

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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ONE IN FIVE ARE BELOW LIVING WAGE

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

Contact us:

- 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org
- The editor (Cathy Nugent), 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.
- Printed by Trinity Mirror

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School cuts

By Stewart Ward

Struggling schools face a new cut of £1 billion, as the Tories attempt to claw back an overspend in its budget for expanding the Academies programme.

Academy conversions have accelerated dramatically since the Coalition came to power, with an increase of over 1,000%. A special fund was set up to encourage schools to sever their ties to local authorities and convert to Academies, but due to the overspend, local authority schools are effectively being punished for not converting by having their budgets raided to plug the gap.

Education Secretary Michael Gove is a belligerent proponent of the Academy model, explicit in his view that all schools should convert. The profligate overspend on a budget that is essentially his war-chest for waging fight to proliferate Academies is an indication of the deeply ideological way in which Gove is using his department's budget.

Strikes by teachers at Worthing High School and Connaught Schools for Girls in Leytonstone, East London, succeeded in disrupting their schools' Academy conversion plans; more sustained strikes elsewhere, combined with community campaigns, could achieve more.

Balls and £10 billion new cuts

By Gerry Bates

George Osborne's spending review, on 5 December, is due to cut another £10 billion from welfare, by cutting benefits in real terms (i.e. chopping the inflation-linked increases which would otherwise come).

He will try to balance this with a "tax-dodging clamp-down" which he promises will raise another £10 billion from the rich. That £10 billion, however, will be a matter of promises and

hopes, whereas the £10 billion taken from the poorest is clear-cut arithmetic.

Despite, or rather because of, all the cuts, the government's budget deficit is increasing, not decreasing. In January-October 2012 it was £5 billion higher than in January-October 2011.

When he was running for Labour leader in 2010, Ed Balls denounced the Tories' cuts policy sharply. His prediction that cuts would lead to slump rather than recovery has been confirmed. But now, as Shadow Chancellor,

he has softened his message rather than sharpening it.

In an article for the *Sunday Mirror* (2 December) Balls does not mention Osborne's well-trailed benefit cuts, or the crazy Tory plan to axe housing benefit for under-25s from which Osborne seems to have been deterred only by Lib-Dem queasiness.

Balls proposes only to:

- build 100,000 affordable homes (over what period? Remember, Tory housing minister Harold Macmillan got 300,000 new council homes a year built in the early 1950s)

- guarantee a job to every young person out of work for over a year (but what sort of a job? Balls adds, menacingly, "a job they'll have to take or lose benefits")

- restore some of the deep cuts to tax credits for working families
- cut VAT temporarily
- set up a British Investment Bank.

That falls far short of measures which would reverse the crash in working-class conditions since 2008, like restoring trade-union rights and rebuilding the NHS as a public service.

Instead of expropriating the banks — taking high finance into public ownership, with democratic and workers' control — Balls proposes only to nibble at the outer fringes of the spiralling wealth of the super-rich, by using funds from the 4G auction of mobile airwaves and taxing bankers' bonuses.



Antonio Gramsci and revolutionary Marxism: a dayschool

Saturday 15 December, 12-6pm, University College London, Gower Street

Workshops on: Gramsci on "East and West" • Gramsci's idea of a socialist newspaper • Education and revolution • The Gramscian revolutionary party

More info: www.workersliberty.org/15decgramsci

Singapore bus strike

By Ollie Moore

Hundreds of migrant Chinese bus workers in Singapore have struck for higher pay.

Singaporean authorities have charged four workers with leading an illegal strike. If found guilty, they face imprisonment for up to a year, or a fine of S\$2,000, or both.

Around 200,000 migrant workers from mainland China work in Singapore, including 450 out of 2,000 drivers at the SMRT bus

company. Over 200 workers have so far participated in the strike.

Strikes in "essential services" are illegal in Singapore. The country's last legal strike was in 1986.

Mainland Chinese authorities have expressed concern for the workers' rights and say they hope the dispute will be resolved in their favour.

This may ring somewhat hollow, given the Chinese government's own horrendous record of repressing workers' struggles.



Two of the world's most significant ports are losing \$1 billion a day due to strikes by clerical workers.

Clerical workers at Los Angeles and Long Beach ports are striking to win new contracts, and other dock workers have refused to cross their picket lines. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) says that 10 of 14 container terminals between the two ports have been shut down.

Panicked bosses have asked the government to intervene.

Stop South London health cuts!



By Todd Hamer

The current crisis in South East London's NHS was caused almost entirely by unsustainable Private Finance Initiative debt held by South London Healthcare Trust.

Last summer the government placed SLHT in "Unsustainable Provider Status" (a category invented by Andy Burnham). That allowed axe-wielding bureaucrat Matthew Kershaw to get to work dismantling the whole health economy of South London. Writing the report alone has so far cost the taxpayer £2 million and he has massively extended his remit, using the funding crisis in SLHT to recommend cuts across South London.

Whatever happens in South London will be a test case for elsewhere in the country. The government has already signalled that other Trusts will be placed in the failure regime before the end of the financial year. Seven Trusts have already approached the Department of Health for help with PFI debt.

NHS managers are coming under huge pressure to get their organisations fit for Foundation Trust status. The government wants all Trusts to become Founda-

tion Trusts by April 2014. Achieving Foundation Trust status involves fulfilling a range of quality criteria whilst also balancing the books. As the NHS is facing a £20 billion funding gap, many Trusts are struggling with their FT applications. Added to this problem is the much delayed report on the failures at Mid-Staffordshire Foundation Trust, which will almost certainly impose even tougher criteria for getting FT status.

MERGERS

It is against this backdrop that we are seeing a wave of mergers as NHS bosses seek to find ways of cutting costs through economies of scale.

This has led to giants like the £1 billion Barts Health Foundation Trust, which covers acute care in East London, and the proposed £2.1 billion giant covering Guy's and St Thomas, King's and South London and Maudsley. There are also smaller mergers, and the giants are swallowing up the smaller Trusts.

In general the mergers will allow for more planning and cooperation within an NHS which has been deliberately fragmented and set up to compete against itself. However, many of these mergers need to be resisted because they cannot be disentangled from the huge cuts packages. The mergers

proposed in SLHT illustrate this problem.

SLHT was established in 2009 through a merger of three hospitals, the Queen Elizabeth in Woolwich, the Princess Royal in Bromley and Queen Mary in Bexley. Last year it was £65 million in deficit on a £459 million turnover. The entirety of this deficit was made up of PFI payouts amounting to £69 million.

The PFI debt is unsustainable because it was the government equivalent of taking out a wonga loan. Princess Royal Hospital cost just £118 million to build but is estimated that the PFI repayments will cost £1.2 billion.

If the NHS bosses had just gone down to their local bank and taken out a mortgage then the hospital would have been paid for years ago. If government had done what it usually does and paid for the hospital directly out of the public purse then we could have built three or four more hospitals in South London alone with the money that has already been spent. The decision by the Tories and New Labour to set up PFI was nothing but a gift of taxpayers' money to the super-rich.

Because of this debt Kershaw decided that the best medicine was to smash up SLHT and offer up services any willing provider. Most of the NHS Trusts in and around London have expressed an interest in tak-

ing over parts of the Trust, and private sector firms like Virgin Care and Serco also looking to hive off a "profitable" section of the organisation. According to *Health Service Journal* none of the expressions of interest include proposals for taking over the entire Trust.

From the interim report it looks likely that the Princess Royal will have some of its PFI debt taken off its hands by the government and will then be taken over by King's Hospital. The Queen Elizabeth in contrast will merge with £222 million a year Lewisham Hospital Trust with all its PFI debt intact.

SACRIFICING

Lewisham will then pay off this debt by sacrificing its A&E department, closing wards and downgrading its maternity service.

The A&E department is the pumping heart of any district general hospital. Closing it leads eventually towards closing the whole site.

The NHS is experiencing a perfect storm of funding cuts, mounting PFI debt and a legislative framework that allows for rapid privatisation. This is an entirely manufactured crisis created by politicians who turned the NHS into a cash cow for the capitalist class. If they are successful then the result will be that working-class people will die of curable diseases and live in fear of illness and pain.

The frontline to save the NHS is now in Lewisham, where a mass community mobilisation is ensuring that the first hospital in the failure regime will not go down without a fight.

Workers' Liberty members will be producing a regular workplace bulletin for Lewisham hospital workers.

More on the campaign... NHS Unity Network: nhsunity.com

savelewishamhospital.com

certain number of senior clinicians are reduced. This is often the first step in running down hospital services, with eventual closure of the hospital a real possibility.

As well as the reduction of services, these changes will put unprecedented pressure on the five hospitals identified as major hospitals when all A&E traffic comes their way.

As well local demonstrations, we need to start organising for bolder actions such as work-ins to keep services open.

• Saturday 8 December — "Casualty Convoy" through West London. Email olivernew@btopenworld.com

West London cuts threat

By Rosie Woods

"Shaping a healthier future", a consultation carried out by NHS North West London, concluded on 8 October.

The consultation, ostensibly about changing services to improve patient care, was actually about implementing massive cuts to NW London hospitals.

All the options proposed involve the downgrading of at least four hospitals, with closure of A&Es and removal of specialist services. The architects of the plans are supporters of the government's "any qualified provider" programme for the NHS; their plans to

hive off services around NW London will be helped if existing services can be undermined with reduction in capacity making parts of the NHS increasingly financially unviable.

It comes as no surprise that following the consultation NW London NHS are proposing their preferred option; closure of accident and emergency units at Hammersmith, Charing Cross, Ealing and Central Middlesex. That is four out of the nine A&E units across NW London. Alongside these closures some specialist services will also be moved. A&E closures mean that requirements for hospitals to have certain facilities available and to have a

Learn from this by-election

UKIP's growth should alarm the left

By Martin Thomas

Labour activists should not be complacent about Labour's victory in the three by-elections on 29 November.

All three were in safe Labour seats. That Labour won when in opposition to a coalition government whose economic strategy is both hurting and not working in its own terms reflects no endorsement on the parachuting-in of candidates or on "one nation" blather.

The party with best cause to be pleased was UKIP: second in Rotherham, with 22%, and in Middlesbrough, with 12%, and third in Croydon North with 6%. Probably few UKIP voters knew about or specifically voted for such UKIP policies as abolishing all higher rates of income tax and scrapping employers' National Insurance and simultaneously raising military spending and doubling prisons (and what gets cut then?)

But UKIP's headline policies of pulling Britain out of the EU and freezing immigration for five years got traction. In Rotherham the BNP came third with 9%, though it got only 2% in Middlesbrough and did not contest Croydon North.

Labour — or, to start with and more specifically, the Labour left and outside-Labour left — need to undercut this by developing a clear argument on how economic issues are now inextricably international, and for a socialist policy on a European scale.

In *Solidarity* 266, Dave Osler reported bookmakers offering shortened odds on the Respect candidates in Rotherham

(Yvonne Ridley) and Croydon North (Lee Jasper). Ridley got 8% and Jasper 3%. That was better than might be expected when Respect is practically defunct as a party, and left groups like SWP and SP have stopped backing it; but it was far from reviving Respect.

As Osler predicted, TUSC (the electoral front run by the SP in harness with the leadership of the rail union RMT, with some token involvement by SWP) did poorly: 1.2% in Rotherham and 1.6% in Middlesbrough.

In October 1969, the revolutionary socialist left started contesting parliamentary elections for the first time since the Neath by-election of 15 May 1945. (Trotskyists contested Neath as a protest against the Labour-Tory political truce which then still continued from wartime but would be broken in June for the run-up to the July 1945 general election.)

Frank Willis of the Socialist Labour League got 1.1% in the 1969 Swindon North by-election. The Communist Party, then still a force, got 1.3%. The SLL declared itself pleased, but obviously wasn't (it ran no candidates in the 1970 general election). The rest of the left thought the result despicable.

TUSC's score on 29 November was only marginally better than Willis's — on a much weaker programme than the CP's in 1969, and in an electorate much more volatile and open to voting for minority candidates than 1969's.

For TUSC people to claim such results as other than a damning setback would be foolish.

Leveson Report: the verdict

Press Watch

By Pat Murphy

With the publication of Lord Leveson's report, the debate on the behaviour of the British press has shifted focus. The question of whether and to what extent elements of the press abused their power and damaged innocent people is largely settled.

The public debate now is centred on whether the Leveson report proposes effective ways of preventing similar abuses happening again. Leveson found that the existing system for addressing press conduct, the Press Complaints Council, is useless and, in practice ignored by the very people who drew up its code of conduct. He proposes a new self-regulation body which is independent of serving editors, owners and government and whose role includes "promoting high standards".

The most contentious part of his report recommends that this body be backed by legislation, known as "statutory underpinning", which would be designed to assess whether the regulatory body was doing its job. Another key inclusion in his report is a conscience clause which would give journalists access to a whistle-blowing hotline.

CAMERON

Given the privilege of first reaction, David Cameron made it clear that he did not want to implement the full report. Aware that this was likely to be an unpopular stance, he framed the debate as one between freedom of the press and state control.

Labour, the Lib Dems and "Hacked Off" campaign all declared their support for the recommendations.

Although the matter of holding the press to account is a complex one, it is important to be clear that Cameron's attempt to grab some moral high ground here is cynical hypocrisy. He remains a slavish promoter of the interests of the very press barons Leveson seeks to monitor. He met with

them just before the report was published and will have been told in no uncertain terms that the price of implementing Leveson could well be a lot higher than that of rejecting or fudging it.

The Dowler family were right to remind him that, when he was forced to set up the Inquiry, he promised to implement its recommendations "unless they were bonkers". There have been lots of attempts to analyse the report's conclusions, but not even the rabid *Sun* has described them as "bonkers". Cameron will find it hard to get away with ignoring the proposal for independent regulation, and rightly so.

Whatever the weakness and flaws in Leveson, it is not serious to claim that it represents state control or anything close to it. There is also little compelling evidence that it would limit the freedom of journalists to investigate the powerful and expose corruption. It is noticeable that the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) came out in favour of the report, and that Nick Davies, the dogged and proudly independent journalist responsible for much of the phone-hacking stories, also responded favourably.

A less well-publicised recommendation is that the duty of government to protect the freedom of the press should be enshrined in law for the first time in the UK's history.

The attempt to polarise the post-Leveson debate around press freedom is, for the most part, misleading and confusing.

If implemented the report would establish a modest and

more public system for holding newspaper organisations accountable for their actions.

Shami Chakrabarti of Liberty (who was also an adviser to Leveson) found herself feted by the *Daily Mail* when she suggested that direct regulation route would breach the Human Rights Act... the same *Daily Mail* which regularly calls for the abolition of this piece of legislation.

Private Eye editor Ian Hislop claimed that all or most of the behaviour exposed in the hacking scandal was illegal in any case, implying that no more needs to be done than enforcing existing laws. In the privileged world he inhabits, Hislop doesn't trouble himself with an account of why this hasn't generally happened. He need do little more than ask why a couple like the parents of Milly Dowler didn't just take out a writ against News Corporation and do legal battle with as equals before the law? All of us, as has often been pointed out, are free to eat at the Ritz.

OWNERSHIP

The big question, however, is avoided by Leveson and all political parties. Only the NUJ, who broadly welcome Leveson, express disappointment that the report has nothing to say about ownership and diversity.

They are right. The real limitation on freedom of the press is that wealthy individuals or huge corporate interests own practically all newspapers. Even where the ownership is more independent there is a dependence on corporate advertising.

Regulation, even the beefed-up Leveson version, leaves untouched the control of information and news by a tiny self-interested minority in society. That minority itself needs regulation that ensures they have fairly accurate and reliable hard information about the world they rule.

But they need only as much as serves that end. What they absolutely don't want is a press that questions that world and their right to rule it. The workers movement does need the ability to hold the likes of Murdoch and the *Daily Mail* to account for their lies and smears.

More than that, though, we should campaign for plurality and democracy in the ownership and control of the printed media. Without that all talk of press freedom is relative and hollowed out.

Letters



Fascism is different

Jon D. White of the SPGB is right that socialists should be staunch advocates of freedom of political expression, organisation, and free speech in general — even for our political opponents.

We oppose state bans and official "censorship", even of fascist groups, but why should we be obliged to support publications controlled by our unions (student unions or trade unions) giving fascists publicity through interviews?

White's letter ("Wrong on free speech", *Solidarity* 266) misses the point about the unique character of fascism as a political form.

Our opposition to giving fascists a political platform or allowing them space to organise is not about "censorship", it is about understanding that violent hostility to democratic and labour movement organisation is built into fascism's political DNA.

It is not simply a particularly unpleasant form of right-wing politics, but a special political form which grows by

systematically eliminating the pockets of working-class and oppressed people's democracy — unions, LGBT organisation, Black organisation, etc. — carved out of capitalism. Any level of fascist organisation — even an interview in a student newspaper — represents an embryonic threat to ethnic minority people, LGBT people, and labour movement and socialist organisation.

There's a big difference between supporting anti-democratic bans and censorship and refusing to allow our campuses, workplaces, communities — or, in this case, our SU publications — being used as platforms for fascist organisation.

Daniel Randall, AWL North East London

Councils can block cuts

If Southampton's new Labour council fails to make cuts as required by the coalition government, then, says Mike Tucker (*Solidarity* 266), "commissioners will come in and run the council", and after that "the Conservatives could come back into power".

Under the Local Government Act 1999 s.15(6), Eric Pickles, as the minister, can personally or through "a person nominated by him" take over "a specified function of the authority" if he is satisfied that the council is failing to make "arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness".

The laws which used to open the way to councillors being

surcharged, suspended, or disqualified no longer hold since the relevant parts of the Localism Act 2011 came into force on 1 July 2012.

It would not be instant or easy, legally, for Pickles to impose commissioners. If the commissioners attempted harsher cuts than an elected council would make — with the councillors still in office and agitating loudly against the commissioners — then workers' and community anger against the cuts would double up with anger against the undemocratic imposition.

With even minimal leadership from the unions and councillors, a vast storm of protest could be aroused, deterring the government and rousing other Labour councils also to oppose cuts. If it is not worth trying to push back cuts in such favourable conditions, then it is hard to see when it would ever be worth taking the risk of fighting anything.

When arguing that they must make the cuts required by the coalition government, Labour councillors often say that "one council on its own" could achieve nothing.

In the first place, it's untrue. Under a more unfavourable legal regime, one small Labour council, Clay Cross, in the early 1970s forced by its defiance the repeal of the Housing Finance Act.

In the second place, it's a pass-the-parcel plea. Every Labour council says it can't defy the government because none of the others will. Every one uses all the others as an excuse, and is used by all the others as an excuse.

The answer is that several Labour councils — for example, all those which are now describing the imposed cuts as "abolishing local government as we know it" — should defy collectively. For a start, one should take the initiative.

Colin Foster, Islington

To raise wages, cut into profits

movement has traditionally counterposed the idea of a “living wage” — a wage on which workers can not simply scrape by, but live a decent life.

The KPMG research uses £7.20 (outside of London) and £8.55 (London) as its “living wage” figures. They are calculated based on cost-of-living assessments of expenses like housing and transport. But these are conservative figures. It is not much easier to support a family on £7.20 than it is on £6.19 (the current minimum wage rate), especially if you work in an industry or sector where your hours vary from week to week, as many low-paid workers do.

Research conducted by trade unions, such as the Industrial Workers of Great Britain and the Industrial Workers of the World, who have organised amongst cleaners and other low-paid workers in the capital, suggest that a real “living wage” figure is closer to £10 per hour. Taken at that level, the number of workers paid less than a living wage is vastly higher.

The low pay crisis is fed into by growing underemployment — workers who work fewer hours a week than they want. An Office of National Statistics report shows that over three million workers would work more hours each week if they were available.

CLEANERS

Low-paid workers, such as cleaners at John Lewis and the Société Générale bank, have faced unilateral cuts in their hours, meaning they are expected to complete the same amount of work, for the same below-living-wage rates of pay, in a smaller amount of time.

Despite facing poverty pay, cuts to hours, and rising living costs, those workers have organised inspiring fightbacks. John Lewis cleaners won pay increases and a commitment from management to negotiate towards a living wage, and cleaners in a variety of other industries have launched strikes and direct-action campaigns. Low-paid workers in other sectors — such as parking attendants at Camden council — have also built strike campaigns, recently voting for a five-day strike and, if that fails to yield results, to move to an all-out indefinite strike to win living wage.

KPMG are attempting to promote a “business case” for the living wage, and building a bourgeois political consensus around it which now includes the Labour leadership and even senior Tories like Boris Johnson (whose Greater London Assembly endorses the principle of the London Living Wage). The “business case” for living wages is of no concern to us, or only of concern to the extent that it is a reflection of working-class social pressure. For us, the living wage is not a matter of economics or of figures. It is a matter of political principle. Every penny we force bosses to pay us above the basic minimum they think they can get away with is a small blow for the hegemony of our interests against the hegemony of theirs.

Enforcing the social principle of living wages would, like the Factories Acts of the 1840s and 1850s which introduced the eight-hour day, or the creation of the National Health Service, represent what Marx called “the victory of a principle”, a victory of “the political economy of labour over the political economy of property”.

“Wages not peanuts”: rail cleaners strike for a living wage

Research by accountancy firm KPMG (of all people) has revealed that five million workers in Britain are paid less than a living wage.

24% of workers in Northern Ireland, and 23% in Wales, earn less than a living wage. 90% of bar staff and 85% of restaurant waiting staff earn less than a living wage, as do nearly 800,000 retail workers. As these are the jobs where many young people and working students are able to find work, young workers are overwhelmingly faced with poverty pay.

Capitalism needs to keep workers going. If we are too sick to keep turning up to work every day, capitalists can't make profits. As Karl Marx puts it in *Capital*: “The maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital.”

But our bosses just need to keep us going — and that's it. If they can get away with it, they will screw down our wages to the bare minimum necessary to keep us fit and healthy enough to return to work every day. In other words: “The capitalist may safely leave [reproduction] to the labourer's instincts of self-preservation and of propagation. All the capitalist cares for, is to reduce the labourer's individual consumption as far as possible to what is strictly necessary.”

The minimum wage, introduced by the Labour government in 1998, meant that employers weren't able to reduce wages below a certain amount. It was a step forward, but there is a huge gap between the minimum wage — the government-arbitrated minimum necessary to “reproduce” our labour from one day to the next — and a wage on which it is possible to live a decent standard of life, including spending on housing, transport, clothing, and leisure. The labour

Starbucks slashes workers' rights



Just days after it announced it would open talks with the UK government over paying more tax, coffee chain Starbucks revealed plans to cut paid breaks, sick leave, and maternity benefits for thousands of workers.

Staff at 750 stores have been told to sign new contracts on worse terms, with

some reporting that they were threatened with dismissal if they did not. Starbucks bosses claims the plans had been laid “over the summer”, and are not connected to the recent

scandal over its tax dodging.

Starbucks is a notoriously anti-union employer, but various radical organising initiatives have had success in forcing concessions from them. Unite (New Zealand) organised the world's first ever Starbucks strikes in 2006/2007, and succeeded in winning significant wage increases for baristas. Starbucks workers in Chile also organised a strike campaign in 2011, and baristas in New York formed a “Starbucks Workers Union” through the IWW in the mid-2000s. These campaigns, rather than approaches based on consumer boycotts, show how to fight.

Activists in the UK involved in initiatives like UK Uncut, which have highlighted Starbucks' tax avoidance, should now throw themselves into supporting Starbucks workers in fighting against this attack on their working conditions.

Help us raise £15,000



Money's tight for all of us at the moment. Particularly in the holiday season, most working-class people will be counting every penny.

If there is any money spare to donate, there's a lot of pressure to donate it to a more obviously “charitable” cause.

That pressure is understandable. No matter how committed you are to socialism, there's no denying that socialist revolution is

a long way off in this country, and that £10 donated to a homelessness charity or a food kitchen has a far greater chance of immediately improving the lives of some of the most downtrodden, alienated, and vulnerable people in capitalist society than £10 donated to a revolutionary newspaper.

But we are asking you to give to Workers' Liberty's fund appeal. Donating money to us is the “long-game” approach to solving social problems, but we believe our ideas can contribute to building a movement that can do more than put a sticking plaster on problems like homelessness — we believe the ideas of democratic working-class socialism can eradicate them forever.

Donate what you can to our fund appeal, and help us build the movement for socialism.

Help us raise £15,000 by May Day 2013. You can contribute in the following ways:

- Taking out a monthly standing order using the form below or at www.workersliberty.org/resources. Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.

- Making a donation by cheque, payable to “AWL”, or donating online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

- Organising a fundraising event.
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.
- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL. More information: 07796 690874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.



**Total raised so far:
£6,476**

We raised £625 this week in increased standing orders and a donation. Thanks to AWL Students, Ali, Becky, Lawrence, and Stuart.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

Account name:

Account no:

Sort code:

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

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20 (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

Syria: anti-Assad rebels on the offensive

By Dan Katz

The fight against Bashar Assad's one-party Baath state, which began in March 2011 and which had seemed locked in a bloody stalemate, may be tilting in the opposition's favour.

Major military gains by opposition militias have been made in the east and north of the country in the past two weeks. Last week surface-to-air missiles brought down a regime helicopter and, for the first time, a MiG fighter plane.

The West has refused to supply modern anti-aircraft weapons to the military opposition for fear that advanced technology may, in the future, be used against Western or Israeli targets. But weapons seized from regime military bases are now being used to make new gains.

The militias started as local self-defence brigades often shaped by former regime officers, but now have a more complex character. The mainstream Free Syrian Army units are more nationalist and more religiously moderate than the emerging jihadist groups. In Aleppo, for example, four large rebel organisations exist and cooperate: Liwa al-Fatah and the largest, Liwa al-Tahwid, are less overtly religious; Jabhat al-Nusra is jihadist and Ahrar al-Sham says it is Salafist.

MOTIVATE

The regime — a sectarian state based on the one-inten Alawite minority in Syria — is finding it increasingly difficult to motivate its own fighters; morale is low.

Although Syria has large armed forces, many of its troops are Sunni, and are considered unreliable, and have been kept isolated and unused. The regime has now conscripted all male Alawites aged between 18 and 50.

The political opposition, recently reconfigured into the National Coalition for Revolutionary Forces and the Syrian Opposition, is now effectively dominated by the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. With its allies, it has more than 50% of the Coalition's 60 ruling council seats. The Coalition and its backers in the Gulf, Europe and the US, are preparing to name the Prime Minister for a future transitional government. Riad Hijab, a longstanding leader of the Ba'ath party before he defected in August, may get the job.

Although the opposition is making gains it is still a long way from winning the war, and it is unclear what the political outcome will be. Syria is fragmenting along sectarian lines: tribes in the east, Kurds in the north east, Sunni rebels in Aleppo and Idlib and those loyal to the state on the coast and around the capital, Damascus.

Alison Baily, an analyst, suggests, "the most likely scenario is that the regime is ground down into a well-armed militia."

Savage fighting is taking place around Damascus. An opposition offensive in summer was brutally put down, but now the opposition is making new gains here, too. Last week the main airport was closed because of the fighting.

In desperation the regime cut off internet access for two days. The regime is now pounding dissident suburbs to the east of Damascus's city centre, using aircraft and helicopter gunships.

The state seems to be extensively helped by its imperialist backers, Russia and Iran. Hundreds of tonnes of banknotes have been flown in from Russia to prop up the economy.

Supplies of weapons come from Iran through Iraqi airspace, and hundreds of Iranian military advisors are working inside the country to prop up the dictatorship.

Egypt's workers

By Harry Glass

Egyptian workers and activists rose up in protest last week, after Muslim Brotherhood president Mohamed Mursi attempted to force through measures designed to strengthen the Islamists' grip on power.

Mursi used the prestige gained from brokering the Gaza ceasefire to issue a six-part decree giving himself sweeping new powers. These include awarding himself blanket legal immunity, blocking judicial challenges to the Islamist-dominated constituent assembly and appointing a special prosecutor with powers to lock up activists for six months. Mursi has specifically targeted protestors who halt production or block roads, and he has moved his supporters into the old state labour front ETUF to tighten the noose around workers' necks.

In response on 27 November, an estimated 200,000 people thronged Tahrir Square in Cairo for one of the largest demonstrations since the previous president Hosni Mubarak was overthrown in 2011. Both the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) and the Egyptian Democratic

Labour Congress (EDLC, which includes the Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services) have denounced Mursi's moves and called for mobilisations against the creeping theocratic dictatorship.

There were more large demonstrations in other cities. In Mahalla al-Kubra, the militant working-class district famed for its role in bringing down the last dictatorship, 20,000 workers called for an end to the Muslim Brotherhood's rule, chanting "The people demand the fall of the regime". As the demonstration reached the town centre square, protesters were attacked by members of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), who threw fireworks and missiles at them. In Alexandria and in Mansoura, the headquarters of the FJP were invaded and trashed.

Mursi's supporters have counter-mobilised, bussing in Islamists from the countryside. The Brotherhood and the Salafists in the constituent assembly responded by producing a hastily-drafted constitution last weekend, and Mursi's has scheduled a national referendum on 15 December to rubber-stamp it. There is nothing in the constitution for workers' rights, and plenty to undermine women's freedom and other democratic liberties. US academic Juan Cole argues that the constitution is "a big step toward the Iranization of Egypt, and very possibly a death knell for freedom of speech and freedom of conscience".

The warning is clear. The Egyptian working class movement is now fighting both for democratic rights and for its life as an independent social force. Our job is solidarity: we side with the workers against both the Islamists and remnants of the old regime.

The left and the Brotherhood

These developments in Egypt should force the "anti-imperialist", soft-on-political-Islam left to sober up. The Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt issued a statement on 22 November explaining why they are protesting Mursi's constitutional declaration.

The statement, "Workers of Egypt, rise up against the constitutional declaration and poverty!" stated: "Today, all the masks fell from Mohamed Mursi and his Muslim Brotherhood organisation, who trade in revolution, and for whom the revolution is nothing but a means to reach the seat of power. They and the remnants of the old regime are two sides of the same coin, which represents tyranny and enmity toward the people."

THREAT

"We say to Mursi: you and your organisation are the real threat to the revolution, as you embrace Mubarak's businessmen, run panting after loans from the IMF, trade in religion, threaten national unity and sell out the revolution."

"The Revolutionary Socialists call on the revolutionary people to save the revolution that has been stolen by an alliance between the Brotherhood and the remnants of Mubarak's regime. We call on people to come out into the streets with the slogans: bread, freedom, social justice."

The Revolutionary Socialists have drawn the class line between Mursi and the Egyptian working class, siding with the workers in Mahalla al-Kubra and calling for the downfall of Mursi. Their statement is a stunning rebuke to their previous strategy — inspired by the British SWP — of critical support for Mursi.

In *Socialist Worker* (2 June 2012), Phil Marfleet stated before the presidential election run-off that "A vote for Mursi is a vote against the legacy of Mubarak and for continuing change". He wrote: "Egyptians will be better off with Mursi as president and an unstable Brotherhood in parliament... Now it is time to put Mursi to the test."

After Mursi had won, editor Judith Orr (*SW*, 30 June) wrote: "The announcement that Mohamed Mursi from Muslim Brotherhood had won Egypt's presidential election was met with relief and celebrations across the country."

If the Mursi and the old regime are "two sides of the same coin", then it was wrong to call for a vote for Mursi last summer.

That was the AWL's view at the time and these events vindicate it. Clive Bradley (*Solidarity* 248, 6 June) wrote: "You have to be clear about what they [the Brotherhood] are, and whether they are the labour movement's allies. They are not. To call for a vote for them on the grounds that in some sense they 'represent the revolution' is to paint them as something they are not. In the long run or even sooner, it will make it harder to fight them."

Our leaflet, "Neither plague nor cholera!" (13 June) stated: "The Brotherhood [MB] is a right-wing, anti-working-class, religious party. Voting for it contradicts our basic policy of fighting for the independent working-class politics. Our job is not to prettify the MB, hold our noses and hope for the best.

"Our job is to organise those who want to fight. By advocating a vote for the Brothers the SWP/RS discredit themselves among the — numerous — opponents of both the old order and the MB already mobilised in Egypt."

Workers confront Mursi

Scenes from recent protests in Egypt, including a placard comparing Mursi to toppled dictator Mubarak. Can Egypt's workers make a new revolution against Mursi's neo-liberal Islamist government?

After the UN vote, fight for an independent Palestine!

By Daniel Randall

On Thursday 29 November, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to endorse Palestine's bid to gain "non-member observer state" status — a recognition of Palestine's de facto statehood, which entitles it to participate in UN debates and join international bodies such as the International Criminal Court.

138 countries supported the bid, with nine opposing it, including America and Israel. 41 nations, including Britain and Germany, abstained.

The bid was driven by Mahmoud Abbas, the PLO/Fatah president of the Palestinian Authority, which notionally governs in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Hamas, the Islamist party which rules in Gaza, eventually publicly supported the bid after initially wavering between indifference and hostility.

Photographs from the celebrations show both PLO/Fatah supporters and others waving Hamas flags — a significant fact in itself, given the hostility between the factions following Hamas' repression of Fatah in Gaza.

The vote cannot force Israel to withdraw from the West Bank, end settlement building, or end the siege of Gaza.

Indeed, in a direct act of retaliation, Israel authorised the building of 3,000 new settler homes in the West Bank on Friday 30 November, and on 3 December it seized \$120 million of Palestinian tax revenue. As Shimon Schiffer pointed out in Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, "even on the day after the new status, Abbas will not be able to leave Ramallah without the authorisation of the DCO [District Coordination Office, an administrative unit of the Israeli occupation] that controls the West Bank." Israeli troops are also reported to have killed two Gazans since the "ceasefire" began.

The UN vote will not change much immediately on the ground, and is largely symbolic. But it is an important symbol. It could break the deadlock in terms of serious negotiations around the national question, establishing an explicit international consensus that may pressurise Israel to resume serious negotiations about a two-state settlement.

Although America, Israel's major international ally, opposed the bid, it has condemned the new settlement building project. A statement from National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor said: "We believe these actions are counterproductive and make it harder to resume direct ne-

gotiations or achieve a two state solution." Other governments have taken a firmer line with Israel following the vote.

Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper reports that Britain, Sweden, and France had summoned their Israeli ambassadors to pass on official condemnation of the new building project.

Alistair Burt, the British Secretary of State for the Middle East and North Africa, said: "The UK deplores the recent Israeli government decision to build 3,000 housing units in the West Bank settlement, and to unfreeze development in the E1 bloc. This threatens the viability of the two state solution and we call on the Israeli government to reverse the decision."

Germany and Russia also issued condemnations, and *Ha'aretz* reports a "senior European diplomat" saying: "This time it won't just be a condemnation, there will be real action taken against Israel". Sky News reports that British government figures are considering proposing the suspension of EU trade agreements with Israel.

PRESSURE

The UN vote seems to have given some EU governments more confidence in putting diplomatic pressure on Israel. A shifting international consensus could encourage America to translate its words of condemnation into the actual exertion of some pressure.

The UN vote was greeted by jubilant celebrations in the West Bank, with Palestinians (including Hamas supporters) also taking to the streets to celebrate in Gaza. In a speech at the UN, Abbas referred to the vote as Palestine's "birth certificate".

All three major political elements in Israel/Palestine — the Israeli government, Hamas, and Fatah/PLO — are reactionary from a socialist point of view. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, himself a hard-line neo-liberal, is in an alliance with the racist, expansionist far-right party Israel Beiteynu (Israel Our Home), led by Avigdor Lieberman, and likely to win next year's elections.

Hamas is a clerical-fascist party with links to the Iranian theocracy (itself a regional-imperialist power). And Fatah/PLO is a corrupt and largely-discredited bourgeois nationalist elite.

In spite of all of this, the UN vote will give those on the ground in both Israel and occupied Palestine fighting for alternative politics a reference point around which to build a

movement. For Palestinians and internationalist Israelis, making the logic of the UN vote a reality is the obvious, immediately-implied political demand to unite around and pressure the Israeli state to concede.

Nominal statehood is not enough. A nominally independent Palestine that left the wider power imbalance intact would be a step forward, but would still leave the Palestine the subjugated neighbour of a militarily and economically superior Israel.

Genuine independence will come when Israel is forced to recognise an independent Palestine in contiguous territory, dismantle the settlements and evict settlers who refuse to live under Palestinian rule, and pay massive reparations to ensure the economic viability of a Palestinian state.

FRAMEWORK

All of that is a long way off. But the UN vote creates a framework in which it is more possible.

The bid is a compromise for the Palestinians, but it is a re-iteration of a compromise they made many years ago (most decisively in 1988, when the Palestine Liberation Organisation — the main umbrella body for radical nationalist groups — accepted Israel's right to exist and endorsed a two-states framework).

The existence of the state of Israel, and the existence of a significant Jewish population in historic Palestine, are largely the results of a historical tragedy for which the Palestinian people are not to blame.

Although there was some "colonial"-type Zionist settlement of Palestine, the bulk of Israel's founding population were not proto-imperialist settlers, but refugees from genocide with nowhere else to go (Britain and America having largely shut their doors). The way in which the state of Israel was established was criminally unjust, but to attempt to undo it by rewinding the film of history and expelling the Jewish (now Israeli-Jewish) population would be to pile another injustice on top of the first.

That is neither desirable nor practically possible; the UN vote is a ringing international message to Israel that the way to guarantee its own stability is to end its colonial oppression of the Palestinians and allow them the independence and self-determination they were promised in 1947, but which they were never granted.

Big oil versus Kazakh workers

By William O'Leary

In May 2011, thousands of workers in Kazakhstan's oil and gas industries struck against low pay and bosses' interference in trade union affairs. A government-backed campaign of strike-breaking, blacklisting and repression ended in the murder by the police of more than a dozen workers in December 2011. A recent Human Rights Watch report, *Striking Oil, Striking Workers: Violations of Labor Rights in Kazakhstan's Oil Sector*, based on interviews with oil workers and their supporters, lays bare the shocking details of this story.

Kazakhstan, the largest country in Central Asia, has, since the fall of Stalinism, systematically exploited its considerable reserves of oil and gas and integrated into the world-economy through co-operation with multi-national capital and foreign state-owned companies.

Although nominally a parliamentary republic, Kazakhstan has been governed continuously by President Nursultan Nazarbayev since independence from the Soviet Union. Nazarbayev was re-elected in April 2011 with an improbable 95.54% of the vote. He has made the transition from Communist Party bureaucrat to neoliberal oligarch with ease. According to one United Nations report, he is estimated to have transferred \$1 billion of oil wealth into his own private bank accounts, and his family controls many important businesses in Kazakhstan.

Oil is by far the largest source of government revenue and in 2010 it represented approximately 11.5% of the country's GDP. By producing an average of 1.6 million barrels of oil a day, Kazakhstan is now within the top 20 oil producers in the world and has potential to become one of the top five if it fully develops its three major oil fields.

By marketing itself as a stable and reliable place to invest, Kazakhstan has achieved a high level of economic growth, fuelled by considerable foreign direct investment (FDI) from the EU, the US, Russia and China.

Following a wave of strikes in the mining sector in the late 1980s an independent labour movement developed in Kazakhstan. By 1991, the Independent Trade Union Centre of Kazakhstan, now known as the Confederation of Free Unions of Kazakhstan (KSPK), was formed.

At the same time the old Soviet All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions was transformed into the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FPRK) and has retained close links with the government. It is still the largest trade union confederation in the country, but its membership has declined from around seven million in 1990 to two million today.

The KSPK too, is far from adequate. Its president, Sergei Belkin, elected in 2003, has been accused of keeping insufficient distance from the state. The report notes how "in February 2009, the KSPK, along with various pro-government political parties, including the president's Nur Otan party, signed a memorandum in which they agreed 'to cooperate during the global economic crisis' and lent the union's support to a moratorium on organising and holding rallies, marches, pickets, and protests."

Given these inadequacies many workers have taken to self-organisation; industrial disputes often take the form of wild-cat actions, two-to-three-hour warning strikes or hunger strikes. Since May 2009, repeated unsuccessful attempts have been made by trade union and workers' organisations to obtain government recognition for a new national cross-industry union, Zhanartu.

THE STRIKES

The report focuses on the strikes at three companies in particular: Ersai Caspian Contractor LLC, Karazhanbas-Munai JSC, and OzenMunaiGas.

Ersai is a joint venture between a subsidiary of Lancaster Group Kazakhstan, a huge holding company formed by oil magnate and Kazakh Minister for Environmental Protection Nurlan Kapparov, and the Italian company Saipem International BV.

In March 2011, an independent trade union, Karakiya, submitted a list of grievances to management at an Ersai service

Summer 2011: Kazakh oil workers on strike

yard in the small town of Kuryk in western Kazakhstan after the company placed restrictions on a union leader's access to company territory. The workers also demanded higher wages. Union members who signed the demands were harassed by Ersai's personnel and security departments and threatened with dismissal unless they denied participation in the meeting which drew up the demands.

In mid-May, after failed attempts to negotiate with Ersai management, workers supporting Karakiya's demands went on strike. "A local court found the strike at Ersai Caspian Contractor illegal on grounds that strikes are prohibited at 'hazardous production facilities,'" the company attempted to break the strike by closing access to the yard, forcing workers who resided there on shift to sleep outside and go without access to showers and toilet facilities. In June, the court temporarily arrested five members of the strike committee and suspended Karakiya for six months for holding an "illegal" strike.

KarazhanbasMunai JSC is jointly owned by China's state-owned CITIC Group and the KazMunai Gas Exploration and Production Company, itself controlled by Kazakhstan's state oil and gas company.

In January 2011, the established procedures between management and the Karazhanbas union broke when one of the union's lawyers, an independent labour activist, was excluded from the arbitration structures considering the workers' demands for higher wages.

A week later, union activists were beaten up by a group of men in an attempt to intimidate the workers from participation in trade union activities. Losing faith in the chairperson of Karazhanbas to represent them, the workers called a general assembly and elected a new representative. Management denied them the use of the assembly hall for their meeting, again prevented the union lawyer from meeting with members at the oil field, and refused to recognise the newly-elected chairperson.

This prompted a partial hunger-strike in early May, followed quickly by strike action. The reaction from management was heavy-handed.

One worker told HRW: "The prosecutor was there, all of the [company] management was there, the police, and [KarazhanbasMunai] security was there, with their truncheons.... [the police] came out there with automatic weapons and pistols. We had a peaceful strike... and they came out with automatic weapons. We're not [criminals], not bandits."

The workers were fined and, in a highly dubious trial, Karazhanbas union lawyer Natalia Sokolova was put up on criminal charges of "'inciting social discord' for speaking to

workers about wage disparity". She was sentenced to six years in prison, though later released.

The third company involved in suppressing labour disputes was OzenMunaiGas, another subsidiary of KazMunai Gas Exploration Production Company, in the remote western town of Zhanaozen.

In May 2011 around two dozen workers staged a hunger strike over declining wages, after being told by management that their demands were "unfounded and illegitimate".

Then several thousand workers downed tools on 26 May. While around 7,800 of the 9,000 workers at the plant are part of the company union, this strike took place outside of its structures. Local courts ruled the strike to be illegal. The hunger-strikers were fined and one worker, Akzhanat Aminov, was given a one year suspended sentence for allegedly organising the strike by phone.

POLICE VIOLENCE

In early July, the police violently dispersed those on strike and detained many of those on hunger strike.

One worker, Kanat K., told how at "around 4 am, I was sleeping in the car, a hatchback. My legs were [hanging out over] the bumper. And then, suddenly, there was lots of noise. I opened my eyes and the OMON [riot police] were beating me with night sticks... Then [they] sat on me, twisted my arms, and loaded me into the bus... We sat down [on the bus], and didn't raise our heads."

Many other workers reported how, during the strike, they and their relatives "experienced various acts of violence, threats, and harassment", including detention and shot-term administrative arrests on spurious grounds.

On 16 December 16, Kazakhstan's Independence Day, clashes broke out in Zhanaozen's central square between the police and protesters, including striking oil workers and members of opposition groups, when the security forces attempted to clear the square to make way for celebrations.

One of the oil workers describes what happened next: "About an hour [after the clashes started], about 50 or 60 police [appeared] ... I saw that they're shooting. I thought they were blanks, or ... rubber bullets... But no, I saw that they're not blanks, not rubber bullets, but live cartridges. I looked around and a guy had been hit in the leg. He screamed. There was a man near him, an older man who was disabled. They grabbed him and hit him with truncheons [dubinki]. Before my eyes, they shot a guy. He died.... They shot at passersby."

Local police and government forces killed at least a dozen and wounded scores more. Other estimates from civil society groups and individuals put the toll of those murdered and injured much higher.

The next day, the authorities imposed a state of emergency in Zhanaozen, cutting off telecommunications and several websites, including Twitter, across the country for two weeks. This was followed by "arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and torture of detainees in custody, and extortion of Zhanaozen residents by police officers". The state of emergency was later extended to the end of January, meaning that residents of the town were unable to vote in the parliamentary elections.

Arrests continued into the new year, using the vague charge of "inciting social discord" against opposition activists and workers. In February 2012, the same charge was used against six oil workers, including leaders of the OzenMunaiGas strike. This was followed by the arrest and trial of thirty-seven activists, including eighteen oil workers, in June 2012, thirteen of whom were sentenced for up to seven years.

The government of Kazakhstan, which in 2011 hired Tony Blair to advise on policy issues, acted, in collusion with oil bosses, to contravene international standards of labour and human rights, including the rights of collective bargaining, freedom of assembly and the right to strike.

Damning, too, is the silence from Kazakhstan's key international partners, the UK, the US, Germany, China and Russia. For capitalists and their governments, profit comes first; callous indifference to the rights and the lives of Kazakh oil workers is routine; and brutal state violence is the standby sanction for all workers who dare to fight.

How “Third Camp” socialists developed their assessments Facing up to Stalin’s strength

In 1940 the US Trotskyist movement split, primarily over its attitude to the 1939-40 Russian invasion of Finland. The split would prove far-reaching.

The minority, led by Max Shachtman, which denounced Russia’s war in Finland as reactionary, soon moved to reject the idea that Stalinist Russia was any sort of workers’ state, and develop policy for a working-class “Third Camp” to confront both capitalism and Stalinism.

The majority stuck to the formula that the Stalinist USSR was a “degenerated workers’ state”, and over the next decade was dragged by its adherence to that formula into claiming that Stalinism had created new “workers’ states” (though “deformed” ones) across vast areas of the world.

The “Third Camp” tradition faded in the 1960s, but its ideas are more and more relevant in a world where the old majority views would commit revolutionary socialists to the idea that North Korea and Cuba are the world’s last bulwarks of (“deformed”) workers’ rule.

Mike Wood has spent some years researching the evolution of the Workers Party, the group formed by Shachtman and his comrades after the 1940 split. This is the first of a series of articles reporting the results of his research.

Between 1941 and 1946 the internal life of the Workers Party was dominated by a debate between the majority and a minority led by C L R James (who also used the pen-name JR Johnson).

Trotsky’s estimate had been that capitalism was in a condition of hopeless collapse, and that the Second World War would end with revolutions, as the First World War had done, or fascist-type counter-revolutions. The Transitional Program of the Fourth International, *The Death Agony of Capitalism* (1938), had been written with that in mind.

In the first few years of its existence the Workers Party accepted that perspective. By early 1943 the tide of war was shifting and the possible shape of its end was emerging. The USSR had gone on the offensive in the Battle of Stalingrad; the USA had scored victories in the Pacific since the battle of Midway in June 1942; the British army was pushing back German troops in North Africa; and in Yugoslavia the Titoist Partisans had begun to reconquer some areas from the Nazis (Republic of Bihac, November 1942).

The Workers Party began to reassess. Over time the majority decided that socialist revolution was not an immediate possibility. National and democratic revolution, against the old colonial powers, German fascism, or the Soviet Union, was first on the order of the day. Out of that might emerge socialist revolution, but only when the working-class movement, shattered by fascism and Stalinism, had had time to regroup and rearm.

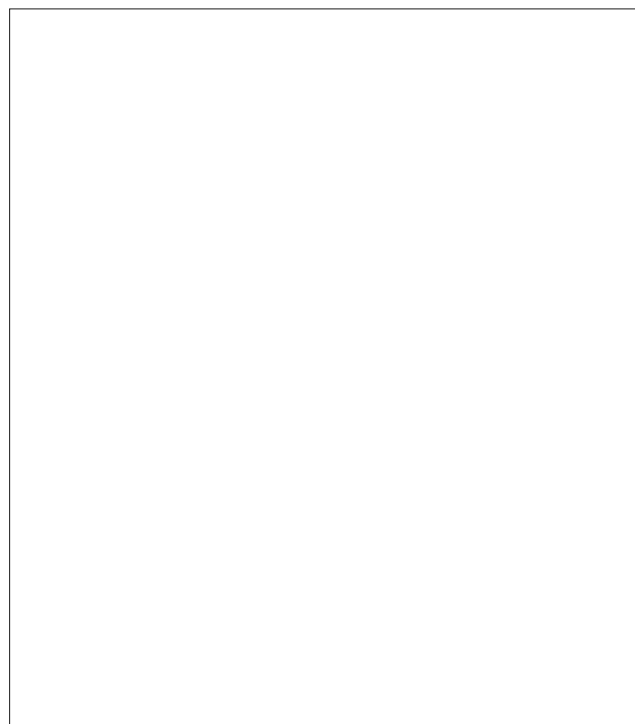
In early 1943 the WP National Committee passed a motion that argued:

“Between the present day and the day the masses rise up against the beneficiaries of the war, a considerable period of time will in all probability elapse... This being so, the most important fact to record in the world today is the yearnings of the vast majority of the peoples of this globe that may be summed up in the phrase: national independence, national freedom from foreign rule and oppression.” [emphasis in original]

This resolution had in mind national struggles in Europe and anti-colonial struggles elsewhere.

Shachtman later wrote: “this resolution, more than any other political document of our movement in years, is a collective product of the leadership.” Amendments had been submitted by: “Ernie [Erber], Joe [Carter], Al [Glotzer], Manny [Garrett], Dave [Ernest McKinney] and a number of others, including Allen [Martin Abern]”.

The 1940 majority of the Trotskyists, those who had argued along with Trotsky that Russia could not quite be opposed in Finland, were organised in the SWP (Socialist Workers Party). The SWP responded that talk of national liberation was merely sidelining the proletariat into fighting for bourgeois goals. Its stance was sustained by self-delusion about the



C L R James led a minority group inside the Workers’ Party

Russian army being underneath it all “Trotsky’s Red Army”, and about the allegedly proletarian “class meaning of the Soviet victories”. (The SWP would sober up a bit from that self-delusion in 1946-7, before slipping back into gross self-delusions about Stalinism after 1948).

Inside the WP, in April 1943 C L R James argued that the epoch was one of revolution and that the first slogan should be a Socialist United States of Europe. Even though the working class had been atomised, the situation was revolutionary: “the more reactionary the steps imperialism takes, the greater the degradation it imposes upon Europe, the more concrete will become the slogan of the Socialist United States of Europe.” Other members of the Johnson faction described the NC position as “revisionist”.

James agreed with the WP majority that the USSR was an exploitative class society, not a workers’ state; but he called it “state capitalist”, and in his version that meant it was the furthest-developed version of a capitalism crashing into inevitable collapse worldwide.

Al Glotzer, a collaborator of Shachtman since the 1920s, replied that James’ proposals were “unreal”. James was correct, Glotzer argued, in saying that the objective conditions were ripe for socialism; but James had ignored the subjective factor, i.e. the state of the working class movements of Europe. The task of revolutionary socialists was to rebuild the working-class movement defeated and dismantled by fascism and Stalinism. That required engaging in the movements for national liberation and democracy.

SPONTANEOUS REVOLUTION

At the core, James had a spontaneous conception of revolution — one of revolution as an automatic product of capitalist collapse, rather than a conscious effort by an organised and politically-aware working class.

James in turn said that the NC’s argument that socialism could only be achieved if a revolutionary party was first built was a “fantastic proposition”. Far from putting back the revolution Hitler had advanced it by heightening the internal contradictions of capitalism. “Today, not a year after the NC resolution [of 1943], all occupied Europe is poised for revolution.” Glotzer’s reply was suitably titled “Politics in the Stratosphere”.

Glotzer accused James of “wishful thinking”; of analysing the situation only from the “abstract historical plane”; of an

ultra-left view whereby the more degradation capitalism forces on the working class the more revolutionary the situation becomes.

In the WP’s magazine in September 1945 Shachtman, as editor, acknowledged that the WP had been wrong before the Second World War to argue the war could only end with socialist revolution or catastrophic counter-revolution. They had underestimated the strength of both the US and the USSR as imperialist powers.

Trotsky had claimed that the Second World War would destroy the Stalinist state either by capitalist overthrow or a new working-class revolution. However, the war had left the USSR stronger than ever, without the reintroduction of private property:

“Stalinist Russia remains in existence — certainly not weaker in world politics than before the war! No fundamental or even serious social change has occurred there, not change in the economic foundations or social structure — at least none that anyone has yet been able to point to and name and weigh. Property remains nationalised; the monopoly of foreign trade is more or less intact.”

The Soviet Union was pushing through nationalisations of property in the states which it now controlled in Eastern Europe. Stalinism was dynamically spreading as a social system rather than collapsing under the pressures of capitalism.

This assessment marked a large shift from what Shachtman had argued at the end of 1940 and in 1941, when he had first shifted from the view which he, along with Trotsky, had argued for many years: that the USSR, despite the Stalinist counter-revolution, and despite the need for a new working-class revolution there, was a “degenerated workers’ state”.

When he first proposed that the USSR was neither capitalist nor socialist, but a new type of exploitative society in which a collectivised economy was controlled by a bureaucratic dictatorship (“bureaucratic collectivism”), Shachtman still accepted a great deal of Trotsky’s analysis of the USSR. He maintained that the USSR was progressive compared to capitalism and under certain circumstances (though not those of World War Two) socialists should side with it in war with a capitalist state.

Joe Carter, another WP member, also described the USSR as “bureaucratic collectivist”, but saw it as a step backwards from capitalism. Shachtman agreed with Trotsky that the Soviet state was an isolated historical aberration, on the verge of collapsing into either a workers’ state or a capitalist state. Carter believed the new form of class society had more stability.

At the 1941 WP Convention Shachtman’s variant became the official position of the Workers Party on the nature of the USSR.

SHIFT

By the late 1940s Shachtman’s views had shifted. He was arguing that bureaucratic collectivism could survive and expand as a relatively stable class society. By 1947 he followed Carter in describing bureaucratic collectivism as a new “barbarism”, akin to fascism.

The shift was clear, but not debated much, directly, over the intervening period. Until their split from the WP in 1947 the James/ Johnson faction dominated discussion in the WP. For most party members outside of the Johnson faction the differences between Shachtman and Carter, seemingly matters of high theory, took a back seat to the dispute with James.

Another factor was that the 1941 debate between Shachtman and Carter had been bitter, and no-one wanted to renew the conflict without pressing need. At the 1946 WP Convention the successful international resolution, supported by Shachtman, contained the following statement:

“The resolution on the Russian question adopted by our party in 1941 deliberately ‘left the door open’ with regard to

the possibility of again raising the slogan of defence of Russia... The party took the view that in examining a new social phenomenon that was still in the early process of formation, namely, bureaucratic collectivism... it did not have the right as a scientific Marxian organisation to set forth its position categorically on all aspects of the question of Stalinism and for all time... What is before us concretely is the development of Stalinist Russia as a fully fledged reactionary empire... In face of this reality, the Workers Party declares flatly that all talk of defence of Russian imperialism... is reactionary talk”.

Actually, in 1941 Shachtman had argued that nationalised property was inherently more progressive than private property and that if war were centrally defined by a threat to the nationalised property of the Soviet Union, then socialists should call for the defence of the Soviet Union in that war. It is not clear whether in 1946 Shachtman and his followers still accepted the 1941 analysis. Those who had agreed with Carter in 1941 (Carter himself was on his way out of politics by then) submitted a statement to the 1946 Convention which read:

PLANE

“The 1941 resolution founded its ‘open door’ conclusion on a particular analysis of the Russian state which still remains in the resolution — an analysis which includes the concept that Russian bureaucratic collectivism, relatively speaking, is, in the words of the resolution, ‘a historically more progressive plane’ as compared with the capitalist world...”

“It also remarks in passing that the 1941 thesis ‘has otherwise been confirmed so emphatically.’ Naturally we do not consider this parenthetical remark an endorsement by the convention of the disputed line.”

This statement accused Shachtman of adopting Carter’s conclusions without honestly squaring the different analyses involved. Shachtman’s response was a statement of his own that unfortunately clarified little:

“I no more share the point of view put forward by Carter in his resolution of 1941 than I did at that time... I do not consider that what is contained in the International Resolution, as far as I am concerned, is a going over to the position of the Carter resolution.”

Perhaps Shachtman’s reluctance to openly admit his shift was because he’d previously argued that Carter’s position

was essentially pro-capitalist and would lead to the degeneration of the WP as a revolutionary party. Associating himself with a position he had denounced in such terms was possibly too much for Shachtman to accomplish openly. The exact reasons for this rather peculiar approach to the debate on such a key question can only be speculated on.

In 1941 Shachtman largely agreed with Trotsky that the USSR was a brief and accidental aberration, not a stable social system. He also agreed with Trotsky that as a result of this it would not survive the Second World War. As he analysed events, stage by stage, his views had clearly shifted by 1945.

He attacked the orthodox Trotskyists who still clung to Trotsky’s formula of the degenerated workers’ state after the end of the Second World War. Trotsky had said the USSR would not survive the war. Shachtman took apart with relish SWP leader James P Cannon’s statement that: “we disagree with some people who carelessly think that the war is over. The war has only passed through one stage.” Shachtman’s response was:

“What stage? The stage of armed, military struggle, the stage which twice-harebrained, careless thinkers have up to now called the stage of ‘war’, but which must henceforward be called, among the careful thinkers of the SWP, by the simple name of ‘one stage’. Into what stage has it passed? Into the stage of the suspension of armed, military struggle, the stage which the thrice-ridiculous careless thinkers have up to now call the stage of ‘peace’.”

In 1946 Hal Draper suggested incorporating more explicitly into the WP’s documents ideas contained in “The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International” — the founding document of the Fourth International, from 1938. Its ideas were still relevant and James should not be seen as their sole defender. Manny Garrett replied for the PC that the 1938 theses had been simply proven incorrect, and their omission from the majority’s document was deliberate.

It is frustrating for a historian studying the development of the Workers Party that so many of the crucial debates in which its ideas on Stalinism and its place in history were in fact developed mention those ideas only tangentially. There was little debate explicitly about the theory of bureaucratic collectivism in the 1940s WP.

Thus in May 1946 Stanley Plastrik wrote:

“I must say that this exclusive, or near exclusive, concern

Shachtman’s views on the USSR shifted as World War Two developed

with Johnson is regrettable and a great disappointment... Many comrades, like myself, have recently come back from a long absence in the army. Many problems puzzled us about the party and its politics. Have they been answered? At best they have been briefly touched upon or raised. Instead the whole atmosphere has been dominated, the whole discussion cornered, by Johnson.”

Top of Plastrik’s list of questions that had not been discussed was the nature of Stalinist Russia. Over 500 pages of Internal Bulletins were issued by the WP in the run up to the crucial 1946 Convention, with the discussion almost entirely focussed on the dispute between James and the majority.

By accepting the idea that there would be a “democratic interlude” after World War Two, the WP shifted from Trotsky’s view of September 1939, plausible enough at the time, that: “The disintegration of capitalism has reached extreme limits, likewise the disintegration of the old ruling class. The further existence of this system is impossible”.

It registered that the USSR had survived the war intact and indeed strengthened, and so whatever system existed there was not as much of a brief aberration as previously thought.

Stalinism was an exploitative class society of some viability and durability, at least a short-term alternative to capitalism though not a progressive one, and not a freakish society about to collapse back into capitalism in the short term.

The internationalist at a time of war

Our Movement

By Micháel MacEoin



Martin Morat, also known as Paul Widelin, was a German-born Trotskyist who spearheaded efforts to form revolutionary cells within the Nazi-occupied Belgium by fraternising with German soldiers.

Widelin was born in Germany in 1913 and became an activist at the age of 15 in Hashomer Hatzair, a socialist-Zionist youth movement. As a Jew and a sympathiser with the German Communist Party, Widelin was an obvious target for the Gestapo after the Nazis came to power in Germany. He emigrated to Belgium.

In Belgium he was won over to Trotskyism. He soon became a member of the European Executive Committee of the Trotskyists’ international organisation (the Fourth International).

When the war broke out he took on special responsibility for organising fraternisation between French and Belgian workers and the occupying Nazi forces. In May 1943, Widelin was sent to work with the Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste in Paris and also led the German Trotskyist group in the French capital.

By and large, social democrats and, following the German occupation of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Stalinists, took the view that the Second World War was a struggle between the forces of “democracy” and fascism. Accordingly, the French Communist Party (PCF) denounced all German soldiers as Nazis and sanctioned acts of terrorism against individual members of the German army. The Trotskyists’ pol-

icy, by contrast, saw the war as a clash between rival imperialisms.

As George Breitman, writing in the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) paper, *Militant*, wrote: “They did not unite with the agents of Allied capitalism around the nationalist slogan of ‘Death to the Boche!’ — as the Stalinists and ‘Socialists’ did. On the contrary, Widelin and his co-workers in all countries sought to unite the masses of the occupied countries with the German soldiers in the occupying armies in a joint struggle against their common oppressors. Fraternisation was their method, for they knew that only through fraternisation could the struggle against Hitlerism have a successful revolutionary outcome. As a consequence, the Gestapo placed a higher price on the head of Widelin than it

did on many an Allied general.”

Widelin produced a special newspaper, *Arbeiter und Soldat* (*Worker and Soldier*), aimed at German soldiers. According to Breitman, “to be caught with a copy of this paper meant horrible torture and certain death. Yet it circulated from France, where it was printed in the underground, all the way back through Belgium into Germany itself... Copies made their way to the distant German garrisons in Italy.”

The paper began to appear in July 1943 and, although temporarily suppressed by the Gestapo, re-appeared again for a few months after April 1944 as an organ of the German section of the Fourth International.

Widelin helped create a cell of German soldiers in Brest. So worried were the Nazi authorities that when the Gestapo discovered a meeting of the cell in 1943, seventeen German soldiers and a French Trotskyist, Robert Cruau, were shot.

In July 1944 Widelin, along with a comrade, Marguerite Baget, was arrested by the French Special Brigades, the collaborationist police force responsible for tracking down “internal enemies”. After being tortured, he was handed over to the Gestapo and murdered on 22 July.

In a testament to his internationalism, and that of the Trotskyist movement during the war, Baget wrote in 1946: “What a symbol — the German Widelin tortured and killed by the French-German Gestapo.”

Workers’ Liberty 3/20: Trotskyism in occupied France. The Trotskyist paper *Arbeiter und Soldat*, 1943-44. www.workersliberty.org/node/10709

Rail cleaners' national strike

By Darren Bedford

Cleaners in the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT) have struck on six contracts, in the widest coordination of cleaners' strike action in recent labour movement history.

ISS cleaners on London Underground and East Coast mainline, Churchill cleaners on Tyne & Wear Metro, Initial cleaners on London Underground, and Carlisle cleaners on the Docklands Light Railways and First TransPennine Express have struck to win living wages and equal terms and conditions. ISS cleaners on London Midland had been due to strike, but suspended their action after the employer more than doubled their pay offer.

On many contracts, cleaning companies were re-

ported to be exploiting legal loopholes to allow them to use agency workers to minimise the impact of the strike. On some services, bosses took on two agency workers to cover the work of every one striker, at significant expense to themselves.

DESPERATE

So desperate are they to make strikes appear ineffective that they are prepared to spend large amounts of money to hire extra staff.

The RMT now plans a lobby of Parliament on 11 December, with more strikes — potentially involving more cleaners from other train companies and services, including Churchill cleaners on Arriva Trains Wales and Vinci cleaners on London Underground — being discussed

for the new year.

Elsewhere in London, University of London cleaners involved in the the "3 Cosas" ("3 Causes" — sick pay, pensions, and holiday entitlement) campaign held a noisy protest at the university's prestigious "Foundation Day" event on 28 November, while members of the Industrial Workers of Great Britain who work as cleaners at the Barbican concert venue in the City of London held a picket on Saturday 24 November, demanding living wages and an end to management bullying.

Workers' Liberty members supported picket lines and distributed AWL's Cleaners' Fight-back bulletin, arguing for rank-and-file coordination between cleaners' disputes in different industries.

Teachers' rank-and-file conference

By Patrick Murphy, NUT Executive (pc)

The conference of the Local Associations Network, a rank-and-file network within the National Union of Teachers (NUT), takes place on 8 December.

It will focus heavily on the progress made so far in the NUT's joint action short of strike action with NASUWT. The opening plenary will hear from school reps at the sharp end of the battle to fight excessive workload, observation and micro-management. The NUT reps from Stratford Academy in Newham, Deptford Green in Lewisham and Bishop Challoner in East London will set the scene for an assessment of the action with accounts of how their willingness to escalate to strike action has won improvement for members.

Another likely spark for further national strike action by teachers will be the imminent announcement by Michael Gove on teachers' pay. He is due to respond to the School Teachers' Review Body Report and there is every chance he will propose some version of regional

pay and an extension of performance-related pay. A special session at the conference will outline the likely proposals and consider how an industrial action response can be mobilised which learns from the weaknesses of the pensions campaign.

Finally the conference will see a session on the future of the union in the light of the growth of academies and the attack on facilities time.

LAY-LED

There is a consensus in the NUT that it should remain a lay-led union with local negotiations controlled by elected local teachers released from the job.

The existing systems for delivering this are, however, under relentless attack. Ensuring we have an effective union led by members means more rank-and-file activity, more democracy and a greater focus on workplace reps. Crucially it also poses the question of one union for all school workers.

Bargaining across thousands of workplaces is difficult enough without the problem of workers being in as many as six separate unions.

Ford fight

A union rep in the Ford Transit Van plant in Southampton threatened with closure spoke to *Solidarity*.

Our position is to oppose the closure. There was never any kind of discussion around it — it was just announced. We want to fight to stop it.

The mood in the plant is strange. Everyone's very up and down, and there a lot of ongoing discussions and meetings.

Some of the workers employed by the contractors are talking about balloting for industrial action, but that'll be around the demand for equal severance packages rather than against the closure. That's the wrong reason, in my view. Workers should be uniting around a campaign to keep the plant open.

We have been a little slow off the mark. The first day the closure was announced, we should have walked out and been demonstrating outside the plant.

MASS

Once we have more information from management we'll move to mass members' meetings.

In hindsight that should have happened already, but at least now we can go to members with more information.

In our discussions about how the plant might be kept open, we've talked about government intervention and potential public ownership. We think the government has a responsibility here; it helped Ford secure the EU loan that has expanded the work in Turkey, where our work is set to be sent. Therefore we think the government needs to intervene to ensure that loan doesn't mean workers here are sidelined and left unemployed.

Ford is offering handsome severance packages but that money won't last long when you're out of work. It'll come down to how hard we want to fight.

Civil servants protest

By Ollie Moore

Civil servants held protest meetings and rallies around the country on Friday 30 November as part of a Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) campaign against government attacks on terms and conditions.

The 10 December PCS National Executive will discuss a ballot for national action in the new year, but the Department for Work and Pensions Group Executive within PCS has already agreed to

ballot for a strike. The ballot begins on 12 December, with a strike planned for 21 January if a "yes" vote is secured. Workers at the Seaham Pensions Centre, near Sunderland, which processes pensions credit claims, are also balloting for a strike over holiday-season working, which could take place on 31 December.

Around 60,000 civil service jobs have been cut since the 2010 election. The latest threatened cuts include reductions to parental leave and annual leave. PCS also reiterated

its opposition to the public sector pay freeze and recent pension reforms. The December meeting of the PCS Executive is expected to discuss a timetable for an industrial action ballot. AWL members in the civil service have argued that a plodding timetable of "days of action", followed by incidental one-day strikes, will not be enough to beat the government.

Sustained strikes in strategic areas — financed by strike pay — will be necessary to force concessions from the Tories.

Unity against fire cuts

By Darren Bedford

The scale of cuts to the fire service across London may be almost twice as bad as previously feared.

A new "pre-consultation draft" from the London Fire Brigade proposes the closure of 31 fire stations across London, the removal of 36 fire engines from service, and the axing of hundreds of jobs.

The Fire Brigades Union held a lobby of Parliament over the issue on 7 November, and local campaigns have begun to emerge in

areas with stations threatened with closure. A meeting on Monday 3 December at Goldsmiths University brought together local campaigners fighting the closure of stations in New Cross, Peckham, and Woolwich.

It was also attended by workers and community activists resisting the closure of A&E and maternity services at Lewisham Hospital.

• Online petition against fire service cuts — bit.ly/nl0nMY

More industrial news online

● Pret union organiser awaits appeal verdict — bit.ly/Yuk71K

● London bus drivers strike — bit.ly/Yuk71K

● More on NUT rank-and-file conference — tinyurl.com/lanconf

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Stop bosses' licence for unsafe workplaces!

If you are injured at work, and your boss has broken relevant health and safety regulations, then you can sue and win compensation. Soon you won't be able to, or you may not be able.

New legislation is now already halfway through the House of Lords, propelled not by a Bullingdon Club Tory but by the allegedly saintly Lib Dem Vince Cable.

It opens the way for the boss to plead either that your injury was not a *foreseeable* result of his breach of regulations, or that it was beyond "*reasonable practicability*" for him to obey the regulations strictly.

You will have to show not only that the boss broke the regulations, but that your injury arose specifically from the boss being "*negligent*" about the regu-

lations.

In the House of Commons Labour opposed the new clause — section 61 of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill — but lost the vote. Now some trade unions have picked up on it. *Solidarity* found out from publicity within the rail union RMT.

It is not too late to stop the legal changes, if unions and the Labour Party mobilise.

The health and safety regulations remain. The bosses' duty in *criminal law* to observe those regulations remains. But the understaffed Health and Safety Executive brings very few criminal cases. It brings about 1000 a year, while there are 78,000 legal cases a year of workers seeking civil redress for injuries at work, i.e. not trying to get the boss ruled criminally guilty "beyond

reasonable doubt", but to get compensation from the boss on a judgement of "balance of probabilities".

Section 61 of the new Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill does not directly change the law on suing your boss over his breach of safety regulations.

REGULATIONS

It empowers the government minister to make regulations about regulations, i.e. to set out rules saying when you can claim compensation for your boss breaching health and safety regulations.

Guidance published by the government says that the regulations will allow for claiming compensation only "where an employer has been shown to be negligent".

A junior minister told Parliament: "those [bosses]

who have taken all reasonable precautions cannot be prosecuted for a technical breach". So a boss can plead that, even though a measure would reduce risks of workplace injury, he should be excused doing it because its cost is "grossly disproportionate" to the reduction in risk.

Labour lawyers Thompsons say this change would take legal protection against workplace injuries back to what it was before 1898.

The change can be fought if unions mobilise to compel the Government not to bring section 61 into force, or to make new regulations without the planned loopholes; and if unions insist that Labour commit itself publicly to closing any loopholes which are introduced.

Lewisham closure fight: a hospital worker speaks out

Anita Downs, a nurse at Lewisham Hospital, spoke at a big public meeting in Lewisham on 28 November, four days after the 15,000-strong demonstration against the threat to the hospital.

If the A&E [accident and emergency] closes, then the hospital as we know it will cease to exist.

Health workers, users and patient groups across the country will be watching the Lewisham campaign and taking hope and inspiration from it.

I want to raise with you tonight a question that has been raised with me dozens and dozens of times during the march and in the hospital: are petitions and meetings and marches enough to stop the Tories and Matthew Kershaw [the Trust Special Administrator put in after South London Healthcare Trust went bust because of its high PFI payments]? What else can we do?

We need to understand the nature of this attack.

The Tories are trying to sell us the idea that the cuts are "common sense". There's not enough money, so cuts have to be made.

There is enough money, more than enough. It's just in the wrong hands.

And never mistake "common sense" for "good sense". Good sense is a publicly owned and publicly accountable NHS. We should wholly reject Tory common sense.

But Cameron is picking up where Thatcher left off. And let's not forget New Labour went further on PFI than the Tory John Major could have dreamt of.

My plea to everyone here tonight and everyone who supports our campaign is to plan and prepare to defend our hospital and services, like the Tories have planned and prepared to decimate them.

We have to harness the passion of our supporters and we have to plan and prepare for a battle that most likely cannot be won by marches and petitions alone. We have to do that in only a few months.

Each and every one of us needs to be talking and convincing our friends, neighbours, colleagues and fellow trade unionists to get involved.

In the hospital we need to get different sections of the staff talking to each other about what we can do. Joint trade union committees, workers' action committees, need to be established.

There need to be a number of different strands to the united campaign that absolutely, resolutely refuses to accept closure in any form.

We have to do whatever is necessary to make this campaign victorious and leave a legacy not just for the people of Lewisham but for people all over the country. No to closure!

McDonalds workers join America's revolt of the low-paid

By Ira Berkovic

Fast food workers in New York have followed the example set by Walmart workers and struck against low-pay and for dignity at work.

After the "Black Friday" strikes on 23 November, which saw workers at 1,000 Walmart stores across America take action, workers at McDonalds, Burger King, and

other fast food outlets in New York struck and demonstrated on 29 November. They demanded union rights and a doubling of the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. The average fast food worker in New York currently makes \$11,000 per year, compared to \$25,000 *per day* raked in by most fast food CEOs.

Like Walmart, fast food chains are notoriously

anti-union. Many trade unions have historically seen the sector as too difficult to organise in. But new models of organising, through union-linked workers' centres and community-based labour movement campaign groups, have given workers a framework within which to begin to assert their rights. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), one of the USA's biggest unions, is backing the New York Communities for Change and the Fast Food Forward campaign, through which workers have begun establishing a Fast Food Workers Committee.

The fast food workers' struggle may soon spread to other cities, with the Workers Organizing Committee of Chicago (WOCC) launching the "Fight for

Fifteen" campaign to demand a \$15 per hour wage for fast food and retail workers. WOCC members demonstrated on 23 November.

The combination of creative industrial direct action combined with organisation across both the workplace and the community was a key factor in the success of the 2006/2007 "Supersize My Pay" campaign in New Zealand, which saw the abolition of the discriminatory youth rates of the minimum wage across much of the fast food sector.

With the revolt of low-paid, "hard-to-organise" workers slowly growing in Britain, activists will be looking to America, and re-learning lessons from New Zealand, for inspiration.

Serwotka backs Bob

Mark Serwotka, the general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), has become the latest British labour movement figure to back Bob Carnegie's campaign against victimisation. Serwotka signed a peti-

tion calling on Abigroup, the construction contractor pursuing Bob for contempt of court and for damages because of his role in leading a successful community protest at a hospital construction site in Brisbane, to drop the charges against Bob.

David McReynolds, the veteran American anti-war and LGBT rights activist who ran for the Presidency on a Socialist Party ticket in 1980 and 2000, has also backed the campaign. He writes: "I hope Bob wins his case."

• bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com