Stafford shows how to save the NHS

see page 5

50,000 march to save hospital
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 can create 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 defend our jobs.
- 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), 20b Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.
Printed by Trinity Mirror

Get Solidarity every week!

- Trial sub, 6 issues £5
- 22 issues (six months), £18 waged
- £9 unwaged
- 44 issues (year), £35 waged
- £17 unwaged
- European rate: 28 euros (22 issues) or 50 euros (44 issues)

Tick as appropriate above and send your money to:
20b Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG
Cheques (£) to “AWL”.
Or make £ and euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub.

Name .................................................................
Address ................................................................
...........................................................................

I enclose £ ..........................................................

Scrap the bedroom tax!

Almost a thousand people demonstrated against the “bedroom tax” in Leeds on 20 April (top picture), and there were smaller but lively protests in Stoke-on-Trent (bottom picture) and Birmingham.

The “tax”, which came in on 1 April, is a deduction from housing benefit for tenants in social housing, of 14% if they are reckoned to have one “excess” bedroom, and 25% if they are deemed to have two “excess”.

Under pressure from campaigners, some councils and housing associations have pledged to reclassify homes so that what have been counted as “excess” bedrooms are instead called “studies” or “storerooms”. Some councils have pledged not to evict tenants who are in arrears because of “bedroom tax”.

Individual tenants can also appeal. Sheffield Law Centre won a case for one family against the “tax”.

Large numbers of appeals can slow down the tax.

Some councils, however, will go for evictions. Campaigners should build labour-movement-based networks now of people committed to defend households against eviction, as households were defended against bailiffs during the poll tax battle. Strong networks of that sort can deter councils from trying to evict.

Three days of action against Trident

By Pauline Bradley

Trident nuclear submarines, each carrying about 120 nuclear warheads capable of mass destruction, have been held on the deep loch of Coulport, near the military town of Helensburgh, Scotland for over 30 years.

A peace camp of many caravans and buses, was built 31 years ago near the base. Life can be tough there, some want to leave and there are discussions about keeping the peace camp open. It will close unless enough people willing to live there come forward.

Although Britain has signed a nuclear non-proliferation treaty the Tories want to renew Trident and spend around £100 billion on building and maintaining a new nuclear weapons system. Whilst ordinary people suffer their cuts the Tories would rather continue to be the imperialist big boys at the international table than keep us safe.

Trident is deeply unpopular in Scotland and the SNP are promising that if we vote for independence in September 2014, they will ensure Trident goes. This is very appealing (except in Helensburgh) so the Greens, Scottish Socialist Party, SNP, Radical Independence Conference and Women for Independence want it to be a central requirement of an independent Scotland. This could swing the result.

Between 13-15 April Scotland for Peace, Scottish CND, Stop the War Scotland, SSP, Scottish Greens, Trident Ploughshares, Radical Independence Conference, SWP, ICG, Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre, and Scottish Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom organised three days of action on the issue ending with a mass blockade of Faslane Naval base on 15 April.

Around 5,000 people attended a Glasgow demonstration on the 13th, buoyed up by the sunny weather and the news of Thatcher’s death. A wide range of speakers and live music at the rally was followed by a social in the evening with the Stargazers the Carlson Jug band and some poets.

People had travelled from all over the UK and the world to attend workshops and non-violent direct action training on the 14th. I was learning and would like to see this developed.

Almost a thousand people demonstrated against the “bedroom tax” in Leeds on 20 April (top picture), and there were smaller but lively protests in Stoke-on-Trent (bottom picture) and Birmingham.

The “tax”, which came in on 1 April, is a deduction from housing benefit for tenants in social housing, of 14% if they are reckoned to have one “excess” bedroom, and 25% if they are deemed to have two “excess”.

Under pressure from campaigners, some councils and housing associations have pledged to reclassify homes so that what have been counted as “excess” bedrooms are instead called “studies” or “storerooms”. Some councils have pledged not to evict tenants who are in arrears because of “bedroom tax”.

Individual tenants can also appeal. Sheffield Law Centre won a case for one family against the “tax”.

Large numbers of appeals can slow down the tax.

Some councils, however, will go for evictions. Campaigners should build labour-movement-based networks now of people committed to defend households against eviction, as households were defended against bailiffs during the poll tax battle. Strong networks of that sort can deter councils from trying to evict.
Italy goes deeper into crisis

By Hugh Edwards

“The scene supersedes the most hallucinatory fantasies of the masters of horror, Stephen King or Dario Argento. The putrefying evil smouldering corpse of a rotting system, corrupted and squashed by the weight of cliques, cabals and mafia of every sort, of bribes, blackmail and endless plots, barred itself in the tomb, nailing the cover from within to prevent the stench and worms escaping. It attempts the impossible; to arrest the decay of the decision of Friday and endless plots, barri- bals and mafia of every variety. The scene supersedes the fantasies of the masters of horror.”

This is the description of Marco Travaglio, Italy’s finest radical journalist, of the decision of Friday 19 April by electors in Italy’s lower house to re- turn 87 year old Giorgio Napolitano to the office of president, only weeks after a seven-year stint in the role ended.

His election is but the latest deepening of the crisis resulting from the elections of nearly two months ago. This is near total stalemate in both houses of parliament, where the centre-left Democratic Party, PD, the centre-right People of Freedom Party, PDL, and the “Five Star Movement”, M5S of Beppe Grillo each have enough seats in the Senate or the other of the houses to prevent the formation of a government without them.

The job of forming a government tell automatically fell to Napolitano, in what seemed then to be his last weeks as president. Negotiations between the PD and M5S barely got off the ground. The aspirations of Nichi Vendola of Left Ecology and Freedom Party (SEL) and others among the left outside parliament, for a left government were a fantasy.

Napolitano: president again of keys to that has been increasingly prominent role of the President. It was Napolitano who ruthlessly deposed Berlusconi as the financial crisis erupted 18 months ago. Along with his ex-Stal- inst cronies Bersani, Napolitano wove aside the automatic right to elections and ushered in the technocrats ordered by Brus- sels.

The election of a new president last week brought all this to the surface. Grillo had proposed a roster of impeccably liberal “neutral” candidates, from the spheres of law, academia, journalism, etc., inviting the belief that if Bersani would support their candi- date (a radical jurist and former “independent” member of the Communist Party), support for a Bersani government might be on the cards.

The proposal had wider support in the PD outside parliament, but Bersani held off. On Thursday 18 April, he announced his se- lection — a former Chris- tian Democrat turned Dem- ocrat (after the Christian Democrats’ extinction), a devoted Catholic and ex- leader of the yellow Catholic and ex- leader of the yellow Christian Centre Union CSL — who, surprise surprise, immediately got the sup- port of Bersani and the Northern League.

The utterly cynical stitch up, prepared well ahead by the parties concerned and with the connivance of Napolitano, revealed the desperation of the ruling powers.

SMOOTHLY

But it didn’t go smoothly. The political leaders Democ- rats revolted, as did some of their new deputies.

Omniously, so too did the Blairite wing led by Matteo Renzi, the “mod- ernising” Mayor of Flo- rence. Bersani and Berlusconi’s man didn’t get enough votes to win. Bersani then proposed former Prime Minister Ro- mano Prodi. That met with widespread opposition. Huge cracks began to de- velop within the PD, with many calling for a new leadership or even a new party.

To prevent an even worse fallout, Napolitano was invited back, and ac- cepted, a gesture violating the constitution and flying in the face of his previous neutered return. Even consider such a thing. The bourgeois media, true to form, immediately sprung into action to repair the damage. Headlines sang hosannas to the return of “the national saviour”.

With the PD on the point of dissolution, Berlusconi will, though not directly, now play the major role whatever setup Napolitano will announce.

One thing is clear — Italy has inched further into a crisis whose disastrous ef- fects at every level will eventually be felt. Every possibility of a viable new Alba Do- rata, an Italian offshoot of Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn, in local polls in one of the poorest parts of the Abruzzi region in the south, must be a wakeup call to the Italian left.

The many calls for the unity of the left in the past weeks signal the despair and confusion. Verdona called for the creation of a new “left party of govern- ment”, indicating his wish to head up a reconfigured PD — reformist from head to toe, like Verdona him- self. The Party of Commu- nist Refoundation (Rifondazione Commu- nista) has called for a new united revolutionary left, premised on its leader’s admissions of the grave errors of tactics and strategy committed in the past.

The situation is critical. Action now will be the proof that the tide can and must be turned.

Blair calls Labour to “centre ground”

By Martin Thomas

Tony Blair, fresh from joining the praise for Margaret Thatcher and saying that as prime min- ister he sought to “build on” what she had done rather than reverse it, has again blasted Ed Miliband’s Labour leader- ship as being too left- wing.

In the New Statesman (11 April), Blair urged Labour to “resist the temptation” to come back “as the party opposing ‘Tory cuts’”. Labour must “search for answers”, he said, instead of just expressing anger.

Blair offered no “an- swers” himself, but hinted what he might support by insisting that, “paradox- ically”, the crisis has brought “no decisive shift to the left”. Labour must remain on the “centre ground” (presumed to be pro- cuts).

Ed Miliband has replied to similar previous blasts from Blair by claiming that there is a “new centre ground” in British politics, a “new centre ground, for example, that says that re- sponsibility in the banking system which we didn’t talk about enough when we were in government — is relevant”.

But, according to the opinion polls, most people see Nick Clegg as more or less exactly in the “centre” of politics, and they despise him: the Lib Dems have crashed in the opinion polls.

The Tories are seen as about as right-wing as they were back in the days of Michael Howard and Iain Duncan-Smith, when one Tory MP commented that the Tory leader had “some- thing of the night” about him, and another that peo- ple saw the Tories as “the nasty party”.

Ed Miliband is seen as pretty much as left wing as David Cameron is right wing. Gordon Brown used to be reckoned as only slightly left wing, and Tony Blair ( oddly for a Labour leader, but perceptively) as to the right of the “centre- ground” of politics.

The figures show that it is futile for Labour to chase after shifts in the “centre ground”. Labour has plenty of political space to develop a left-wing alterna- tive: the problem is that, despite the signals he gives of being in some vague way “left-wing”, Miliband doesn’t do that.

Left-wing political an- swers would start with, not be opposed to, expressing anger at what the Tories are doing. The cur- rent Labour quarter-semi- demi campaign against the bedroom tax is the first in the party campaign that the Labour Party has run against in- cumbent government policy since 1996 (except perhaps the tiny flicker of official Labour opposition on the NHS about a year ago). The first in 17 years! And so feeble! Even now union and Labour banners are rare on protests against the bedroom tax.

Activists should fight for Labour to do exactly the opposite of what Blair proposes: to start by being a vehicle for peo- ple’s anger against the Tories, and go on to make policies which do not track a nebulous “centre ground” of poli- tics, but rather shift the spectrum.
How the media lost the Thatcher PR battle

Press
By Pat Murphy

The battle to shape the contemporary public perception of Margaret Thatcher began immediately after her death on 8 April.

The terms of the debate were neatly summed up in the contrasting front pages of the Daily Mail and Daily Mirror. “The Woman Who Saved Britain” announced the Mail whereas, for the Mirror she was “The Woman Who Divided a Nation”.

The Tories presented Thatcher as a figure of such immense stature that the whole nation could unify in remembering her with respect despite the passionate opposition she generated when in power. They drew the obvious parallel with Churchill. They knew she had created not so much division as extreme polarisation and that she was hated by many on the left. Their hope, however, was that expressions of that hate and contempt after her death could be marginalised. The risk of being associated with the haters would bind mainstream left politicians to a respectful consensus.

However, the Thatcherites lost the PR battle. To succeed they only had to get people to admit that, even if they disagreed strongly, Thatcher was a great leader. They didn’t succeed.

The anti-Thatcher street parties were sufficiently widespread and genuine to ensure national coverage. The success of the campaign to get the Wizard of Oz song “Ding Dong The Witch Is Dead” to the top of the charts became one of the central stories of the week. Those communities most savagely hit by her brutal policies came to the fore with articulate, moving and unflinching accounts of the damage she had done and how her legacy continues to blight their lives.

It helped that less than half of Labour MPs turned up to sing her praises. Those who did attend included Glenda Jackson whose blistering anti-Thatcher polemic took as many heads as all of the predictable eulogies put together.

For the left, the anti-Thatcherites, to win the PR battle it did not have to persuade people that Thatcher was wrong about everything or that they had all the answers. That is a much more long-term and complicated battle. No, we just had to puncture the notion that she was undeniably great and deserving of respect from all sides.

As the funeral ended and the media shifted their focus, even some of the right-wing coverage began to accept that she was an immensely divisive figure. As when she resigned in 1990, they had to accept they were hated with a passion in large parts of the country and admired most by those people and that class who gained most from her greedy, get-what-you-can philosophy.

This is even more remarkable given that the leaders of the Labour Party went hook, line and sinker for the Tory strategy. Their message was “be respectful, this is not the time for reopening old wounds, don’t fall into the Tory trap of looking disingenuous”.

The problem for Ed Miliband was that his message was overwhelmingly ignored in the Labour Party. This was not a sign of open rebellion so much as an outpouring of genuine emotion and feeling.

There were bits of the working-class response to Thatcher’s death that were considered in advance and theatrical, but there was plenty that was spontaneous and raw. We saw an outpouring of emotion that was a good deal more genuine and heartfelt than the mannered pomp and ceremony in Westminster, where those who forced her out rubbed shoulders with those who worshipped her every move, all of them better off and more privileged as a result of her reign.

The pressure to be respectful was easier to resist because it came from such transparent hypocrites. Supporters of the woman who famously declared that “there is no such thing as society” now wanted to click their fingers and have us all behave as if there was.

But only for a week. After that we could return to evicting our neighbours, hating immigrants and shopping benefit claimants.

What kind of left unity?

Letters

I broadly agree with your article “Left unity must be linked to real action” (Solidarity 280) and of course the mistakes of past must not be repeated.

It is difficult to see how this can be avoided unless the sects learn lessons from the Socialist Alliance/ Respect attempt for a left alternative and also the reasons for the dismal TUSC showings and its failure to grow anywhere beyond the SP and a few fellow travellers. It does not look likely that this will happen. However, their involvement in any new project that they cannot control or do not set up themselves is also unlikely.

As for the timing of the initiative, the groundwork needs to be started. Although people are likely to turn to Labour in the immediate future, all signs point to any Labour government in 2015 continuing the austerity measures of the Coalition. They have refused to commit to the repeal of the Bedroom Tax and are setting themselves against benefit claimants, aping the Tories.

The important questions are left unity on what basis and if it develops then what type of new party? Open and democratic for sure, but what does that actually mean in reality? There are many questions and it remains to be seen the trajectory that this initiative will take. Discussion, debate, education and socialism — unity in action and purpose.

However, the Labour Party cannot simply be ignored or bypassed. Shril denunciations and claims that “all parties are the same” are lazy and weak. The relationship to the labour movement is one of the most crucial, as is the question of the Labour Party. What must also be avoided is any attempt to set up a Labour Party Mark 2, which appears to be the TUSC approach.

Are the AWL taking part in or supporting the Left Unity appeal in terms of a new party formation, or does the perspective of work in the Labour Party preclude that?

Steve S, Cambridge

Aimless toddlers?

Elizabeth Truss, Tory Childcare Minister says toddlers in nurseries “run around aimlessly”. She says they should be in a more structured environment, learning the skills they will need when they get to “big school” (i.e. reception class).

Who is this woman? Has she ever met a toddler and what is she going on about?

Elizabeth Truss employs a nanny to look after her two children. Possibly the only context she’s ever met a toddler is one in which they are fed, watered, shivered from the bath, and put to bed. Children of 3-4 years old do indeed like to run around. But the activity is not pointless. Give them enough stimulating stuff to bump into, and you can relabel this activity experimental learning. Truss is either a fool or she is putting a Tory line.

It is not clear whether Truss is talking about Foundation level nursery education (free for all pre-school children between three and a half and rising five), or day-care for younger children (real toddlers). It seems the Tories would like to emulate some things about the French pre-school Ecole Maternelle system of highly structured nursery education, usually attached to primary schools, though not the fact that places are free from the age of two years upwards.

In those schools the staff are graduates and there is a high child to staff ratio. Already the Tories have given the green light to higher ratios in nurseries.

In the UK a lot of pre-school education is already attached to schools and can be similar to the French system. In private nurseries the set-up may be different.

But what is so dispiriting about this story is the emphasis on regimenting very young children — demanding they sit up straight, don’t fidget, listen attentively etc. when they are not yet prepared to do so. Such “skills” are no longer necessary if one teacher has to look after 20-plus children.

So it’s another cost-cutting exercise, where toddlers pay the price. How low can they go?

Claire Denby, south London
Stafford shows how to save the NHS

Fifty thousand people marched on Saturday 20 April to defend Stafford Hospital against threatened cuts in services and jobs and against private healthcare companies taking over their hospital.

Fifty thousand people took to the streets in a magnificent display of support to defend their local hospital despite it having recently suffered some of the worst publicity of any hospital in the history of the NHS.

Fifty thousand people (a borough with a population of 126,000) crowded into the town square, with a shared understanding that cuts and underfunding inevitably lead to excess patient deaths and poor care and conditions for patients and their families.

Jobs were cut, care reduced, and conditions impoverished to balance the financial books of the Mid-Staffordshire Foundation Trust. And now, 1,200 unnecessary deaths later, the Government declares Mid-Staffs Foundation Trust to be bankrupt.

More jobs to be lost, many more services to be cut, and Stafford and Cannock Hospitals to be downsized and primed for the private healthcare companies to rob services for profit.

This is the future that the Con-Dem government have planned for the NHS. And, increasingly, it is a future that tens of thousands of people actively reject.

The Lewisham demonstration in January and the Mid-Staffs demonstration on 20 April are the beginnings of a wave of local hospital campaigns that can mobilise significant numbers of people to defend the NHS. We need to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people in communities, unions and workplaces if we are to turn the tide on the wholesale destruction of our health service.

LORDS

On Wednesday 24 April, the unelected House of Lords will debate and vote on the latest draft of the regulations that will govern procurement and competition in the NHS (Section 75 NHS regulations).

These regulations are essential to make the Health and Social Care Act work for the government and private healthcare companies. As Lucy Reynolds, a public health academic, put it in a video interview in early March: “The (HASC) Act itself was the aircraft of privatisation, the structure that gave the idea the potential to fly. Section 75 of the regulations is the engine that will allow it to take off”.

Section 75 sets the legal framework for competition in the NHS. It requires Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to put out to tender everything that could be provided by an organisation other than the NHS.

Under Section 75, GPs cannot keep care within the public service unless they can prove that there is only one “capable provider” for a particular service. If the private sector can offer it too, CCGs will be forced into “competitive tendering”.

This is a short step from a two-tier NHS. The whole process weighs heavily in favour of the big, rich corporations who have time, money and expertise to put together tenders. Big corporations with one-track minds and shareholders to keep happy will sacrifice safe, high quality care to profit. NHS and voluntary sector providers will lose out as the big corporations cherry-pick their way through the NHS, leaving behind the long-term sick, elderly, emergency care and anything else where provision is expensive and profit-making difficult.

Already, thanks to dogged campaigning and lobbying, the Government has been forced to redraft the competition and procurement part of the regulations. But the redraft is no better than the original and remains the great opportunity it was always meant to be for the greedy private companies.

This week’s debate and vote in the Lords is the only real chance to get Section 75 rejected. Since the redraft, campaigners in Lewisham have spent countless hours sitting in doctors’ surgeries and health centres engaging hundreds of people in a personal letter-writing campaign. Thousands of letters have gone to various Lords from all over the country in an effort to put pressure on and shift opinion. This has gone alongside lobbying and meetings with various groups of Lords.

Section 75 is a weapon of mass destruction being dropped on the NHS. If it goes through it will be a huge boost to the enemy achieving its goal to privatise our health service. But the war will continue and every battle will count.

Mobilising communities, health workers and medical staff, and dragging the trade unions into action is our weapon of mass destruction against the rich, greedy profitiers and their political representatives in Parliament.

Our strength lies in numbers: mobilising and organising these numbers is the key to us winning these battles and, ultimately, the war to save the NHS.

Stafford Hospital Campaign: supportstaffordhospital.co.uk

WHAT WE SAY

Help us raise £15,000

In two months, Workers’ Liberty will host Ideas for Freedom, our annual weekend of socialist discussion, debate, education and training.

It takes place at the University of London Union, and will feature lectures, workshops, film-showings, debates, and other sessions designed to give those who are already socialists a chance to discuss our politics, and to persuade those who are not already socialists to become so.

Many speakers will be Workers’ Liberty members, but there will also be speakers from a range of other groups and backgrounds. We want Ideas for Freedom to be a space where genuine debate and engagement can take place, not just stage-managed expositions of our views.

If the event sounds good to you, please donate to our fund appeal. We can’t make events like Ideas for Freedom happen without your financial support — to pay for materials, speakers’ travel expenses, food costs, and more.

Last year’s Ideas for Freedom attracted nearly 250 people and was the biggest for a decade. With your help, Ideas for Freedom 2013 could be even bigger.

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 on 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: £10,111

We raised £410 this week. Thank you to Alison, Kas, Ed, Hannah, Hannah, Helen and Duncan.

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 .................................
Thatcher saved their Britain

Andrew Gamble is professor of politics at Cambridge University, and author of the major left-wing analysis of Thatcherism, The Free Economy and the Strong State. He spoke to Martin Thomas from Solidarity about Thatcher and her legacy.

MT: In your book on Thatcherism, The Free Economy and the Strong State, you write that Thatcherism was “a political project developed by the Conservative leadership... to re-establish the conditions for the Conservative Party to resume its leading role in British politics” and then again of Thatcherism as “a project aimed at the replacement of the discredited social-democratic consensus of the postwar period by a new consensus for the 1990s”.

If we look back from now, Thatcherism won on one of those similar-seeming definitions, and lost on the other.

In the Guardian (14 October 2005), you described Thatcher as “ending the political hegemony [the Tory party] had enjoyed for 100 years”. (The Tories have since won the 2010 election, but not regained the dominance they had in 1986-1985 or 1922-45 or 1951-64). In your book, The Spectre at the Feast you wrote of “the political intervention represented by Thatcherism” as having, “established neo-liberalism as the new dominant common sense”.

Looking back, how would you assess Thatcherism on three levels — what Thatcher and her close associates thought they would do — what they actually did — and what they came to think they had done?

AG: Initially, there was no blueprint. But in the 1970s there was a ferment of radical right-wing ideas, which did create — at least amongst the true believers — very high expectations. A lot of it was focused around plans to reverse economic and national decline, and with it to reverse the fortunes of the Conservative Party. That sprang from a quite widespread concern in the party that they were being marginalised, and were not able to govern effectively — partially because of the strength of the trade unions. It was against that sort of defeatism that Thatcher made her pitch for the leadership.

What they managed to do was in some respects more radical than some of them had thought was possible. The Thatcherites were remarkably opportunistic. They seized on events and were able to turn them to advantage, taking a lot of risks, most of which came off. In the “Winter of Discontent”, they switched their policy on trade unions to a much more hard-line one.

The split in the Labour Party in 1981 gave them more space to develop their ideas. The fiscal retrenchment in 1981, which was largely forced on them, gave them the opportunity to develop their policies. A lot of the privatisations were also carried out opportunistically. Privatisation was not in the 1979 manifesto, but having experimented with British Telecom they developed a rolling programme that was later hailed as a flagship policy.

They became more radical as they went on. That was partly about Thatcher’s shifting of the balance within the cabinet, although Thatcher never really got a truly Thatcherite cabinet. The biggest tax cuts and the Big Bang in the City came after 1983, and the big changes in education and the Poll Tax after 1987. They grew in confidence while in office and began to fashion a new economic model.

They were able to view with equanimity the rapid disappearance of the old economic model and the decline and destruction of the old manufacturing industries. What they didn’t understand was how that would, by undermining the compact of the union in the United Kingdom, make the party completely dependent on its heartlands in the south and south east.

The eulogies for Thatcher were all about how she “saved Britain”. This involves exaggeration of what the UK’s condition was in the 1970s, and quite staggering errors in the talk of Britain being a “basket case”, and the “sick man of Europe”. But that is the central narrative by which the Thatcherites now understand what happened — Britain in a position of terminal decline in the 1970s and being rescued, almost single-handedly, by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.

The Thatcherites can’t disguise the fact, and indeed keep talking about, that the Conservatives have not won a majority in an election since 1992. But their explanation for that is that Thatcher changed Labour. That becomes their alibi for why the Conservative Party itself has not fared so well since Thatcher left the scene.

MT: David Cameron says “we are all Thatcherites now”. Nick Clegg dissents. Tony Blair says that he thinks his job was “to build on a lot of the things Thatcher had done rather than reverse them”. When Blair was elected in 1997, Thatcher said that “Britain would be safe in his hands”; you have commented: “And she might have said, Thatcherism will be safe too”.

The coalition government is doing things, in the NHS for example, which Thatcher would not have dared to attempt. Are all mainstream politicians today Thatcherites? When Thatcher was prime minister, her government clashed sometimes with elements of the “Establishment”. Do you think the whole “Establishment”, the ruling corps in the state, economy, and society, is “Thatcherite” now?

AG: Thatcher did attack large parts of “the establishment”, but there is a sense in which she’s now been folded into it. The fact that she was given all but a state funeral, and that the Queen attended, is significant. Previously the Queen had only attended Churchill’s funeral, and no Labour prime minister’s funeral has ever been attended by the monarch.

MT: In your book on Thatcherism, The Free Economy and the Strong State, you write that Thatcherism was a “political project developed by the Conservative leadership... to re-establish the conditions for the Conservative Party to resume its leading role in British politics”; and then again of Thatcherism as “a project aimed at the replacement of the discredited social-democratic consensus of the postwar period by a new consensus for the 1990s”.

If we look back from now, Thatcherism won on one of those similar-seeming definitions, and lost on the other.

In the Guardian (14 October 2005), you described Thatcher as “ending the political hegemony [the Tory party] had enjoyed for 100 years”. (The Tories have since won the 2010 election, but not regained the dominance they had in 1986-1985 or 1922-45 or 1951-64). In your book, The Spectre at the Feast you wrote of “the political intervention represented by Thatcherism” as having, “established neo-liberalism as the new dominant common sense”.

Looking back, how would you assess Thatcherism on three levels — what Thatcher and her close associates thought they would do — what they actually did — and what they came to think they had done?

AG: Initially, there was no blueprint. But in the 1970s there was a ferment of radical right-wing ideas, which did create — at least amongst the true believers — very high expectations. A lot of it was focused around plans to reverse economic and national decline, and with it to reverse the fortunes of the Conservative Party. That sprang from a quite widespread concern in the party that they were being marginalised, and were not able to govern effectively — partially because of the strength of the trade unions. It was against that sort of defeatism that Thatcher made her pitch for the leadership.

What they managed to do was in some respects more radical than some of them had thought was possible. The Thatcherites were remarkably opportunistic. They seized on events and were able to turn them to advantage, taking a lot of risks, most of which came off. In the “Winter of Discontent”, they switched their policy on trade unions to a much more hard-line one.

The split in the Labour Party in 1981 gave them more space to develop their ideas. The fiscal retrenchment in 1981, which was largely forced on them, gave them the opportunity to develop their policies. A lot of the privatisations were also carried out opportunistically. Privatisation was not in the 1979 manifesto, but having experimented with British Telecom they developed a rolling programme that was later hailed as a flagship policy.

They became more radical as they went on. That was partly about Thatcher’s shifting of the balance within the cabinet, although Thatcher never really got a truly Thatcherite cabinet. The biggest tax cuts and the Big Bang in the City came after 1983, and the big changes in education and the Poll Tax after 1987. They grew in confidence while in office and began to fashion a new economic model.

They were able to view with equanimity the rapid disappearance of the old economic model and the decline and destruction of the old manufacturing industries. What they didn’t understand was how that would, by undermining the compact of the union in the United Kingdom, make the party completely dependent on its heartlands in the south and south east.

The eulogies for Thatcher were all about how she “saved Britain”. This involves exaggeration of what the UK’s condition was in the 1970s, and quite staggering errors in the talk of Britain being a “basket case”, and the “sick man of Europe”. But that is the central narrative by which the Thatcherites now understand what happened — Britain in a position of terminal decline in the 1970s and being rescued, almost single-handedly, by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.

The Thatcherites can’t disguise the fact, and indeed keep talking about, that the Conservatives have not won a majority in an election since 1992. But their explanation for that is that Thatcher changed Labour. That becomes their alibi for why the Conservative Party itself has not fared so well since Thatcher left the scene.

MT: They must have quite a special definition of “saving Britain”. Britain’s rate of economic growth is lower than it was up to the 1970s and Britain’s share of world output and exports is lower. What they mean is that their class was in a position where it could not easily impose its will, and now it can. So it saved a particular group within Britain.

AG: Yes, it saved their Britain. It saved them. The Telegraph, on the day of the funeral, said words to the effect of “we have to thank Margaret Thatcher for saving Britain and creating the kind of country we are living in today”. That’s the key — she restored some of the privileges of her class and of capital as a whole.

If you look at the way income and wealth distribution has moved since the 80s, that’s the Britain that she saved.

MT: David Cameron says “we are all Thatcherites now”. Nick Clegg dissents. Tony Blair says that he thinks his job was “to build on a lot of the things Thatcher had done rather than reverse them”. When Blair was elected in 1997, Thatcher said that “Britain would be safe in his hands”; you have commented: “And she might have said, Thatcherism will be safe too”.

The coalition government is doing things, in the NHS for example, which Thatcher would not have dared to attempt. Are all mainstream politicians today Thatcherites? When Thatcher was prime minister, her government clashed sometimes with elements of the “Establishment”. Do you think the whole “Establishment”, the ruling corps in the state, economy, and society, is “Thatcherite” now?

AG: Thatcher did attack large parts of “the establishment”, but there is a sense in which she’s now been folded into it. The fact that she was given all but a state funeral, and that the Queen attended, is significant. Previously the Queen had only attended Churchill’s funeral, and no Labour prime minister’s funeral has ever been attended by the monarch.

MT: David Cameron, George Osborne, Michael Gove, Nick Clegg, Ed Miliband, and Ed Balls are just old enough to have a living political memory of the miners’ strike and Thatcher’s high days in 1985-7. (In 1984-7 their ages were between 19-21 for Cameron, the oldest, and 13-16 for Osborne, the youngest). All will have not much memory of the early Thatcher years of strict monetarism, in 1979-82, but strong political memories of the decay and end of Thatcher’s ministry, in 1987-90, when they were all in the formative period of their late teens and early 20s. Can we see how those different phases of Thatcherism shaped them?

AG: They were shaped by the Thatcher government because of both the length of her period in office, and the fundamental nature of the changes that took place. They all experienced those changes as an irreversible watershed.

For all of them, she came to embody a particular style of leadership (which is very much misrepresented, the misrepresentation being partly her own construction). It’s interesting how that has become a standard and ideal, within the Conservative Party, against which all of her successors have been judged and found wanting.

The myths around Thatcher have now become more important than the actual facts of her period in office. They’re all in some sense in thrall to Thatcher.

Cameron thought he was breaking away from her when he said “there is such a thing as society”, but at her funeral the Bishop of London argued that she had been misunder-
The media eulogised Margaret Thatcher. What does her political legacy mean for the ruling class today?

MT: So today’s Conservative leaders would see her removal from office in terms of “betrayal”, rather than that Thatcher went wrong at the end?

AG: A few Conservatives, like Ken Clarke, say she went wrong, but it’s difficult for people like Cameron and Osborne to openly criticise her. They tend not to.

They have hinted at criticism, in a coded way, before, but during the funeral Cameron was careful in every way to appear to be ultra-loyal.

MT: You have quoted Peter Riddell as writing: “If there was a Thatcher experiment, it was launched by Denis Healey”. With hindsight, unless there had been a great socialist transformation of the labour movement and the working class in the 1970s, many things would have gone the same way even if Callaghan had called an election in 1978 and Thatcher had lost and quit.

Britain would have been converted in the 1980s, one way or another, to a capitalistic regime geared not to sustaining a relatively integrated national complex of industries and services, and a society round it, but to developing its territory as a site for global capital, with systems to suit of strangled trade unions, limited social overheads, easy access to profit opportunities in contracted-out public services, and tax favours for the rich.

How did the special political tactics of Thatcherism — the sharp rejection of equality (rather than acquiescence to increasing economic inequality as a supposedly inescapable trend), the brief period of strict monetarist dogma, the anti-feminism, the homophobia, the monoculturalism, the desire to reassert Britain as a big military power — intertwine with the global trends?

AG: Many of the changes would have happened under a government led by Willie Whitelaw, or indeed under a government led by Denis Healey and David Owen. The shift would have been accomplished; there was enormous pressure for it, including from the United States who wanted to reconfigure international political economy following the breakdown of Bretton Woods at the beginning of the 1970s.

But whilst that’s the general picture, there were different options in the 1970s and different paths Britain could have taken. There were different ways of adjusting to the new dispensation that was taking place, and other countries — Germany, and the Scandinavian countries — took different paths.

Thatcher took a particular path, which was based on boosting the City and financial services, accepting the destruction of manufacturing, and boosting the south east at the expense of the rest of the country. Huge alterations took place, leading to much greater inequality and polarisation.

That was coupled with increased political centralisation of power and the destruction of local government.

These were lasting consequences of the particular way in which Thatcher and her allies went about adjusting Britain to the changing circumstances of the international political economy.

Not all of those were “necessary”, and some were reversed. The particular social authoritarianism associated with Thatcher, for example, was partially reversed under John Major and certainly under Blair. Brown, and now Cameron.

What was clearly not at all challenged by Major, or by New Labour, was the new economic model and the dominance of finance within the UK economy.

The link with the US was strengthened by Thatcher, and that was continued by Blair after a short hiccup under Major. 1997-2007 is the period of a revived Anglo-American “special relationship”, which had particular uses for the Americans in terms of the Cold War and the subsequent engagements of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Thatcher gave priority to those ties with the United States rather than, for example, ties with the European Union. Those parts of her legacy have been enduring.

OPPOSED

MT: In The Free Economy, you point out that “remarkably large majorities remained opposed to many of the policy shifts in welfare and social policy most sought by the Thatcher government”, and that remained true right up to 1997.

Can it be said that Thatcher pushed through the legislative changes and defeated the strikes, but it was the work of Blair and Brown to win ideological hegemony for Thatcherism, though in a modified form?

AG: All countries had to accept the neo-liberal framework if they wanted to stay within the US-dominated international order. But the problem with the way that had been applied in Britain was that it destroyed many of the institutions of local government and the provision of public service, and Thatcher in the 1990s became extremely unpopular.

What Blair and Brown did was to put together a programme that accepted all the major economic changes, but which added to it the idea of social justice — by which they meant greater “fairness”, not in terms of overall distribution of wealth but in terms of provision of public service. They used a large part of the proceeds from economic growth in the 1990s and early 2000s to increase spending on public services and infrastructure.

What Blair and Brown did had already been foreshadowed by the ideas of the SDP and David Owen, who talked about the need to combine economic efficiency with social justice. That market realism combined with enlarged state programmes for health, education, and welfare, is what Blair and Brown were able to deliver because the economy was performing better than it had been in the 70s and 80s, albeit not as well as it was in the 50s and 60s.

What Blair and Brown fashioned, which proved to be very electorally popular, had a big impact on Cameron and Osborne. Until the crash of 2008, Cameron and Osborne were basically accepting that the Blairite dispensation was a better way to govern Britain, within the broad contours of the changes Thatcher had brought about.

It’s only because of the crash of 2008 and its aftermath that Cameron and Osborne have had to change their policies.

It’s quite interesting that they have received huge criticisms within their party, particularly from the old Thatcherite wing and from the new Thatcherites, because they are seen as being much too close to Brown and Blair, and wanting to continue their legacy.
Greece: solidarity with migrant workers

By Theodora Polenta

Nea Manolada, some 280 kilometres (160 miles) west of Athens, is an archetype of how thousands of migrant workers are employed in agriculture.

On Wednesday 17 April, about 200 strawberry-pickers, migrant workers from Bangladesh, went to the company offices to ask for more than six months’ wages they had not received.

Three foremen employed by the landowner, a big capitalist strawberry exporter, met the workers and stonewalled their demands. The workers protested.

Two foremen went to their car and took out their shotguns. A third took a revolver and began firing into the air. The first two then began to shoot to kill, injuring more than 35 people.

Eleven workers were injured severely, and one is still in a critical condition.

The perpetrators, with the assistance of two drivers, left the site. The police arrested the landlord of the business, and then on Thursday the three foremen. Reportedly, one of the foremen is the same person who in the summer of 2009 tied two migrant labourers behind a motorbike and dragged them through the streets of Manolada on the suspicion that they might have stolen a few sheep from his flock.

Even Greece’s fascist movement, Golden Dawn, and SEV (the Greek CBI) have mumbled condemnations of the shoot-ings. But this brutalisation of labour relations affects not only migrant workers behind a motorbike and dragged them through the streets of Manolada on the suspicion that they might have stolen a few sheep from his flock.

Even Greece’s fascist movement, Golden Dawn, and SEV (the Greek CBI) have mumbled condemnations of the shootings. But this brutalisation of labour relations affects not only migrant workers but has been bullied and terrorised into submission by the bludgeon of 27% unemployment.

DEPORTATIONS

Maria Kanellopoulou, an MP for the left-wing party Syriza, accused the government of arresting injured immigrants and their comrades in the aftermath of the Manolada massacre.

Kanellopoulou stated that: “Migrants were sent for deportation because they have no legal documents to remain in Greece, aiming to eliminate the witnesses of the attempted mass murder against immigrants.”

In a similar tone, the Greek Communist Party, KKE, denounced the government because the police of Antalida had arrested six injured migrant workers, transferred them from hospital to the police security office in Amalia, and threatened them with deportation.

Public Order Minister Dendias and the Government have denied the allegations and promised that they will not deport the injured illegal immigrants of Manolada.

The left-wing coalition Antarsya stated: “This crime must not go unpunished. The working class movement must break the immunity of the known exploiter of the workers from Bangladesh, and his henchmen. The labour movement and trade unions must embrace all immigrants from Bangladesh and every exploited Greek and ‘foreign’ worker.”

Giannis Vroutsis, the Minister of Labour, Social Security and Welfare, has stated: “I condemn in the strongest terms and in the most solemn manner this brutalisation of workers, the poverishment of workers, sky-rocketing unemployment, the xenophobia, the reactionism, of religion.

As we have the memory of goldfish! Giannis Vroutsis is a minister whose government has imposed the massive imposition of workers, sky-rocketing unemployment, de-construction of collective bargaining agreements, massive reductions to the minimum wage, restrictions on the right to strike, and “civil mobilisation” orders against strikers.

The government proudly declares “zero tolerance” and the “reoccupation of towns” from the refugees, and promises day care nurseries without migrant children.

On 5 February, the Council of State, Greece’s highest administrative court, ruled unconstitutional an earlier law granting second generation migrants the right to apply for Greek citizenship. Moves have also been made, unsuccessful so far, by the conservative ruling party New Democracy demanding that naturalised Greeks be barred from entering military academies or joining the armed forces and police services.

In August 2012, police in Athens, led by Public Order Minister Dendias, organised mass arrests of migrants. By early February 2013 about 4,200 people were being detained for up to 45 degrees. If the migrant workers ease off while working, the temperature in the greenhouses is over 45 degrees. If the migrant workers ease off while working, the foremen beat them, threaten them with guns, and sometimes shoot in the air.

The workers are accommodated in sheds with few facilities. They sit and sleep on wooden pallets. There is no electricity. For washing, cleaning and drinking they depend on a drill pipe, with stagnant water around it.

STRIKE

In April 2008 migrant workers in Manolada struck, demanding better wages and conditions.

Squads organised by the bosses invaded their sheds, demolishing them and physically attacking the workers.

In 2011, two journalists from the newspaper Vima were beaten mercilessly while seeking to report from the fields of Manolada.

Manolada is not the only case. A few years ago it was revealed that the big peach producers in Northern Greece were hiring immigrants from Bulgaria to pick peaches; then, when the production season was over and the time had come to pay wages, they would ring the police to arrest and deport them.

A newly launched social media campaign urges a boycott of fruit from Manolada. It calls the region’s produce “blood strawberries”, in the same way as people talk about Africa’s “blood diamonds”.

An answer can only be given by a combative working class movement, which needs to enforce in practice the slogan “no body on their own” and “Greek and foreign workers united”. Despite good intentions, the class struggle cannot be conducted electronically or by boycotting a company’s products, but in the workplaces, the neighbourhoods, the streets.

The issue is too serious to be left in the hands of the bureaucrats of the official trade-union leaders of GSEE. GSEE argues that “A working regime of modern slavery has been created in the strawberry fields’’. It calls for retribution against those employers who strangle “even the remaining labour and insurance rights and sink the pension funds by non-payment of the employers’ contributions”.

Working-class politics and anarchism

Debates between members of Workers’ Liberty and comrades from various anarchist traditions. E5 — tinyurl.com/wecpanarchism
The ghetto fighters of Warsaw

By Vicki Morris

Seventy years ago, in April 1943, the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto rose up against the Nazis.

On 28 September 1939 Hitler’s troops had captured Warsaw and taken control of Poland. Three million Jews lived in Poland as a whole: 350,400,000, a third of Warsaw’s population, were Jews.

The Nazis herded the Jews into medieval style ghettos — smaller and smaller areas in 45 separate ghetto towns across Poland — where Jews worked for German war industries. The first was set up in Lodz in April 1940.

Immediately the Jewish quarter of Warsaw was put in “quarantine” and 80,000 non-Jews living in the district were ordered to get out. Adam Czerniaków, one of the old leaders of the Jewish community, was called to the Gestapo Headquarters on 4 October 1939 and ordered to set up a new Jewish Council which would have to recruit the work brigades.

A year would pass before the ghetto was set up, as Warsaw Jews managed to deflect the threat with large sums of money. But in September 1940, a 10-foot high wall around the Jewish district was started. It was completed in summer 1941.

Eventually it surrounded an area 3.4 square kilometres in size, 2.7% of the Warsaw area. It was cut in two by an “Aryan” road, crossed by a bridge which allowed people to pass between the two parts.

It included 1500 dwellings in about 100 blocks. Conditions were appalling. Twelve people lived in each room. They had a ration of 800 calories each per day — half of what an adult needs to stay healthy. Jewish refugees brought into the ghetto had nowhere to live and slept on the streets. The native Warsaw Jews resented them and the Jewish Council provided no relief to them. 66% died in the streets of the ghetto from cold, starvation and disease. Only youth organisations would help them and recruited from among them. By May 1942 430,000 Jews were living in the ghetto.

The Germans feared a ghetto revolt which might spread to the whole of Warsaw. So they successfully poisoned the relations between the Jews and the “Christian” Poles — helped by the strong tradition of anti-semitism in Poland.

Jewish Councils administered the ghettos in Poland; they compiled statistics for the Nazis, and conveyed their orders to the community. The Jewish Councils hoped that there would be some sort of future under Nazism. Perhaps if they were useful and compliant the Nazis would not think it necessary to kill large numbers of Jews. One ghetto leader, Chaim Rumkowski of Lodz, took great pride in the fact that “his” ghetto was self-sufficient and economically useful to the Germans.

GHETTO SOCIETY

Very rapidly, the Jewish Council became the centre of the richest Jews.

In order to gain respect, the Council set up the Jewish police with 1700 men recruited from the sons of “good families”. The Germans promised the Jewish policemen that members of their families would not be harassed.

This police became the centre of a protection racket — all-powerful to dispense (for ready cash) exemptions from forced labour and food rations.

When taxes had to be raised to pay the Nazis, or police wages, a 10% tax was levied on basic foodstuffs — the poor paid as much as the rich. In January 1942 the Council voted down a proposal to “take from the rich the means with which to feed the poor”.

The role of the rich in the ghetto was shameful and they were rewarded with the hatred of the people. But the Nazis made vile propaganda from it to show in Germany. They photographed rich Jews enjoying their privileges, while, nearby, emaciated Jews died in the streets ignored. As if it were only rich Jews who behave like this and not rich people everywhere. As if the Nazis were not themselves responsible for ghetto conditions!

They do not know it, but some on the left who have made “anti-Zionist” and anti-Israeli propaganda out of the behaviour of the bourgeois Jewish puppet councils — Jim Allen, the socialist author of the play Perdition for example — stand in the direct line of descent from this vile Nazi propaganda.

To try to escape starvation 5,000 Jews volunteered to go and work in Germany, and 10,000 in Poland. The news was that the camps there were not too bad.

The Germans promised a safe life to the “productive” workers in the Wehrmacht workshops. Eventually they promised to each workshop a survival priority over the other shops, then to men, priority over women and children, to good workers priority over bad. These promises were all deceptions.

Despite it all, many Jews tried to keep up a sense of human dignity the Nazis were ripping from them. They held concerts; academic and religious life continued. Dr Korczak, who ran the orphanage, sealed it against the ghetto and through three years protected his children from knowledge of life outside. This pretence of normality was the only form of resistance they had.

This desperate desire not to believe the worst was one of the reasons why those who from the beginning wanted the ghetto to fight could not gain the influence they needed.

From the top: Nazi order calling for the “resettlement” of the Warsaw ghetto’s Jews, 22 July 1942; a bunker where Jews hid, lived and fought from during the uprising; captured by the Nazis; after the uprising, the ghetto burns.

Continued on page 10
The pogroms did not end in 1945

Anti-Jewish pogroms continued in Europe after the defeat of the Nazis, as this report from the US “orthodox” Trotskyist paper, the Militant, of 11 August 1947, shows. The “orthodox Trotskyists” tended to argue that the Jews were not assimilated into the local society, and that the pogroms were a result of this pogrom in Tel Aviv on 31 July, five were killed, 18 wounded, with two women reported among the dead.

In Palestine the main assault took place in the all-Jewish city of Tel Aviv, where according to UP and AP dispatches from Jerusalem, squads of British soldiers and police manned “approximately eight armoured cars” and stormed the centre of the city “firing wildly and sending shots into shops and moving houses”. Passengers on a crowded bus were caught in a cross-fire and suffered the brunt of the casualties. Passers-by were assaulted by armed troopers and policemen. Store windows were smashed and looted. There are reports of hand grenades being used in addition to clubs and guns. As a result of this pogrom in Tel Aviv on 31 July, five were killed, 18 wounded, with two women reported among the dead.

Jerusalem, Haifa and other cities witnessed similar scenes. On the next day, the funeral procession accompanying the victims of the previous day’s massacre served as an occasion for another brutal assault in Tel Aviv. According to eye-witness reports, an armoured car manned by British police drove headlong into the funeral procession of 5,000 approaching the synagogue. Three separate bursts of gunfire poured into the defenceless mass, wounding 33 Jews.

In January they were able to thwart the Nazis for a few days and to persuade the remaining Jews that it was better to fight even against impossible odds than to give themselves up for deportation.

The final deportation was planned for April and on the 19th trucks arrived to take people to Treblinka. The Nazis and their trucks were attacked. Nazi tanks which guarded them set on fire. For three days the fighters held running battles with the Nazis, forcing them to retreat. They had only limited support from the Polish resistance outside the ghetto; their arms were some rifles but mostly handguns, grenades and molotov cocktails. The Germans had thousands of fully armed troops and sophisticated killing equipment.

Finally the Nazis won simply by dint of setting fire to the whole ghetto, burning the hidden Jews out of cellars. By mid-May the ghetto did not exist. 13,000 Jews had died in the fighting, 30,000 were captured and sent to Treblinka, others committed suicide. Hundreds of “rubble fighters” remained to carry out random attacks on the Nazis for months to come. A few hundred Jews crawled for twenty hours through the sewers to join resistance groups in the forests around Warsaw.

The persistence of the ghetto opposition, in spite of their having been treated as one homogeneous lump of expendable Jews left.

They killed police informers. They demanded money off the rich to buy more arms. They organised the remaining dwellers, readying them for the Nazis’ final assault.

The British authorities have disclaimed responsibility for these outrages, depicting them as “spontaneous” reprisals for the hanging of two British sergeants by the Jewish terrorists in Irgun Zva’i Leumi. These hangings were in their turn reprisals by the terrorists for the execution by the British of three Jewish youths implicated in organising the Acre Prison break of 4 May.

The denials of the authorities cannot be taken at their face value, any more than the original denials of both the police and the army that their men “were implicated in the affray which turned the streets into a veritable shooting gallery for several hours”.

The method of “reprisals” deliberately inspired from above happens to be a favourite tactic of colonial “pacification”. From being strangers to its use, the British have applied it on numerous occasions, in particular, during the 1936-39 uprisings of the Arabs in Palestine.

In any case, thinly veiled threats to employ this tactic had been made several times. General Sir Allan Cunningham, British High Commissioner for Palestine, is reported to have told the head of the Jewish Agency that “the British had reached the end of their patience, and would not endure further insults, kicks, bullets and bombs without reprisals”. This statement, made after the pogroms in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa, hardly requires comment.

The fountainhead of the anti-Semitic outbreaks in England is quite clear. The incipient fascist formations there, headed by Mosley’s scum, seized the opportunity to organise assaults upon the Jewish communities in London, Liverpool, Manchester and other cities. The most ominous note here is the apparent absence of popular resistance to the hoodlums.

A Jewish-owned factory was set ablaze in Liverpool. In Manchester thugs invaded the Jewish area, attacking passers-by, smashing store windows and inciting onlookers to loot. Synagogues in many cities, including London, were the targets for vandals who invariably raised the cry: “Down with the Jews!”

The extension to England of these fascist-like attacks on the Jews is not a passing episode. Jews in England provide as convenient a scapegoat for unbridled reaction as they did in Germany, so they will on the morrow in the United States as well. This is inherent in the decaying capitalist system, which breeds the most bestial reaction regardless of how “democratic” the traditions of a particular country may be. The English pogroms are merely the latest verification of this inexorable truth. Whoever tells the Jewish people otherwise is leading them blindfolded to the same horrible fate they have already suffered on the European continent.

The pogroms in Palestine, the anti-Semitic outbreaks in England, are an anticipation of what capitalism has in store for the Jews wherever they survive.

Warsaw ghetto

From page 9

In August 1942 the Nazis ordered Jews to be deported to camps in the east. They were told they would be settled and allowed to redeem themselves by work. No-one could know the full horror of the camps, but the Council had some eye-witness accounts. The knowledge was too much for Czerniakow, he committed suicide. The Council on the other hand encouraged Jews to volunteer for deportation. 20,000 Jews would go voluntarily to the Umschlag (the deportation place).

When political activists in the ghetto — left wingers and Bundists and Zionists — put out leaflets telling the truth about the death camps, people just did not believe them.

Between July and October 1942, 310,000 people were deported to camps, principally Treblinka, where life expectancy was one hour.

Only when the extent of the genocide was fully known (by the end of 1942), and the Führer’s passive hope was realised, and — most significantly — only when the Jewish underground began to obtain arms, did the ghetto go to war against the Nazis.

Until 1943 the Underground did not have the trust of the people. Until then, they set themselves the job of relief work, organising young people, holding meetings. They exposed the grimness of the camps, slowly they gained the respect of the masses who remained.

On 20 October 1942 the Jewish Coordination Committee was formed, bringing together five Zionist movements (Ha-Chomer, Dror, Gordonia, Poale Zion, Heschualutz), the Stalinists (PPNR) and the socialists (the Bund). It drew up plans for a military organisation (Jewish Combat Organisation).

The mass deportations had stopped on 3 October but started again on 18 January 1943. There were only 40,000
Ford workers ballot for strikes

By Darren Bedford

Workers at the Ford stamping and tooling plant in Dagenham have begun voting in a ballot for strikes over the closure of the plant. 652 workers will take part in the ballot, which closes on 30 April. The closure of the plant, along with another factory in Southampton, was announced in October 2012. The ballot follows protests at both the Southampton and Dagenham plants, organised by Unite, on 18 April. The closures threaten 1,500 jobs directly, and more in Ford’s supply chain.

A Unite statement said: “The workers at the stamping and tooling facility are furious over the way they are being treated by the company. Despite promises to find the displaced workers alternative employment, the company is not keeping to its commitments. “Over 100 toolmakers have not been found suitable jobs, and workers who are being redeployed are being given very little information about what work they will be doing once they are transferred.”

It seems likely the demands of the strike will focus on improving severance packages rather than halting the closure plans. Unite has highlighted the disparity between the severance payments offered to workers at the two plants — Dagenham workers are offered a package worth between £10,000 and £30,000 less than those in Southampton.

Unite national officer Roger Maddison said: “Ford betrayed its workers when it announced the closure of its plants and now the company is rubbing salt into the loyal workers wounds by treating them with contempt.”

Ford bosses at Dagenham are threatening to withdraw the severance packages on offer if workers take action. Unite says such threats “only strengthen workers’ resolve”.

When Solidarity spoke to a union rep in the Southampton plant in November, he said: “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.” At this late stage it would take extremely radical action — ongoing occupation and probably government intervention to take the plants into public ownership — to prevent closure and job losses. A strike to win a better severance package is preferable to no action at all, and union reps who spoke to Solidarity did not report the mood from the shopfloor as one of workers desperate to take action immediately (even in November, a Southampton rep reported the greatest push for action came from contractors who wanted to fight for equal severance terms with directly-employed workers).

But a public, visible campaign that began as soon as the closures were announced — including both whatever industrial action workers were prepared to take and external political pressure and campaigning — might have left the union in a stronger position.

Community fights fire cuts

By a south London trade unionist

On Monday 22 April, 80 local residents and trade unionists attended a Fire Brigades Union (FBU) meeting to protest against the closure of Downham fire station in Lewisham, south east London.

The local campaign is being driven by the FBU, led by local rep Kelly Macmillan. The meeting was addressed by local Labour MP Heidi Alexander and London Assembly members Darren Johnsson (Green Party) and Len Duvall (Labour).

The Tories are aiming to make £45 million in cuts to the fire service in London. They want to shut 12 of the 112 London fire stations, cut 520 firefighters, and 18 engines.

The cuts will mean nearly five million Londoners will face longer response times to emergency calls.

More industrial news online

• Bromley Council workers blackmailed
• Gateshead steel strike
• More Post Office strikes
• BBC guides fight 17% pay cut

All at bit.ly/indnews

Teachers strike against bullying

By Jonny West

Teachers at Littlehampton Academy in Sussex struck on 17 April in the first of a series of planned strikes against management bullying.

The workers, who include members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Association of Schoolmasters’/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), say excessive observation and inspections have led to the development of a micro-managerial culture that makes it impossible for teachers to do their job.

There is recent precedent for teachers’ strikes stopping micro-managing bosses in their tracks. The threat of strikes from NUT members at Bishop Challoner school in East London forced the headteacher to cancel a planned “mock Ofsted” inspection. There, the head is now victimising union reps in response. The school NUT group has voted in an indicative ballot for strikes.

Elsewhere, a planned strike at the Globe Academy in Southwark, south London, has been called off after the school (owned by the ARK chain which operates 18 schools around the UK) threatened legal action because of ballooning irregularities.

Teachers face eight compulsory redundancies.

Birkbeck cleaners fight pay cut

By Stew Ward

Cleaners at Birkbeck, one of the constituent colleges of the University of London, face a 12.5% pay cut after management unilaterally announced a cut in the hours.

Trimming time off workers’ contracted hours is an increasingly common tactic for cleaning contractors looking to cut costs.

The cleaners’ employer, Ocean Contract Cleaning Ltd., propose to cut 15 minutes from the working day of every cleaner. Most cleaners work two hours a day, usually alongside similar length shifts elsewhere, so a 15 minute cut in a given shift amounts to a significant loss.

Although cleaners at the University of London won the “London Living Wage” (currently £8.55/hour) in 2012, many still face attacks such as this, as well as inequality in terms of sick pay, holidays, and pensions with directly-employed University of London staff. Ocean Contract Cleaning’s record as an employer speaks for itself; it did not pay the living wage to cleaners it employed at St George’s Hospital in south London until an industrial campaign forced it to. Ocean cleaners at Guildhall also struck to win living wages in late 2010 before the contract was transferred to Sodexo.

Supporters of the Birkbeck cleaners have begun a petition to defend cleaners’ pay. Sign it at bit.ly/birkbeck

PCS elections: vote Independent Left!

Members of the Independent Left network within the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) are standing in the upcoming National Executive Committee elections alongside members of the Independent Socialists.

They are standing on a platform of transforming the PCS to make it a rank-and-file-led union with radical, imaginative industrial strategies.

For more information on the platform and the candidates, see bit.ly/votepcsil

Gateshead steel strike

Workers at the Crossrail sites in London, including both whatever industrial action workers were prepared to take and external political pressure and campaigning — might have left the union in a stronger position.

By Darren Bedford

Anti-blacklisting campaigners staged a protest outside a construction industry awards ceremony at a prestigious London hotel on 16 April.

The awards were being hosted by Kier Construction Ltd., one third of the BFK consortium (along with BAM Nuttall Ltd and Ferrovial Agroman) which runs construction work at the Crossrail sites in London. In September, BFK sacked 28 electricians after their shop stewards raised concerns about safety abuses at the Westbourne Park Crossrail site. Since that time, sacked steward Frank Morris and supporters have been holding daily pickets at the site, as well as direct actions at the flagship Crossrail site on Oxford Street in central London.

The 16 April protest stopped rush-hour traffic outside the Lancaster Hotel. On Thursday 18 April, campaigners targeted the National Building Awards at the Grosvenor Hotel on Park Lane, and on Friday 19 April the Westbourne Park picket succeeded in stopping some deliveries to the site.

Anti-blacklisting direct actions are increasingly winning official backing from union officials and Labour politicians — a testament to the hard work of the rank-and-file led Blacklist Support Group in bringing the issue to prominence and taking the fight to the blacklisters’ doorsteps.

More bit.ly/blacklistbeg
IMF indicts Osborne

By Martin Thomas

Economic figures published on Thursday 25 April will show whether the UK is technically “in recession” again.

Even if the figures escape the formal definition of a “triple dip” since 2008, jobs, services, benefits, and wages are definitely in a slump, and set to continue that way for years.

The coalition government claims this is an inevitable price for the supposed (but imaginary) “overstretching” by the last Labour government on public services. Conserva-
tive and mainstream voices are questioning Osborne’s “invi-
tability”.

On 16 April the Interna-
tional Monetary Fund (IMF) published a new edi-
tion of its twice-yearly World Economic Outlook. “In the United Kingdom”, the IMF said, “where recovery is weak owing to lacklustre demand, consideration should be given to greater near-term flexibility in the fiscal adjustment path”.

That was polite official language for: “Cuts as big as Osborne’s are crazy. They depress economic output — people can’t buy stuff, and capitalists seeing flat markets don’t invest — and thus also depress government revenues. They do not even reduce government debt”. The UK’s ratio of government debt to annual output has risen from about 80% when Cameron and Osborne took office to 91%.

A “growth tracker” graphic in the IMF report maps major countries’ phases of slump, stagnation, and recovery since 2008. It shows the UK as doing no worse than most others until early 2011, and since then doing worse than any of the countries tracked except Greece and Portugal.

On 15 April, three US economists had exploded a famous bit of research which Osborne had cited to “prove” that cutting, and cutting again, until eventu-
ally government debt does decrease, is essential to re-
store economic growth.

The Harvard economists Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff published figures in 2010 claiming to show that government debt above 90% of annual output makes economic expansion difficult or impos-
possible.

Their critics have shown, unanswerably, that the sta-
tistical analysis was dodgy. Historically, higher govern-
ment debt levels tend to go together with somewhat lower growth. But the corre-
lation is loose. Further analysis by another econo-
mist, Arindrajit Dube, shows that the correlation is probably mostly a matter of lower growth causing higher debt levels rather than vice versa.

On 19 April, the US rating agency Fitch struck a third, though symbolic, blow to Osborne’s credibility and confidence by downgrading the rating it gives to US government bonds as a safe investment.

In truth, getting eco-

nomic recovery, or even re-
ducing debt, are not Osborne’s priorities. He himself explains his policies as an effort to “make the UK the most attractive destination in Europe for businesses and invest-
ment”, that is, to use the crisis to out-compete other European countries as a place for future profit-making.

Thus the cuts in top in-
come tax and corporation tax, and the continued zoom of top pay (chief ex-
ecutives’ pay went up 16% in 2012), at the same time as wages are slumped down and benefits axed. If becoming “attractive for businesses and investment” means the UK also becoming horrible for workers and the unem-
ployed, that’s fine with George Osborne.

Labour’s Ed Balls seized the IMF criticism of Os-
borne. But in hard fact, still all he proposes is marginal changes from the Tory tra-
jectory — a few tax tweaks here and there.

In 2012 the TUC con-
gress voted for public ownership and demo-
cratization of social control of the whole banking sys-
tem. The unions should demand that Labour take up that demand.

IMF: “growth tracker” graphic in IMF report maps major countries’ phases of slump, stagnation, and recovery since 2008. It shows the UK as doing no worse than most others until early 2011, and since then doing worse than any of the countries tracked except Greece and Portugal.

By Bjørke Frifbog, Red-Green Alliance

Since April 1, almost 70,000 Danish state school teachers have been locked out by their employers. The lockout is the latest in a series of austerity measures initiated by the so-called centre-left government, led by social-democratic Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt.

After its first year, which included some pol-
icy changes such as in-
creased rights for migrants and LGBT people, enthusiasm for the new government has drastically waned and given place to resignation and repulsion as well as resistance.

After turning against the trade unions in June 2012 for failing to accept a longer working week, the government blocked with the right wing in parlia-
ment and agreed to lower taxes for the well-off while cutting benefits for the unemployed as well as disabled workers.

With the present indefi-
nite lockout of the teach-
ers’ unions, the government parties have taken their next step in turning against their own working-class voting base.

Solidarity with the protesting teachers needs to be expanded to other groups of workers. The record score for the radical socialists of the Red-
Green Alliance (RGA) in the 2011 parliamentary election (when it won 6.7% of the vote and 12 parliamentary seats) must be converted into militant activism in the work-
places rather than tactical manoeuvres in parlia-
ment.

The 70,000 locked-out teachers have mounted a massive public campaign, complete with daily cri-

tive protests including singing, placards, YouTube videos, a 20-mile human chain between Copenhagen and Roskilde, and flash mobs all over the country.

Meanwhile, 780,000 school children are spend-
ing their days at home or at their parents’ work-
places. Frustration and ex-
haustion is increasing as the lock-out continues.

Meeting in the weekend of April 26-28, the RGA national congress is facing discussions on parliamentar-
y as well as extra-parlia-
mentary strategy, including the party’s stand on whether to pull the carpet from under the government or struggling to gain concessions from the politically-weakened coalition parties.

With the Social De-

corators down to a record low of 17% in polls, and a near melt-
down for the supposedly more left-wing coalition partner Socialist Peoples’ Party, the Danish PM should watch both her back and the streets outside the parliament building.

Danish teachers locked out

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2013

Ideas to turn the tide

Marxist ideas to turn the tide

A weekend of socialist debate and discussion

Friday 21-Sunday 23 June, University of London Union

Sessions include: How can we turn the labour movement around? • The cleaners’ revolt, with cleaner activists from the 3Cos campaign and others • Challenging sexism in the labour movement • The spirit of ’45: how the working class won what it did and why it didn’t go further • Sexual violence: the global picture, with Camila Bassi • What’s happened to the working class? with Scott Lash and Martin Thomas • Lessons in working-class revolution: the Paris Commune; China 1929-27; Solidarnosc; South African workers against apartheid • John McDonnell MP and Unite activist Elaine Jones on working-class political representation • Theatre and working-class culture • Black soldiers in the Second American Revolution — the story of the 54th Massachusetts • Lenin vs Lennon, with Cathy Nugent • Gramsci: a Marxist for difficult times • and many more...

For more info, and to book tickets, see workersliberty.org/ideas

The placard reads: “We know a lot about education. Who is listening?”

Solidarity with the

teachers' unions, the
government parties have
taken their next step in
turning against their own working-class voting base.

Solidarity with the

protesting teachers needs
to be expanded to other
groups of workers. The
record score for the
radical socialists of the
Red-Green Alliance (RGA) in the 2011 parliamentary election (when it won 6.7% of the vote and 12 parliamentary seats) must be converted into militant activism in the workplaces rather than tactical manoeuvres in parliament.

The 70,000 locked-out teachers have mounted a massive public campaign, complete with daily creative protests including singing, placards, YouTube videos, a 20-mile human chain between Copenhagen and Roskilde, and flash mobs all over the country.

Meanwhile, 780,000 school children are spending their days at home or at their parents’ workplaces. Frustration and exhaustion is increasing as the lock-out continues.

Meeting in the weekend of April 26-28, the RGA national congress is facing discussions on parliamentary as well as extra-parliamentary strategy, including the party’s stand on whether to pull the carpet from under the government or struggling to gain concessions from the politically-weakened coalition parties.

With the Social Democrats down to a record low of 17% in polls, and a near meltdown for the supposedly more left-wing coalition partner Socialist Peoples’ Party, the Danish PM should watch both her back and the streets outside the parliament building.