liam McNulty, London

Democrats and Labour are different

Eric Lee [*Solidarity* 254, 22 August] makes a false analogy between the Democratic Party and the Labour Party, saying that because trade unions give millions of dollars or pounds to both parties, they are the same kind of party.

The Labour Party may have moved to becoming more like the Democratic Party in the last couple of decades in that trade unions just hand over their money without any say in the politics of the party, but it is not the same yet. Trade-unions links to and levers within the Labour Party are weaker than they were, but they still exist, and could be used if the union leaderships wanted to, in a way that has never been true of the Democrats.

Before the First World War, almost all British trade unions supported the Liberal Party (with the exception of Lancashire where the millowners were Liberals and the textile workers' union supported the Tories). Trade unionists were the backbone of the Liberal Party in many constituencies, especially in mining areas in the North, and some of them became "Lib-Lab" MPs.

The Labour Party was the result of trade unions and some of those MPs splitting from the Liberals. Doesn't Eric think they were right to do so?

Matthew Thompson, Manchester AWL

Democrats aren't democratic

What is there to be gained from Marxists, socialists, or even trade unionists working and pumping millions of dollars into the Democratic Party?

The Democratic Party is barely a party in the traditional sense like we have in Europe. It's a banner candidates stand on. The party does not fund anyone, so anyone who does stand for them needs vast amounts of money, thus restricting the possibility of labour movement or working-class candidates.

At least with the Labour Party there is some however limited possibility for socialist and trade unionist candidates. Why argue for people to support a party that in practice is deeply anti-working-class?

This seems lesser evilism to a poor extreme indeed. In my opinion *Solidarity* was correct to criticise the SWP and its Egyptian section for supporting a vote for the Muslim Brotherhood when they put this argument forward.

Comrades, where's the independent working-class politics here?

Ryan H (from the AWL website)

Double dip? Or prolonged soaking?

Double-dip? It's more like a prolonged soaking. Unemployment has been high, around 8% since 2009, with only small and temporary improvements.

Youth unemployment is particularly severe, standing at 22.6% as of June 2012 — a 9% spike since late 2007.

The number not unemployed but working part-time only because they are unable to find a full-time job is rising, and is now over 600,000. Real wages have been falling since late 2009.

No improvement is in sight, and a eurozone crash may bring drastic worsening.

This is more than just episodic bad luck as a result of snow, the Royal Wedding bank holiday, or any of the other pitiful excuses from the Chancellor George Osborne. This is a deep and serious crisis of capitalism.

Five or 10 years of prolonged depression means 18-year-olds permanently unemployed or with only precarious part-time or temporary work until well into their 20s; it means recently laid-off 55-year-olds cast into a similar situation until pension age. These things wreck lives and communities.

Not everyone is suffering. The richest in society are getting richer.

According to the *Sunday Times* "Rich List" of April 2012, the combined wealth of the richest 1,000 individuals in Britain is now a depression-defying £414 billion. Their combined wealth increased by 4.7% since 2011.

Directors' pay at the top 100 companies rose 49% in 2010-11 and 14% in 2011-2.

15,500 new dwellings for the global rich are currently under construction in London, at an average market value of £2.5 million each. The total value, at £38 billion, is bigger than the total of the cuts the coalition government is planning from health, education, other services, and benefits.

Far from there being "no money", the depression is being used to intensify inequality. The ruling class is using the crisis to attack wages, public services and workers' rights in order to increase their profits.

Our answer is to seize this wealth, which was created by the working-class, and to place it under democratic collective ownership. Start by taking the banks into public ownership under workers' and social control!

Rather than production for profit serving only to line the pockets of the bosses, we need to use society's wealth to meet social needs such as jobs, homes and services for all.

Lobby, Manchester, 30 September

Labour: restore the NHS!

The NHS Liaison Network, which advocates for and seeks to organise coordination between all pro-NHS campaigns, has organised a lobby of the Labour Party conference on Sunday 30 September — from 2.30pm at Peter Street, Manchester.

The protest is supported by, among others, Unite North-west Region, Keep Our NHS Public London and the Labour Representation Committee.

It will demand that Labour commit to restoring the Health Service as a public service. It is necessary because all we have from the Labour leaders at present is a promise to repeal the Health and Social Care Act (accompanied by indications that much of the restructuring done under the Act will remain in force) and no promise at all to reverse cuts in the NHS budget.

On Friday 31 August, Dr Mark Porter, the new chair of the British Medical Association's council, told the *Guardian* that current policy is "morally wrong" and will threaten people's health or lives because they will no longer be able to get treatment.

"Bits of the NHS are being parcelled off and taken out of the NHS offer year by year... there's lots of areas where bits of the NHS have been taken out of the offer... It's no longer a comprehensive service. We can see the effect of people to whom we have to say: I'm sorry, this treatment is no longer available."

In an effort to save £14.2m Harrow Primary Care Trust has informed practices that they will receive £1 per registered patient if they appoint a GP to review all referrals, with an extra £1 per patient for the 25% of practices which refer the most people if they can cut their referral rate by 10%.

In September there will be a number of NHS protests in London: demonstrations on 15 September in Ealing, Brent, and Greenwich, and another on 22 September in Ham-smith, all against the closure of A&E departments.

Unite members at a blood testing centre in Colindale in North London are being balloted for strikes against closure of the centre. Workers in Filton and Manchester centres will be asked to take action short of a strike in solidarity and against the increased workload the Colindale closure would mean.

Even a few determined groups acting in unity can make a huge difference in the battle for the NHS, through maintaining a website, facilitating joint actions, and stimulating the creation of local coalitions in defence of the NHS.

● healthalarm1159.wordpress.com

Lobby the Labour Party conference Sunday 30 September, 2.30pm

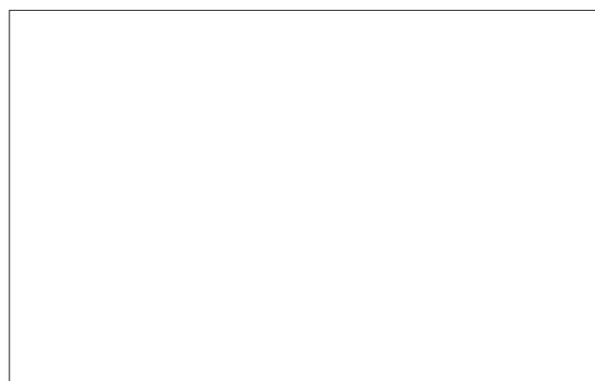
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Merseyside TUC; Wirral TUC; Wirral South CLP;
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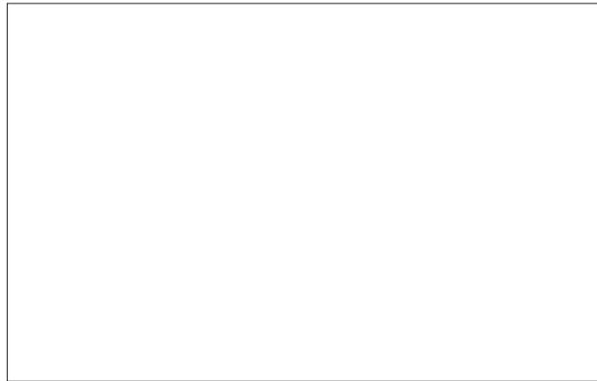
Coach from London: RMT, Unity House,
Chalton Street, NW1 at 9.30am. Tickets: £15.

To book or for more details: email: nhsliason@yahoo.co.uk/tel: 07904 944771

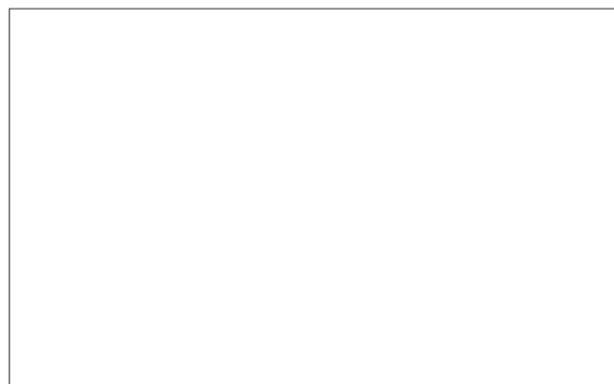
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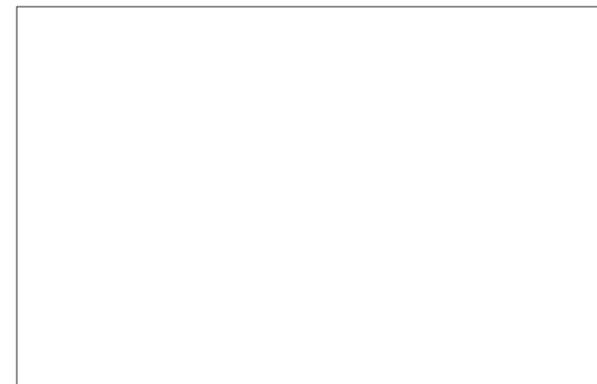
Youth unemployment



Involuntary temporary workers



Involuntary part-time workers



Growth/decline real wages

Why socialists do w

By Martin Thomas

What are we for? For what overall defining purpose do revolutionary socialist organisations labour to raise funds, recruit members, publish and sell literature, organise meetings, and so on?

The Australian socialist group Socialist Alternative tried to answer these questions directly in an article in its July 2012 issue, "The case for a revolutionary socialist party", by Diane Fieldes.

The effort deserves close attention. Socialist Alternative is now probably the strongest revolutionary socialist group in Australia; it used to be much smaller than the ISO (now Solidarity) or the Democratic Socialist Party (now Socialist Alliance) but has outstripped them. It claims allegiance to the same tradition as the SWP in Britain; but is an "unofficial" or "dissident" group in that spectrum, and has published thoughtful critiques of the SWP on such issues as the Respect debate.

Socialist Alternative has grown, above all, by being the group best focused on the basics of making itself visible: or-

ganising public meetings, distributing posters and flyers for them, running stalls, selling its magazine. It deserves credit for that, and the rest of us can learn from it.

Fieldes says that the "key reasons" for building a revolutionary socialist organisation are "two facts": "the unevenness and contradictions in workers' ideas, and the existence of competing ideas about what to do and how to win in any struggle".

This seems too general to be useful. If everybody, or all workers, had the same ideas, then there wouldn't even be anyone to pose the question of whether to organise a separate revolutionary socialist organisation, let alone an answer to the question. And the "two facts" are really just one fact: people have different and therefore competing ideas about things, including about how to pursue struggles.

After paragraphs noting that some people reject all parties because of experience of bad parties (Stalinist or reformist), Fieldes becomes more specific.

"Every struggle, no matter how small, brings those competing ideas into conflict. Should we go on strike and picket our workplace, or should we take a case to Fair Work Aus-

tralia [official industrial conciliation] to get a wage rise? Should we rely on the election of the Australian Labor Party to end WorkChoices [the vicious anti-union law introduced by the previous conservative government] or should we build mass strikes against the law? Is a mobilisation in the squares enough to bring down Mubarak or do we need strikes against the regime, and so on".

One set of competing ideas, Fieldes continues, is promoted in an organised way by Labor and union leaders, namely, "ideas of change from above... looking to parliament... trying to capture union positions, doing bureaucratic deals or influencing 'important' people".

She assumes, no doubt fairly, that her readers will see those ideas as inadequate. Therefore, counter-organisation is needed, by those who will favour striking and picketing, or, more generally, "change by the mass of workers and the oppressed standing up and fighting back" or "mass mobilisation from below".

"A revolutionary party needs to unite the most radical", she concludes. "Most radical" here is implicitly defined as those who favour the widest and most militant action.

Far from indicating a rational long-term defining purpose for the work of building revolutionary socialist organisations — which has gone on through ups and downs for about 200 years now, and may have to go on for many decades longer — Fieldes' formula offers only a snapshot of Socialist Alternative's picture of itself.

It goes to struggles, and in each one it becomes the organised force arguing against Labor and union leaders for more militant tactics.

Of course revolutionary socialists generally argue for more militant tactics. But Fieldes' snapshot cannot be an adequate statement of the long-term defining purpose of revolutionary socialist organisations. It says nothing about the aims of the struggles in question, but only about better or worse tactics towards those aims!

REVOLUTIONARY

In conditions where a revolutionary socialist organisation is stronger than the reformist organisations, and where workers generally and instinctively go for strikes rather than wait-and-see once a battle is underway — that is, where a revolutionary organisation could really come into its own — Fieldes' snapshot formula would give the revolutionary organisation almost nothing to do.

Revolutionary socialist organisations cannot generally make workers more militant just by exhortation. Where revolutionary socialists establish themselves as trusted workplace leaders, the fact of trustworthy leadership will increase workers' confidence, and may enable the socialists in some cases to swing opinion against submission and towards a militant response. I doubt that external appeals to workers to be more militant, from outside the workplace (which I fear is mostly what Socialist Alternative has in mind), do much good.

On the other hand, even small socialist organisations which work well can change opinion on big ideological questions through a process of cascading whereby first the most active and interested are convinced, then they transmit ideas to others, and so on.

In times of big militant class struggle socialists may be able to make more progress on that in a day than in years of previous quiet. But to do that they must already know their basic ideas well enough to "think on their feet", and be organised to promote them, trained to explain them clearly, and well-placed to get a hearing. And they must at least have started to put the ideas round, so that for many workers it will be a matter of ideas they'd heard, but which previously seemed abstruse and extreme, now suddenly making sense.

The process demands some conformity of the ideas which are to be spread with reality. But only some: Stalinist ideas were spread fairly widely in many countries by relatively small groups. There is no automatic self-correction mechanism which ensures that the socialistic ideas which are spread by socialist groups are either enlightening or accurate, or fail to spread: the socialist groups themselves have to "check", by study and debate.

Of course Socialist Alternative has a defined aim, as well as a preference for militancy. It is set out, albeit sloppily, in a "What We Stand For" in every issue of the magazine: "a world in which the workers who create all the wealth dem-

Andy Burnham = Lansley-lite?

By Todd Hamer

Labour's front-bench health spokesperson, Andy Burnham made a pledge at the TUC rally in March this year that if he is health secretary when Labour are next in power he will repeal the Tories' Health and Social Care Act, which became law in March 2012 and vastly increases privatisation and marketisation of the Health Service.

But the pledge is full of loopholes.

Most of the current cuts in the NHS were planned by Andy Burnham while he was Health Secretary. Burnham started off as Shadow Health Secretary by criticising Tory health minister Andrew Lansley for planning to increase health spending!

Lansley has cut spending in two successive years (£766 million 2010-11, £26 million 2011-12). But in his first debate as shadow Health Secretary Burnham situated himself to the right of the Tories.

During his time in office Burnham backed the recommendations of Sir David Nicholson, the chief executive of the NHS, to make £20 billion "efficiency savings" by 2015. Nicholson pointed out that rising demand due to the ageing population and new technologies cost the taxpayer an extra £20 billion by 2015. He advised the government to halt extra funding and attempt to find the extra cash by shutting down hospitals and moving care to the community. Burnham concurred.

BRIDGE

Burnham has done his best to expose the fact that the Tories are trying to privatise both commissioning and NHS provision.

But here again, he struggles because his own policies are mere watered down versions of Lansley's. As Unison general secretary Dave Prentis put it, "The Tories are marching over the bridge that Labour built".

Burnham opposes Lansley's plans "to let market forces rip right through the system with no checks or balances", but he is at pains to stress that "without the contribution of private providers, we would never have delivered NHS waiting lists and times at historically low levels".

He claims that the Tories want "unchecked privatisation" whereas he wants "the private sector working at the margins providing innovation and support." The problem with this line is that market forces tend to take on a dynamic of their own.

That is seen in Labour's own manifesto pledge to "[give] Foundation Trusts...the freedom to expand their provision into primary and community care, and to increase their private services — where these are consistent with NHS values, and provided they generate surpluses that are invested di-

rectly into the NHS." Market pressures from Foundation Trusts to expand their private work led Labour to accept proposals to raise the private patient income caps.

Burnham has since claimed that he was only planning a "modest loosening" of the cap. But it is difficult to oppose the Tories plan to give over up to 49% of NHS beds to private patients when the Labour policy is nothing but a smaller step in the same direction.

Burnham has qualified his basic promise to repeal the Health and Social Care Act, he has since qualified this with a promise to avoid any "top-down reorganisations". Ed Miliband has approved "clinician-led commissioning", the core idea of the Act.

Cut through the bluster and Andy Burnham's vision is basically Tory policy minus the Maoist execution and with a bit more regulation — HSCA-lite.

Miliband and Burnham have both stressed that much of Lansley's programme could have been executed without new legislation.

LEAVE

If Burnham is the next Labour Health Secretary then his promise to repeal the Bill without any top-down reorganisation will probably leave much of the new infrastructure in place.

Entirely missing from this debate is a rational evaluation of the pre-Thatcher NHS. The Tories drove through this policy arguing that the NHS was bureaucratic and wasteful. Nobody from the Labour benches raised the obvious objection.

The waste and inefficiencies of the NHS bureaucracy are the result of Tory and New Labour attempts to introduce market mechanisms and PFI. For much of its history the NHS was a state-planned organisation run on the basis of block grants and risk-sharing. It was occasionally a bit clunky, and it was chronically underfunded, but from 1948-1980 the bureaucracy accounted for just 6% of health expenditure.

With the introduction of the Tory "internal market" and the continuation of this policy with New Labour's "purchaser-provider split" the bureaucracy swelled to around 14% health funding. Health economist Allyson Pollock estimates that in the new system "billing, invoicing, marketing and advertising will add between 30% and 50% to costs".

In the USA, with a fully privatised system, administration costs account for a third of all health spending. 50 million are without health insurance, yet the USA spends nearly 17.4% of GDP on healthcare, compared with 9.8% in UK.

The labour movement must imagine the possibilities for an NHS run on the founding principles of collaboration, risk-sharing and democratic planning. The labour movement must fight for such a policy and fight for leaders willing to argue it and implement it.

what we do

Textile workers in a sweatshop. How can revolutionaries help our fellow workers to, in Lenin's words, "think over their experience and really take power into their own hands"?

ocratically decide what and how much our society needs, rather than decisions being determined by the pursuit of profit".

Fieldes' article, however, shows that in Socialist Alternative's own picture of its own day-to-day activity is connected to that aim only via the apparent assumption that more militancy about tactics will lead to seeing a democratic worker-controlled economy as the general aim, and the general thought that making the organisation bigger helps. Look after the militancy, and the aims will look after themselves?

Fieldes' pivotal paragraph evades the question of the aims of struggle in three ways.

First, it assumes that the only struggles which come around are those which socialists should support, or that there is no difficulty about seeing which struggles to support and which not to support.

But campaigns against abortion rights, against a carbon tax, for "local workers first", or "to boycott Israel", may be sizeable, and even involve many workers, yet be unsuitable to support.

Socialists cannot just jump into struggles, ignore the question of aims, and busy themselves only with arguing for more militant tactics.

DOWNPLAYS

Second, when it deals with struggles which socialists should support, it downplays the arguments which exist within those struggles about exactly what their aims should be.

To take Fieldes' examples: if it's a struggle for a wage rise, should the claim be for an equal wage rise for all, or for higher wages for workers already in post and lower wages for new hires? Should workers trade conditions for wage rises, or should they regard hours and conditions as fundamental?

When campaigning against WorkChoices, is our aim to return to the status quo before WorkChoices, or should we (as Workers' Liberty argued in that campaign) fight for a positive charter of workers' rights to organise, to bargain, and to strike?

In a mobilisation against Mubarak, are we content with the old dictator being replaced by a Muslim Brotherhood leader? Or do we demand a democratic secular state, institutionalising wide workers' rights, as the essential first step to enable wide working-class organisation and a move towards socialist revolution?

Third, what is our overall defining purpose in the struggles? Is it to win a range of concessions which, bit by bit, will improve society? Or, while we value partial improvements, is the essence each struggle's contribution to the organisation, awareness, and confidence of the working class, which alone can win the victory — the socialist revolution — which is more than a temporary forcing-back of the slaving jaws

of capitalism?

Fieldes says the party must "bring together those who want the movement to grow numerically, and ultimately [only ultimately?] to reach out to the social force — the working class — that has the power to actually challenge the rich and powerful".

It is not in the least clear from the context what "movement" is meant here, except that it is evidently something so distinct from the working class that only "ultimately" can it hope to reach out to the working class.

That sentence is one of only three clear references to the working class in the article. Though the article often, in passing, refers to the people involved in struggle as "workers", and sometimes to "class struggle", its general scheme is one of "struggles", "rebellions", "movements", without further definition, and of revolutionaries defined as the advocates of more militant tactics in those "struggles", "rebellions", and "movements".

The working class is invoked as a force which, because of its power, "ultimately" has to be brought into things. The suggestion is that arguing more militant tactics for "the movement" will eventually coincide with the desired "reaching out to the working class", presumably because the working class has the power to organise larger actions (strikes as distinct from occupations of city squares, for example).

Despite the word "class-conscious" being used a couple of times in the article, the scheme here is of the working class as the "brawn" whose ever-enhanced militancy has to be used as a battering-ram by the "brain" of a movement distinct from the class.

For the Marxist, wrote Plekhanov, "the revolution is of 'particular importance' for the workers, while in the opinion of the [populist] the workers, as we know, are of particular importance for the revolution". Socialist Alternative, despite its wish to be Marxist, is on the same lines as the populists here.

The Socialist Alternative article is not just a sloppy one, failing to spell out some essential steps in the argument because the writer takes them for granted. It is also a faithful mirror of the "party-building" approach of Socialist Alternative and of the whole school of which it is part, around the SWP in Britain.

The socialist revolution is invoked but seen only as the culmination of strikes and similar struggles when they reach a height of militancy. The job of the revolutionary party in the revolutionary situation is to be strong enough and, as ever, to argue for more militancy. Clear definition of aims is not seen as a problem.

Whether what the revolutionary organisation advocates is right, or tallies with the long-term aims of socialism and the working class, is secondary to whether it "positions" the organisation well to attract militant-minded people.

It is a formula which can "work" for a while. It compares

badly with what Marx, Lenin, and others can teach us.

In the Communist Manifesto Marx defined the purposes of the Communist League as follows:

"1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

"The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement...

"The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement".

The idea of being "the most advanced and resolute" in immediate struggles is there, but the emphasis is on understanding and explaining long-term interests and historical aims, not on advocating more militant tactics.

CONSCIOUSNESS

George Plekhanov, in 1891, summarised Marx's argument in a way that educated Russian Marxists for decades after: "the sole purpose and the direct and sacred duty of the Socialists", he said, is "the promotion of the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat".

When Lenin wrote a draft programme for Russian Marxists in 1895, he defined the aim as "to assist this struggle of the Russian working class by developing the class-consciousness of the workers, by promoting their organisation, and by indicating the aims and objects of the struggle".

The Russian Marxists eventually adopted a programme in 1903. It defined the purpose of their movement as to "organise the proletariat into an independent political party, opposed to all the bourgeois parties, guide all the manifestations of its class struggle, expose before it the irreconcilable contradiction of interests between exploiters and exploited, and explain to it the historical significance of, and the necessary pre-conditions for, the impending social revolution".

After the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky argued that the old definitions of the role of the Marxist party had overstressed the organic evolution of class-consciousness from struggle, and not sufficiently taken into account the sharpnesses of ideological battle and the need for a capacity for sharp turns and initiative in a revolutionary crisis.

"The proletarian revolution is precisely distinguished by the fact that the proletariat — in the person of its vanguard — acts in it not only as the main offensive force but also as the guiding force. The part played in bourgeois revolutions by the economic power of the bourgeoisie, by its education, by its municipalities and universities, is a part which can be filled in a proletarian revolution only by the party of the proletariat... In a revolutionary party the vitally necessary dose of conservatism must be combined with a complete freedom from routine, with initiative in orientation and daring in action".

When he summed up the Fourth International's tasks, he kept that argument in mind: "To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives..."

And that is why Workers' Liberty Australia, in its constitution, sees itself as having a different purpose from Socialist Alternative: "to spread ideas of unfalsified socialism, to educate ourselves in socialist theory and history, to assist every battle for working-class self-liberation, and to organise socialists into a decisive force, able to revolutionise the labour movement so that it, in turn, can revolutionise society".

What the Third Camp meant to me, and to some others

early Pan-European movement.

In 1943, my father was stationed in Berlin and my parents sent me to Switzerland to get me out of the way of the war. In the summer of 1944, my mother had joined me in Switzerland and my father, through an unbelievable piece of luck (nobody ever believed he hadn't received advance notice, but he hadn't) came to join us for a week's vacation in the week where Romania changed sides in the war. There was no way he was going to go back to Germany (later we heard that the Gestapo had been waiting for him). So my father was reassigned by the Romanian foreign service to Bern, and Switzerland became our home.

I finished high school in Switzerland in a cadre school for the kids of the ruling class. My family had destined me to follow my father in the Romanian foreign service but history decided otherwise.

In 1946/7, Stalinism took control of Romania. My father resigned from the Romanian foreign service in December 1947, was called back and refused to return. In 1949 he and his family lost Romanian citizenship (as well as his income, which led to an existential crisis for my parents, of which I was blissfully unaware until much later).

So here I was, young, stateless, and without family pressures. I may have been the only person in the world who experienced the Stalinist take-over in Romania as a liberation. Meanwhile, I had developed other interests. I had been brought up as a highly political person in an unpolitical sort of way, aware of world politics through my father's bedtime stories about the Balkan wars (of the early 20th century) and his own experiences as a commander of an armoured train in the Romanian army during the First World War.

CONCLUSION

By the time I was eighteen I had come to the conclusion that the only worthy aim in life was to serve the community and the only struggle worth fighting was the fight for justice.

Exactly how to do this I had no idea; the socialist parties seemed boring, and Stalinism was out of the question (although some of Gletkin's arguments in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* seemed uncomfortably cogent). I had discovered surrealism, and was enthralled by the radical revolt it expressed, in literature and in painting. I had also discovered existentialism, and devoured Camus, Sartre, de Beauvoir, as well as Malraux, and Koestler (later Sperber, Serge, Orwell).

In my last year in high school I had a brilliant philosophy teacher, a Frenchman, who once dropped in passing a reference to *La Vérité*, the French Trotskyist journal. That registered. Here was an unknown shore yet to be explored.

After high school, I did not really know what to do with myself. Through an accidental meeting, I got a scholarship at the University of Kansas, in Lawrence, where I arrived in August 1949. After a while, I found my milieu in the student housing co-ops, mostly inhabited at this time by veterans on the GI-Bill, some of whom had been active in the Progressive Party campaign of 1948 to get Henry Wallace elected president. There was also an Italian who had been with the socialist resistance movement *Giustizia e Libertà*. Unlike the other student housing, the co-ops were integrated: in ours, the only black resident was the lone member of the Socialist Party.

I had been co-opted to the editorial board of *Upstream*, a small student magazine with literary ambitions and liberal-left politics.

Through exchanges between student publications in different universities, I came across *Anvil* and *Student Partisan*, the student magazine of the SYL, which looked really interesting, so much so that I decided I wanted to meet the editor. A trip to New York, in the summer of 1950, gave me the opportunity to do so. This was my first meeting with Julie Jacobson. We talked at length; he also introduced me to Hal Draper and Gordon Haskell, the *Labor Action* team, at the Long Island office, as they were packing crates for moving to 14th Street.

This was a vision of socialism, both revolutionary and democratic, that I could accept. My world view suddenly clarified; history was falling into place. There was only one thing I couldn't accept, I told Julie, and that was the theory of the "Third Camp". It seemed obvious to me that a liberal democracy like the United States was preferable in every respect to a totalitarian police state like the Soviet Union, and should therefore be supported in the global power struggle

(albeit critically). We talked some more and finally Julie said: "Okay, why don't you write an article for *Anvil* explaining your position, I'll write an answer setting out our position, and we'll have a discussion." Fair enough, I thought, and went back to Kansas.

Back in front of my desk, a remarkable thing happened. I found I could not write that article. My arguments seemed shallow, not thought through. I began to have an inkling of what I later fully realised: actually, there is no "Third Camp", only two camps — "them" and "us". The "Third Camp" was a slogan for a world polarised between two super-powers, but its profound meaning was different. Later, when I started to give courses in the trade union movement, I explained it this way: the fundamental line of cleavage in today's world is not the vertical one separating the two blocs, it is the horizontal one separating the working class from its rulers, a separation that runs across both blocs. We are not "East" or "West", I would add, we are "below", where the workers are.

In the event, I wrote Julie that I could not write that article and that I was joining the SYL.

The following months were hectic. I threw myself into activity with the zeal of the neophyte, stopped studying and flunked the university, became very visible and attracted the attention of the authorities (FBI and Immigration) who arrested me and released me on bail on condition that I should show up at the Immigration headquarters in New York and "show cause why I should not be deported."

Being stateless, with an expired student visa, having flunked university and no money, my bargaining position was not as strong as I could have wished, so I went to New York, with Liz, a Chicago SYL comrade who was to become my wife.

ORGANISED

We stayed in New York about six months waiting for my hearing. In the meantime we had both found jobs at the New York Public Library and organised a local of the CIO-affiliated Government and Public Employees Organizing Committee (which, in 1955, merged with an AFL-affiliated union to become AFCSME).

This AFCSME local still exists, and it is the only union I ever organised directly so I feel sentimental about it. When we left New York, another SYL comrade took a job at the Library and continued organising.

Eventually I got my hearing at Immigration and the officer in charge had a stack of reports in front of him documenting my subversive activities. He had a long look at me, no doubt figured that I was less of a threat to the security of the US than I had hoped, and said, after joining his hands in a prayer-like gesture, that he was "granting me the privilege of voluntary departure" — a more lenient measure than deportation, which would have made it nearly impossible to return to the US.

So in March 1953 I was back in Switzerland, with Liz. I thought there were two ways I could help the ISL I had left behind: by reporting on European developments for its press, and by strengthening its network of international relations. After consulting with Hal Draper, that is what I did.

Through the ISL's German contacts, I met Henry Jacoby and his wife Frieda. They had been close comrades of Otto Rühle, the leader of the German council communists, and had escaped to the US, through Czechoslovakia and France, in 1940.

Henry Jacoby wrote as Sebastian Franck for *Funken*, a small review published in Frankfurt by survivors of various revolutionary Marxist organisations sharing the Luxemburgist tradition. It was one of a number of groups and individuals that I contacted throughout Europe, corresponded with and worked with to build an international network of the independent socialist left, between 1953 and 1958.

Some were old ISL contacts with a long history of relations, going back to the London Bureau. These included British Independent Labour Party, the Spanish POUM, the French socialist Marceau Pivert (who was again active on the left of the SFIO), the syndicalists of *Révolution Proletarienne*, and Dimitri Yotopoulos of the Greek Archo-Marxists. Others were new contacts, like the Danish syndicalist Carl Heinrich Petersen, the Norwegian *Orientering* group, an anti-NATO left split from the Labour Party, the Italian *Unione Socialista Indipendente*, which originated in a

Dan Gallin

In *Solidarity* 242, we began compiling a series of recollections and reflections from activists who had been involved with the "third camp" left in the USA — those "unorthodox" Trotskyists who broke from the SWP USA in 1939/40 to form the Workers Party, and the tradition they built (the Independent Socialist League, and later the Independent Socialists and International Socialists). Here, we include a specially-written contribution from Dan Gallin, discussing his work with the Independent Socialist League (ISL).

Dan Gallin joined the Socialist Youth League, the youth wing of the ISL, in 1950. He was a contributor to its journal, *New International*, and its paper *Labor Action*, until it ceased publication in 1958. He went on to contribute to *New Politics*. He was General Secretary of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant and Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) from 1968 until 1997, and is currently the Chair of the Global Labour Institute. He joined the Swiss Socialist Party in 1955 and remains a member to this day. This contribution is abridged from a much longer piece, which can be read online at bit.ly/TEwYQB.

Other contributions to the symposium can be read at tinyurl.com/thirdcampsymposium.

Daniel Randall

I was not the typical recruit to the Independent Socialist League (ISL) or its youth organisation, the Socialist Youth League (SYL). My family came from Czernowitz, as it was known in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Cernăuți in Romania after 1918, Chernivtsi in the Ukraine after 1939).

My father was a senior civil servant in the Romanian foreign service, a conservative nationalist but a democrat, who saw himself as a servant of "the nation", by which he meant the people. My mother had no time for Romanian nationalism, or any other nationalism for that matter, she grieved over the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Emperor Franz-Joseph, who died when she was sixteen, remained her father figure. Later she became enthusiastic about the

The Occupy Wall Street protests. Does the Occupy movement's "99%" represent a modern echo of the Third Camp idea?

Titoist split in the Italian CP in 1951, *Socialist Review*, (which became the International Socialists, and later the SWP) where Bernard Dix was already writing for *Labor Action*, and Walter Kendall of the *Voice*, in Britain. There were many others — broadly speaking, they were the "Third Camp" constituency in Europe.

I also reached out to the "official" Trotskyist groups in Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, but they had of course a different agenda and were allied to the American SWP, sectarian and hostile to "centrism". Nothing came of any of these contacts.

My networking activities did not lead to any form of permanent co-ordination. The differences of political cultures and traditions were too great, and the organisations too weak to sustain a major international joint effort. What did emerge was a more active co-operation between publications, and some lasting bilateral relations.

PUBLICATIONS

In May 1960, an International Conference of Socialist Publications and Reviews was convened in Brussels by the Imre Nagy Institute, a centre of political research founded by exiled Hungarian socialists who were associated with the "revisionist" tendencies in the Hungarian Communist Party before 1956.

Fourteen publications were represented, from France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain (in exile), and the US. I represented *New Politics*. Mike Kidron represented IS, and Wilbaldo Solano represented *Tribuna Socialista*, the review of the POUM.

The conference adopted two resolutions. In one, the participating reviews stated their intention to extend all possible practical assistance to each other, in the form of exchanging articles, addresses, publicity, distribution facilities, and information on the working program and activities of each participating review.

It was also decided to publish a liaison bulletin twice a year. In another resolution, the conference singled out two themes — the independence of the working class was one, and the nature and perspectives of the Cuban revolution was the other.

Although its outcome was modest, this conference was the high water mark of co-operation of the independent left milieu in that decade. Unfortunately, it was also decided that the follow-up would be the responsibility of the Imre Nagy Institute, which proved too frail a vessel to carry that load. It folded in 1963 for lack of funding. No other international meetings were convened, and the upheavals of 1968 created a new situation for the independent left.

From 1953, I had written for *Labor Action*, mostly as André Giacometti (after the Swiss sculptor and painter, who I greatly admired), and reporting most of the time on developments in France.

I contributed to *Labor Action* until it ceased publication in 1958, when the ISL dissolved into the Socialist Party. I also contributed to the ISL journal *New International*, in particular with my article "The Working Class Movement in Tropical Africa" — a survey of the sub-Saharan labour movement, which appeared in 1956 and 1957 in three instal-

ments, at a time when virtually nothing was known about Africa and its unions in the American left.

After the ISL disappeared, I kept contact with Hal Draper, and with Julie and Phyllis Jacobson who had started publishing *New Politics*, to which I also contributed, and later, when the Socialist Party split in 1972 over the Vietnam War, with comrades from Michael Harrington's Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.

I contributed to the *New International Review*, which Eric Lee was editing at the time, and kept in touch with Bogdan Denitch and others. In 1955, I had joined the Swiss Social-Democratic Party (called the Socialist Party in the French and Italian language regions), where I am still a member.

So what about Third Camp Socialism? I do not know whether, had I not joined the ISL, absorbed its political culture and understood its insights and its specific brand of socialism, I would have been able to contribute to the international labour movement in the way I did for over fifty years. What I do know, is that I was able to do this thanks to comrades like Hal and Ann Draper, Julius and Phyllis Jacobson, others like Max Shachtman, Al Glotzer, Herman Benson, Gordon Haskell, Ernest Rice McKinney, Saul Mendelson, Debbie Meier, Don Chenoweth, Sam Botton, and others yet I hardly knew, like Joe Friedman (Carter), Paul Bernick, Jack Rader, Carl Shier, or others I only knew through their writings, like Lewis Coser, Ernest Erber, Stanley Plastrick, Irving Howe, B.J. Widick — and many more.

LEARNED

To all of them, I owe many hours of conversations, correspondence and reading.

What I learned was that the "Third Camp" was really another name for the world's working class in the broadest sense of the term, including the informal workers, mostly women, the landless peasants of the "Third World" (itself another outmoded term since the two other worlds have gone the way of the two other camps). In contemporary terms, what was our "Third Camp" is now the 99% of the Occupy movement.

As I see it, the core of the 99% is the organised working class, and our duty, overriding all other considerations, has to be to defend the integrity and the independence of the movement of the organised working class — the trade union movement or, more generally, the labour movement — against all threats, from anywhere, regardless of their many guises. At any rate, that's what I thought it meant to be an independent socialist in the labour movement in the last half century. Or, the way Marx put it in his time: "The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves."

The ISL's brand of socialism also provided me with a very useful theoretical framework to help me understand my hatred of Stalinism and, for that matter, of any brand of authoritarianism, including those which were not actual criminal conspiracies like Stalin's operation. The ISL was not blind to the dangers of the various brands of Third World authoritarianism, and none of us ever went on those ridiculous quests for a promised land which would pro-

claim any tin-pot dictator with a radical discourse as the latest shining beacon of socialism.

Nor was the ISL blind to the bureaucratic and authoritarian traditions in social-democracy which, combined with opportunism, cowardice and obtuse stupidity (never to be underestimated) would inflict enormous damage on the labour movement, leading to its worst historical defeats. Even at the best of times, those traditions would cultivate conformity and passivity, wear down the activists, and lead the movement into blind alleys. The ISL taught me, and others, to resist all this.

Finally, the ISL taught me to take the long view. It never proclaimed a terminal crisis of capitalism, nor declared a revolutionary situation every five years or ten years. Most of us knew we were in for the long haul, and that we would not live to see our long-term goals. All we can ever do is the best we can, where we are, while we are there.

Books from Workers' Liberty

What is capitalism? Can it last?

With articles from Leon Trotsky, Max Shachtman, Maziar Razi and many more.
Edited by Cathy Nugent. £5 —
buy online from tinyurl.com/wiccil

Working-class politics and anarchism

Debates, polemics, and exchanges between members of Workers' Liberty and comrades from various anarchist traditions.
£5 — tinyurl.com/wcpanarchism

Treason of the Intellectuals

Political verse by Sean Matgamna. £9.99 —
tinyurl.com/treasonofintellectuals

Soweto Blues

Songs of Liberty & Rebellion



Miriam Makeba's song 'Soweto Blues', written by her ex-husband Hugh Masekela, is a lament for the victims of the 1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa.

On 16 June, police fired on demonstrations led by high-school students protesting the ban on non-Afrikaans languages. Over 200 protestors were killed and many more were injured. The song's use of the language of black South Africans is itself an act of defiance.

More than thirty years since the massacre at Soweto, the post-Apartheid South African state was complicit in another massacre, as platinum miners striking for decent pay and conditions were gunned down by police.

This song could be rewritten as 'Marikana Blues'.
The Ruby Kid

The children got a letter from the master
It said: no more Xhosa, Sotho, no more Zulu.
Refusing to comply they sent an answer
That's when the policemen came to the rescue.

Children were flying bullets dying
The mothers screaming and crying
The fathers were working in the cities
The evening news brought out all the publicity:

Just a little atrocity, deep in the city
Benikhupi ma madoda (where were the men)
Mabedubula abantwana (when the children were being shot)
Benikhupi na (where were you)
Abantwana beshaywa ngezimbokodo (when the children were throwing stones)
Benikhupi na (where were you)

There was a full moon on the golden city
Knocking at the door was the man without pity
Accusing everyone of conspiracy
Tightening the curfew charging people with walking

Yes, the border is where he was awaiting
Waiting for the children, frightened and running
A handful got away but all the others
Hurried their chain without any publicity

Soweto blues — abu yethu a mama
Soweto blues — they are killing all the children
Soweto blues — without any publicity
Soweto blues — oh, they are finishing the nation
Soweto blues — while calling it black on black
Soweto blues — but everybody knows they are behind it
Soweto blues — without any publicity
Soweto blues — god, somebody, help!
Soweto blues — (abu yethu a mama)

Neville Alexander, 1936-2012

Martyn Hudson celebrates the life of South African Trotskyist activist and writer Neville Alexander, who died on 29 August.

A descendant of East African slaves and an inmate with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, Neville Alexander should best be remembered as perhaps the greatest mind thrown up by the revolutionary left in the South African struggle.

Born in Cradock in what is now the Eastern Cape, he became a Marxist early in life through contacts at school and university. He was influenced by Maoism in his early political life and by ideas of importing guerrilla warfare into the South Africa struggle.

By the early 1960s, Alexander, at the beginning of a decade of imprisonment on Robben Island, had become significantly attracted to the ideas of Trotskyism, particularly after meeting Natalya Sedova, Trotsky's widow, in Paris during his overseas studies.

During his time in prison and afterwards he developed an analysis of capitalism in South Africa which critiqued and helped to understand how the class struggle was perceived in racial terms and "colour-caste relations".

Although it was criticized within the Trotskyist left by theorists such as Hillel Ticktin, Alexander's attempt to undermine the reactionary role of the race issue in South African liberatory politics led to major insights into what a post-apartheid regime might look like and how activists could create a truly multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, working-class based liberation movement.

The failure of the ANC to do this and to challenge capital in the transition from white minority rule in South Africa led to Alexander seeing the transition as an "unfinished revolution".

Alexander always regretted that he wasn't able to construct an ongoing dialogue after his imprisonment with Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement, but in the early 1990s it was clear that new political questions about the role of the working class in the post-Apartheid era were emerging and it was during this period that he founded the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action to advocate for independent anti-Stalinist working-class politics in South Africa and to agitate for a mass workers' party in opposition to the stranglehold of the South African Com-

munist Party and its support for the ANC.

He also continued his studies of national liberation begun in prison and, until the end of his life, of the role of education in the struggle for emancipation in South Africa.

This led to him to a directing role in understanding the primacy of the idea of a multi-language state — which is undoubtedly one of the few policy successes of the post-Apartheid ANC.

He never hid his profound disappointment with the nature of the post-Apartheid state even though he had clearly predicted it. In his Strini Moodley lecture at the University of KwaZulu Natal in 2010 he referred to Hilary Mantel's great novel of the French revolution, *A Place of Greater Safety*. One of the characters, Lucille, wants to know about the philosophy of the Revolution. She is wary of asking Robespierre, who would lecture her for hours on the General Will, or Desmoulins, who would provide an insightful couple of hours on the Roman republic.

So she asks Danton and he just says: "Oh, I think it has a philosophy. Grab what you can, and get out while the going's good."

That is how Alexander saw the new regime, with its new elite of millionaires and most Black South Africans' lives unimproved.

Our starting points

In the 1990s Neville Alexander and the organisation he was then part of, the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action, had links with Workers' Liberty, and we supported their effort to run a Workers' List challenge to the ANC/National Party coalition in South Africa's first non-racial elections, in 1994.

In 1992 Alexander gave Workers' Liberty his verdict on the collapse of the USSR: "We believe the October Revolution continues to be the most important event in world history. In building a new international socialist movement, there is no doubt that we have to go back to the period of 1917-1924 to see where our starting points should be.

"Our view is that in the advanced capitalist countries the so-called actually existing socialist societies have discredited socialism. In the minds of most workers — in fact, most people — those societies were equated with what socialism was supposed to be. This was a real setback.

"In countries like South Africa socialism continues to be not just relevant but popular. We have no doubt at all that because of the hegemony of the black nationalists, the socialist movement continues to be a minority current. But it is there, and it is important. Socialism is an important pole of attraction in the mass movement.

"In a way we have to get back to the First International where workers' organisations the world over got together on the basis of their experience, on a bare empirical reality of the experience of capitalist exploitation, begin to put together a cohesive strategy against the world capitalist system".

Workers' Liberty 16, February 1992

A socialist pioneer against patriarchy

Our Movement

By Mícheál MacEoin

Edith Lanchester (1871-1966) was a British socialist and feminist. She was born to a prosperous architect and grew up in Battersea, south London; she became a prominent activist in the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF).

By her mid-20s she was a schoolteacher, then worked as a secretary to Eleanor Marx, daughter of Karl Marx and a prominent activist in her own right.

In 1895 Lanchester caused a storm when she announced that, in protest against Britain's patriarchal marriage laws, she was going to cohabit with her lover, an Irish factory worker, James Sullivan. Her socialist feminist convictions had led Lanchester to conclude that the wife's vow to obey her husband was oppressive and she was politically opposed to the institution of marriage.

Incensed, Lanchester's father and brothers barged into her house and forcibly subjected their daughter to an examination by Dr George Fielding-Blandford, a leading psychiatrist and author of *Insanity and Its Treatment*. After signing emergency commitment papers under the 1890 Lunacy Act, Fielding-Blandford had Lanchester imprisoned; her own father and brothers bound her wrists and dragged her to a carriage destined for the Priory Hos-

pital in Roehampton.

The psychiatrist explained his reasoning in a contemporary news report. Lanchester "had always been eccentric, and had lately taken up with Socialists of the most advanced order. She seemed quite unable to see that the step she was about to take meant utter ruin. If she had said that she had contemplated suicide a certificate might have been signed without question. I considered I was equally justified in signing one when she expressed her determination to commit this social suicide. She is a monomaniac on the subject of marriage, and I believe her brain had been turned by Socialist meetings and writings, and that she was quite unfit to take care of herself".

Almost immediately a meeting was called by Lanchester's comrades under the auspices of the Legitimation League, a body set up to campaign to secure equal rights for children born outside of marriage. At the meeting, a resolution was passed against Fielding-Blandford, and Lanchester's landlady, the SDF activist Mary Gray, was urged to take legal action against her tenant's brother for assaulting her during the raid on her home.

After four days by the SDF, with the help of Lanchester's local MP, the Commissioners of Lunacy proclaimed her sane though "foolish" and released her.

Independent Labour Party leader Keir Hardie accused Lanchester of discrediting socialism; but her stand was a brave and radical challenge by a committed socialist feminist to the institution of marriage and to late Victorian society's highly constrained and patriarchal conception of femininity.

Lanchester and Sullivan's daughter Elsa Lanchester became a famous actress.

Remploy workers launch week-long strike

By Dale Street

Following a 100% vote in favour of strike action, pickets were out in force at the Remploy factory in Springburn (Glasgow) on Monday 3 September, the first day of a week-long strike. Remploy workers in Chesterfield were also out on strike.

Phil Brannan, who works in the Springburn factory and is GMB Remploy Shop Stewards Convenor (Scotland), explained the background to the strike to *Solidarity*:

"The strike in Springburn will be for four days because we work a four-day, 35-hour week here. But in Chesterfield they work a night shift as well, so the strike there will be for five days.

"The only person working on the first day of the strike was a Human Resources consultant brought in by the company to shut us down or sell us off. He's paid £300 a day. That's more than what we earn in a week.

"The reason for the strike is that although five and a half months have passed since the government announced that Remploy factories were to be closed or privatised, we're still in a state of total ignorance about our future. The same goes for Chesterfield.

"We don't know if we're going to be shut down and all made redundant or taken over, and if we are taken over we don't know anything about what our terms and conditions would be, or what the procedure would be if there were redundancies after a takeover.

"Members are at their wits' end. For five and a half months we've been asking which companies may be taking us over so that we can talk with them. But no-one will tell us who they are.

"There were people looking at the factory last Thursday. But we had to threaten to occupy the canteen to force them to talk to us, and even then they would meet us only on condition that

they would not say what company they were working for.

"We've been told that we won't get any protection under the TUPE legislation because if we are privatised, then it would be a buyout and not a TUPE transfer.

"Our fear is that the first people who would get made redundant would be the ones who are the most disabled.

ready been made redundant just the previous week, occupied the Remploy head offices in Leicester.

"We wanted answers to all the questions we have, but were told that all the directors were away or on Annual Leave.

"When they finally got one of them, the Finance Director, on the speakerphone, he gave us the usual answers, but also said that there was no protection for our final-salary pensions and no guarantee that union recognition would continue if we were sold off.

"Just last week the DWP announced that what they called significant new information had come to light regarding Remploy Healthcare (one of the five business 'streams' in Remploy) and the bidding process had therefore been postponed for at least a week.

"As of today we still don't know what that information is. That's typical of the contempt they treat us with.

"The government is say-

ing that we are putting jobs at risk by going on strike and that we should be talking to Remploy.

"But Remploy have had two and a half weeks to speak to us since we gave them notice of the strike and have not bothered. And when we do speak to them, they tell us that they don't know what's going on as they have not been told themselves.

"We're not against a takeover, but we're not prepared to accept jobs at any price. We're not going to accept standing an auction box in order to be sold off to the highest bidder, as if we were going to work on the plantations in Jamaica."

Donations to support the Remploy workers should be sent to: Phil Davies, GMB, 22-24 Worple Road, London, SW19 4DD. Cheques should be made payable to: Remploy Fighting Fund.

Sheffield recycling strikes back on

By Dan Higginbottom

Workers at Sheffield's five household recycling centres have recommenced industrial action after deeming management's latest offer unacceptable.

The action, which aims to reverse cuts to the services' budget and opening hours (leading to working hour and therefore pay cuts for workers), began earlier this year. 28 days of strikes by GMB members forced Sheffield Council and Veolia/SOVA (the private contractors which operate the centre) into

negotiations over the cuts.

Affected staff at the sites have found themselves economically devastated by reductions in hours; since many of them are barely earning more than minimum wage at present, this represents a savage move against some of the most financially vulnerable workers.

GMB members on the first picket lines of the new round of action were naturally angry at the attitude of the council and the subcontracting companies, but also at the reduction in a vital public service paid for by public funding but reduced due

to financial transactions between private organisations, one of which (SOVA) is a charity.

The workers have already demonstrated their commitment to extended and sustained action through their strikes earlier this year.

Their mood is just as determined now; they are of the belief that one day strikes are pointless exercises and their spirit of solidarity could be an example to many others.

• For the background to the dispute, see *Solidarity* 252, 11 July 2012 — bit.ly/OKTmG9

"Phased reverse" in Southampton

By Ollie Moore

An offer from Southampton's Labour council, which replaced the previous Tory administration in May 2012, could bring a settlement to the bitter industrial dispute which began in May 2011.

The new deal promises a "phased reversal" of the pay cuts for 86% of the workers affected. Low-paid workers will have the cuts reversed entirely.

The reversal only covers the pay lost over the last year and doesn't include any increase, amounting to a pay freeze. Some cuts included in the Tories' package, such as the cut to car allowances, will be restored, but others (such as the reduction in annual leave for some workers) remain in place.

Unions will begin balloting on the deal on 14 September, with results expected on 5 October. Both Unite and Unison are recommending that members vote to accept the deal.

Interviewed in *Solidarity* 254 (22 August), Mike Tucker, the secretary of Southampton District Unison, said: "There's been a general improvement in industrial relations at the council. Management engage with unions now and the normal channels of consultation are being respected again. The new administration has also withdrawn proposals to evict the unions from the offices and to make myself and my colleague from Unite redundant."

Members of Unison and Unite have run a campaign of rolling, selective, and

sustained strikes against a massive cuts plan from the Tory council, which included a 5.5% pay cut for many workers and was imposed through the gun-to-the-head method of mass sackings and rehiring workers on worse terms.

The Labour council is beginning to draw up its own cuts plans, including a proposal to close a local swimming pool, which has already provoked a union-backed rebellion from two Labour councillors.

Mike Tucker said: "We support the election of a Labour council, but our fundamental role is to help our members defend their pay, conditions, and jobs, and we'll continue to do that regardless of which political party has power in the council."

Health workers fight closure

By Darren Bedford

Workers at the NHS Blood and Transplant Testing/Microbiology Department in Colindale, north London, are being balloted for strikes over the closure of their department.

Their union, Unite, sent

out ballot papers on 31 August, with results due back on 18 September. Man-

agers are proposing to move the department's work to Filton, in Gloucestershire, which means blood samples from London and south east England would have to travel up to 120 miles for testing. This could potentially lead to a lengthening of waiting times for patients. The move is also environmentally damaging, as it needlessly increases emissions-heavy road journeys.

Workers at Filton, and the other transplant testing centre in Manchester, are also being balloted for action short of strike in protest at the increased workload they would face if the Colindale closure goes ahead.

Train drivers in pay strike

Drivers for train company DB Schenker will strike on 8 September.

They are fighting to win a decent pay increase for 2012. Their union, ASLEF, declared that management's latest offer was "unacceptable". Members

voted by 85.2% and 91% (on DB Schenker and DB Schenker International respectively) to strike.

Weekend engineering operations and charter services are expected to be disrupted by the strike.

TUC DEMONSTRATION, SATURDAY 20 OCTOBER

Assemble 11am, Embankment. Moving off at 12 noon, marching to Hyde Park.

Workers' Liberty members will be there and arguing for a working-class programme of resistance to austerity, to highlight ongoing workers' struggles and build solidarity with them, to build the campaign to defend the NHS, and for a workers' government.

More info on the demo: afuturethatworks.org

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Teachers and students protest at the Department for Education, 28 August

Gove stole our GCSE grades!

By Siobhan Davies

On Friday 24 August, a teacher from south east London, and a member of Workers' Liberty, woke up feeling miserable.

She'd been slaving her guts out over a year and a half to make sure that her English class achieved C grades in their GCSE.

But most of them ostensibly failed. A "D" no longer guarantees you a place in further education.

After an obligatory mope, she contacted the local union executive member and suggested a demonstration outside the Department for Education.

And it happened: Tuesday 28 August, 1pm. It was covered in the *Daily Mail*, the *Telegraph*, *TES*, and Radio 5 Live.

What's the background? GCSE results have dropped

significantly for the first time in 24 years. Through what the exam boards claim to be "actions to curb grade inflation", we have seen many students receiving D grades this summer with marks that would have secured them C grades had they sat the exams and submitted their coursework in January.

The worst-hit subject is English. In the AQA English Foundation exam, the pass level for a C was moved up by 16 marks.

It is because "too many" students had been meeting the standard necessary for access to the majority of academic further education courses that the level has been changed.

More than 950 schools have put in complaints to the qualifications regulator Ofqual — nearly a third of all schools in the country.

Ofqual has now bowed to the pressure and will conduct an independent inquiry. But if the independent inquiry into exam cheating at a certain notorious school in Dulwich is anything to go by, the results will inevitably favour those with the most invested in exams, i.e. the private companies running the show.

This year, education minister Michael Gove has introduced a requirement that schools who fall below a floor target of 40% of A*-to-C will be forced to become academies. This year's deflated results will see many schools in this situation.

Parents of Golden Hillock School, Birmingham, also protested on 28 August, and London teachers presented a letter to Michael Gove.

With new capability procedures being introduced this September, many teachers could face punitive measures for the drop in exam grades. Schools may decide to balance their books by punishing these teachers by not allowing them to progress up the pay-scale, as they should do for each year in service.

Though heads and teachers are united in their anger over Gove's grade-robbery, there is a fundamental difference in opinion.

Many teachers are asking questions about what a true education looks like, and how we can expect to be able to deliver it in a marketplace of competing exam boards that respond to political manipulation. Teachers should ask the big questions about assessment, the measurement of aptitude and the dominant logic of competitive capitalism that is continuing to strangle education.

Even if these grade boundaries are reversed and these many children are awarded their Cs, we should continue to call actions within the NUT, and expose those who are not forthcoming with their support.

With the energy of the new Local Associations Network within the National Union of Teachers, there is potential for a union that reflects the wishes of the rank-and-file, not just the bureaucrats.

Within this forum teachers on the left will need to be asking ourselves what exactly we think could replace this corrupt exam system.

Italian miners' occupation forces concessions

By Hugh Edwards

On 26 August, at the end of their shift, 120 Sardinian miners, furnishing themselves with 350 kg of explosives, barricaded themselves 400 metres underground in one of the shafts of the CarboSulcis mine near the little centre of Nuraxi Figus on the Italian island.

They did so in protest and defiance at the refusal by Italy's Minister of Development to permit the miners' proposals for an alternative environmentally "clean" plant even to get on the agenda after a European ruling that production at the highly-polluting mine must cease.

The mine has been producing heavily-contaminating sulphur-laden coal since 1850. The price paid in death, illness, and terrible suffering has been incalculable.

RESISTANCE

The miners alone have offered resistance. Seven were shot dead in a 1920 dispute.

When in 1995 the mine became the property of the Region, the miners put forward a plan for an environmentally-friendly production site. They were cynically ignored, with the connivance of trade union leaders whose everso-heart-felt rhetorical appeals to the bosses and their governments have never been matched by serious action.

The Sardinian workers have had enough of it! They know that if the mine closes there is no future for the 500 who will lose their jobs.

Hardly five kilometres

away, the giant Alcoa aluminium plant prepares for the end later this month, with another 500 jobs to go. Here too the workers are in action, mounting protests last week outside Rome's parliament with plans, as with their brothers and sisters of Sulcis, for a mass demonstration of their whole community to defy the logic of the profit motive.

Elsewhere on the island, unemployment reaches 20%, hundreds of businesses signal "a state of emergency", and the standard of living of the average islander continues to plummet.

OCCUPATION

The miners' occupation has, at least, forced the government onto the back foot.

Ministers have given assurances that no miner "will be left on the street", and that they will reconsider the proposals for new technology to save the workplace — "as long as it is cost effective".

The miners know too well what such weasel phrases signify, but have cautiously welcomed the offer by agreeing to consider the end of the occupation at a mass meeting on Monday 3 September.

The courage and determination of the miners of Nuraxi Figus are proof that Italian workers, despite the crippling limits of their trade union leadership, continue to fight.

Even at the most extreme moments of despair, on that alone rests the hope, belief and — yes! — certainty that united working-class-led challenge remains still the path to human and social emancipation.

New wins for London cleaners

By Ira Berkovic

Cleaners have won trade-union victories at the London School of Economics (LSE) and the Société Générale bank in London.

Cleaners employed by the Resource Group at LSE stopped a plan that would have seen them lose up to £1,000 a year.

A union campaign, supported by LSE students, has forced Resource bosses to back down.

Workers employed by Initial at Société Générale (the second largest bank in

France and the eighth largest in the Eurozone) faced even worse cuts which would cut their hours in half and make some cleaners redundant without replacing them. Remaining workers would have to do the work of more than one person in half the time!

Société Générale cleaners also face persistent management bullying, including being refused time off for family emergencies, and are paid below the London Living Wage of £8.30 an hour.

The cuts were due to

come into effect on 3 September, but they have been suspended following the mere threat of industrial action by the workers' union, the Industrial Workers of Great Britain (IWGB). The union's campaign of demonstrations resumes on Thursday 6 September.

The IWGB formed in August as an offshoot from the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). It traces its political lineage to the 1909 organisation of the same name.

● More: facebook.com/cleaners.branch