

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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default?** page 3



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ΙΚΑΝΟΠΟΙΗΣΗ ΤΩΝ ΑΝΑΓΚΩΝ ΜΑΣ



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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 and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
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Cuts hit disabled hardest

By Dan Rawnsley

Under the banner "Hardest Hit", thousands marched on 11 May to parliament to protest against the Welfare Reform Bill and the particular measures which will mean huge cuts in benefits for disabled people.

People who are sick and disabled — in or out of work — will be the big losers from these changes. Disability Living Allowance will be replaced by a less generous Personal Independence Payment.

A Universal Credit will replace means-tested benefits and tax credits and much of the extra money that disabled people currently get will be cut.

I spoke to Brian Davis, a member of GMB union and

employee of Remploy, which provides work for disabled people:

"Two years ago they closed 28 [Remploy] factories, this year 760 people have been given voluntary redundancy, and some factories now have only twenty to thirty people working in them. Trainees are being brought in, but none of them are being taken on. People don't

know what will be going on in their factory next week. People I know are on anti-depressants, two people who took voluntary redundancy have committed suicide and two are in prison. The government expects everyone to work, but benefits are being cut and there aren't any jobs. We want the government to tell us Remploy is safe."

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is facing 68% cuts and a 68% cut in jobs. Around 48% of the calls the EHRC receives are from disabled people. The EHRC workers have been balloted over action.

The rally on 11 May was quite apolitical, with a lot of speakers from charities with unclear views about the government's overall cuts programme.

Liam Byrne (Shadow

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions) and Dame Anne Begg spoke from the Labour Party. Liam Byrne said that demonstrators needed to "tell the government that there is a different way" and to support him in "tabling amendment after amendment" to the Welfare Reform Bill. What about voting against the bill!

It was left to a disabled student, Gerry Hart, from the Darlington Association of Disability, to point out that the Coalition's actions were a response to "inherent faults of the capitalist system", and draw comparisons with last year's student demonstrations and the fight against the poll tax.

Mark Smith from the Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People pointed out that disabled rights were won through direct action, "both inside and outside of the law" and that disabled people cannot allow these hard won rights to be given up.

The Scottish left after the elections:
www.workersliberty.org/scot

Students suspended over academy walkout

By Bob Sutton, Vice President-elect, Liverpool Guild of Students

Nineteen students were suspended at Shorefields Technology College in the Dingle, Liverpool on 10 May after 150 of them had walked out in protest at management plans to turn the school into an academy.

Their teachers, members of both the NUT (National Union of Teachers) and NASUWT (National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers) trade unions, were going out on strike the following day.

The Dingle is a working-class area. Academy status — the [irreversible] removal of the school from local authority control — will mean the business/backer coming in to run the school will be under no compulsion to accept students with any

extra educational needs, or for whom English is a second language. They will not be bound by existing local or national agreements on pay, jobs or conditions.

Activists from the Merseyside Network Against Fees and Cuts had distributed a leaflet at the school gates on the morning of the walkout. In an interview for the *Liverpool Echo* the Deputy Head, Ian Young, huffed and puffed about "propaganda", but in fact Shorefields students had already demonstrated their willingness to fight — over 500 of them walked out before Christmas over the plans.

Several were on the teachers' picket line the following day. They were joined by parents, younger kids, the GMB (who organise the non-teaching staff), and other student and trade union activists from across the city.

A march followed at 9 am which went round the area surrounding the

school ending with a meeting. An NUT rep from Chester was very informative about the rolling out of the Academy programme across the North West. The "backer" for Shorefields is the University of Chester, which has gone into a whole string of schools — with redundancies often following.

A sixth form student also spoke. She had been among those who had pulled together the walkout in the winter but had not been in school on 10 May. She seemed to think that the suspensions were down to people losing focus and using the walkout as an excuse to run wild.

We spoke about how, if you didn't have an ongoing core of people organising and providing direction, it was easier for things to lose focus or management to reimpose their arguments.

• <http://mnafc.wordpress.com>

Tidemill: second push for academy status

By Duncan Morrison

On 4 May the Governors of Tidemill Primary School in Deptford voted to make a second application to become an academy.

The school had hit the national news headlines last year because of the £142,500 salary of the headmaster, Mark Elms. The first application to become an academy was met by a vibrant local campaign led by parents of children at the school.

That application was shelved when the parents exposed misleading financial figures in the initial application, and made a legal challenge. But, despite the opposition of local MP Joan Ruddock, Lewisham Council, Lewisham NUT and a large number of parents, the Governors of the school have decided to proceed with a second application.

This application, like the first, will be met by a vigorous campaign.

• <http://sayingno.org/cms>. *Solidarity* will carry an interview with Leila Galloway from the "Deptford says no to Tidemill Academy campaign" in a future issue.

Victory at Rawmarsh

By Gemma Short, Rotherham NUT

Teachers at Rawmarsh Community School in Rotherham have struck a significant blow in the battle against job cuts by saving the last remaining job under threat.

Although NUT rep Ralph Dyson will not be

returned to full-time work, the threat of redundancy has been withdrawn and Ralph has been offered a 2.5 day-per-week contract (he will also be on 1.5 days union facility time).

The dispute has been long-running and shows very clearly what is possible when unions take action in pursuit of specific, clear demands (in this

case, no redundancies) rather than striking simply to register a protest at this or that action by management.

Rawmarsh has sent a message; already, another local school has withdrawn a plan for eight job cuts.

Other workers facing job-cut threats should follow the Rawmarsh teachers' example.

Will Greece default?

By Colin Foster

At the start of May, Portugal followed Greece and Ireland into a European Union/ IMF financial "bailout". At about the same time, the clamour of economists predicting that Greece's bailout cannot possibly work became deafening.

"This effort has failed: the cost of borrowing [for Greece, etc.] has risen, not fallen... The chances of renewed access [for Greece] to private lending on terms that the country can afford are negligible" (Martin Wolf).

"Here's a hint for Europe's politicians: if the math says one thing and the law says something different, it will be the law that ends up changing" (Charles Calomiris).

"The program for Greece is... not even close to working" (Paul Krugman).

"We are more or less guaranteed to find ourselves facing some kind of Greek default" (Edward Hugh).

Greece is being "bailed out" in the sense that European funds and the IMF are lending the Greek government money to save it from having to borrow on the open market to pay its old debts as they fall due. It *can't* borrow on the open market except at prohibitively high interest rates.

But the cuts demanded by the European Union and European Central Bank and the IMF as conditions for the loans have sent Greece's economy into a spiral. It is even further than it was before the bailout from being able to get enough export earnings to make it look credit-

worthy to the international financiers.

Despite the big social cuts made by the German government — for political reasons, to enforce a "hard" neoliberal way forward from the 2008 crash, since Germany itself has no government debt crisis — German capitalism has done relatively well in the last year. Its output grew 5.2% between the first quarter of 2010 and the first quarter of 2011.

That does not help Greece. When the current bailout funds run out, some time in 2012, Greece will face limited options.

It can seek a further bailout. Quite probably the resentments of German taxpayers will make that impossible. In any case, it would mean that (as Martin Wolf puts it) "Greece would lose almost all sovereignty indefinitely". Its government would become, for a long future, little more than an agency for carrying through policies imposed by the IMF and the European Central Bank.

It can seek a "restructuring" of its debts, that is, a polite and controlled agreement that it won't pay them, or will pay them late. But the bailout was motivated, in the first place, by the desire to make sure that German, French, British and other banks got back the money they'd lent in Greece.

A negotiated "restructuring" within the euro will be difficult, and may give only temporary relief anyway.

The other option is for Greece to quit the euro. The restored separate Greek currency (drachma) will inevitably plummet in

value, compared to the euro, making Greece's external debts harder to pay, so the exit will have to go together with a debt restructuring.

The boon of this move is that Greek industries with costs in drachmas — which would then equate to fewer euros, pounds, or dollars — then become more competitive internationally. The boon would be paid for by imports consumed by Greek workers becoming much more expensive for them, as measured in drachmas.

Euro-exit would give the Greek government more room for manoeuvre, but room it would use to impose yet another squeeze on the Greek working class. An exit from the euro is no easy road, and not something that would automatically or even probably push the Greek government to the left in any sense; on the other hand, the current course means that the people of Greece pay both the cost of (doomed) efforts to avoid euro-exit and default, and the cost of the euro-exit and default when they come. "Postponing the day of reckoning... will merely make the debt restructuring more painful when it comes" (Martin Wolf).

The clock is ticking. For now, the dominant EU powers, and the Greek government, are effectively just hoping that "something will turn up" to brighten the prospect.

Portugal's prime minister José Sócrates claimed that Portugal's bailout would involve no cut in public sector wages or sackings of public sector workers. He is contesting a general election on 5 June.

In fact he didn't really need to paint up the deal. As in Ireland, the big opposition parties have accepted it anyway.

The detail shows that Portugal is committed to a freeze (i.e. real-terms cut) in public sector pay and pensions, a curtailment of the level of unemployment benefits and the time they are paid for, job cuts across local authorities, a tax on pensions, and a privatisation drive.

Whether Portugal's bailout is any more workable than Greece's remains to be seen. A Greek default is bound to make international financiers more reluctant to lend to other debt-ridden eurozone countries, and could tip Portugal and Ireland — and even Spain — into intractable dilemmas even if they might have escaped them otherwise.

And then? Some economists think the whole euro system will break up. For sure the present tentative global capitalist economic recovery will be put under stress, and may plunge into new slump.

Even on the most optimistic scenario, this "recovery" has the general pattern of capitalist economic recoveries writ large: it operates on the basis of increasing inequality.

In Europe, the poorest people in the poorest countries pay the biggest price, while the richest capitalists, in the City of London and the heights of German industry, get the most help in the hardest times and zoom ahead once there is a flicker of improvement.

added incentive.

The way forward in Israel-Palestine is the creation of an independent Palestinian state with full rights alongside Israel, and the decisive obstacle to that is the policies of successive Israeli governments.

But the 15 May events also showed that socialists must beware of demagogues seeking to divert the democratic revolt in the Arab world into chauvinist "destroy-Israel" dead ends.

• Israeli socialist Adam Keller discusses Israeli-Palestine and the Arab revolution, page 9.

Uganda: vote deferred on death penalty for gays

Rolling Stone front page inciting murder of gay people

By Hannah Thompson

The Ugandan parliament adjourned on 13 May, leaving homophobic legislation undebated. However, independent MP David Bahati pledged to re-introduce the bill after the elections.

LGBT rights organisation AllOut call the lack of progression on the bill a "victory", congratulating the signers of its 1.4 million strong petition which has put enough international public pressure on the Ugandan president to ensure the bill's deferral.

But the bill itself and the attacks against LGBT activists in Uganda in the wake of the bill are still terrifying.

Although Bahati proposed withdrawing the clause that would make "aggravated homosexuality" punishable by hanging, no evidence of the amended bill has been produced. Ugandans could be charged with "aggravated homosexuality" if they have sex with someone of the same gender and are HIV positive, a "serial offender", are in "a position of authority" over their partner, or if their partner ("victim") is under the age of 18.

The bill adds to existing colonial legislation making same-sex sexual acts punishable by life imprisonment, and requires all members of the public to report "acts of homosexuality" within 24 hours or face seven years in jail. Anyone who "aids, abets, counsels or procures another to engage of acts of homosexuality" will face up to seven years. Everyone from LGBT activists and HIV counsellors to landlords is liable for persecution.

The bill was brought before the Ugandan parliament in March 2009 after the US evangelical Family Life Network held a semi-

nar in Kampala to "Expose the truth behind homosexuality and the homosexual agenda". Speakers included Scott Lively, president of Defend the Family International and author of "The Pink Swastika", and Don Schmierer and Caleb Lee Brundidge, both involved in "homosexual recovery groups".

The religious right in Uganda is also influential in HIV campaigns which advocate abstinence over condom use.

Homophobia is widespread in Uganda, but the seminar succeeded in further stirring homophobic hysteria from parents now convinced that LGBT students and teachers are out to "recruit" their children.

Ugandan legislation makes "promotion of homosexuality" a crime; this has been taken up by the tabloid press. In January *Rolling Stone* newspaper published the names and photographs of several LGBT people under the headline "Hang Them".

After the "outing", Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) activist David Kato received death threats and was eventually beaten to death in his home.

SMUG commented: "We call on religious leaders, political leaders and media houses to stop demonizing sexual minorities in Uganda since doing so creates a climate of violence." Director of SMUG Frank Mugisha described the situation for LGBT people in Uganda: "The average gay person is always harassed, bashed, thrown out of school, thrown out of home."

So long as this bill and the homophobia behind it are up for debate, violence and prejudice towards LGBT people in Uganda will remain high.

Keep up the international pressure: solidarity with LGBT and human rights activists, kill this bill!

Hezbollah, Assad and 15 May

By Rhodri Evans

On 15 May, groups of Palestinians living in Syria and in Lebanon gathered and crossed the border into Israel, in demonstrations to mark Nakba (catastrophe) Day (the Palestinian name for the anniversary of the declaration of the state of Israel).

The Israeli army responded in typical ten-eyes-for-an-eye fashion, killing 14.

According to a sympathetic report on the Lebanese border action in *Counterpunch* by Franklin Lamb, who took part in it, buses to the border were

organised by the Islamist party Hezbollah.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah told the crowd that the action was a gesture of continued commitment to the destruction of Israel:

"The fate of this entity (enemy) is demise and no initiatives, treaties or borders will protect it. Your return to Palestine is an inalienable right, and its realisation has become closer than any other time".

At the Syrian border, one of the people who had crossed the border fence and reached the nearest Israeli village, Majdal Shams (inhabited by Druze: Arabs, but generally pro-

Israeli), said (according to the liberal Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, which in an editorial criticised the Israeli government response) that the action had "received a nod from the Syrian authorities". "We asked if we could go and they said yes, and we came in hundreds of buses..."

It is not the first time that Syria's dictatorship (which aids Hamas while denying the Palestinians living in Syria the right to obtain citizenship or to own land there) has used Palestinians as a pawn to boost itself as "anti-Zionist". And the grass-roots rebellion now underway in Syria will have given it

Why super-injunctions are good

Press Watch

By Pat Murphy



It is rare to find an issue that unites all of the press — left, right and centre. Still harder when that issue is considered controversial, involving complex moral and legal issues. How then to explain the unanimity of the press? The matter under discussion is the use of so-called “super-injunctions” to prevent the publication of sex scandal stories involving celebrities.

The daily diet of the British tabloids is stodgy with tales of which Premiership footballer slept with which model and which C-list soap star is having it off with which “Big Brother” housemate. Hence the outrage that they can be “gagged” by the courts.

But the problem with Premiership footballers, famous actors and performers is that they are rich and can call on great resources when they are desperate to defend their reputations or hold their relationships and families together under the strain of infidelity. Although they are victims of tabloid culture, they are also one of the very few social groups powerful enough to prevent the papers from printing exactly what they want regardless of the consequences.

According to the *Telegraph*, at least 80 celebrities have obtained what that paper calls “gagging orders” in British courts over the last six years.

Does any of this matter to socialists? The way in which this debate is being framed encourages us to think of it as a conflict between free speech and freedom of the press on the one hand and the power of the rich and famous on the other. All other things being equal, a libertarian socialist would be for the right of the press to print stories irrespective of whether we agree with them or are comfortable with the content.

The *Mirror* emphasised this side of the debate with a survey showing that “eight out of 10 people believe the use of ‘super-injunctions’ against the press shows there is one law for the rich, another for the rest of us.” It turns out that the survey was paid for by the *Mirror*! Nonetheless, they are

Hugh Grant, himself a former victim of a “kiss-and-tell” scandal, has been a leading defender of the injunctions

sure that the result will “fuel the furore over the gagging orders which wealthy celebrities use to hide their indiscretions”.

I don’t have the breadth and diversity of friends that would keep me in touch with all of the feelings of readers of the *Sun*, *Mirror* and *Telegraph*, but I get around a bit most weeks and I haven’t detected any furore at all about super-injunctions.

On a personal level I would like to see many, many *more* court orders preventing the publication of accounts of the sexual indiscretions of celebrities. Their privacy would be protected and, no matter how rich, I think they have rights too. But that would not be the only gain. It might also mean that some of these celebrities will get less casual sex than they do now!

If there was little chance of selling salacious (though usually tired and predictable) details to the press that would be a good thing. These stories are “bread and circuses” of the worst kind, demeaning their readers almost as much as their victims. They, and celebrity gossip in general, have been a huge factor in the evolution of a mass newspaper market which barely deals in news and politics at all.

There is nothing natural or inevitable about this evolution. I was brought up in a council house by working-class

parents neither of whom had an education beyond 16. Newspapers were, nevertheless, a sacred part of every day and silence descended on our front room when the news came on the TV or radio. It may not have been a typical household on our estate, but it wasn’t particularly rare either. Interest in the world is as likely and can be as enthusiastic in working-class homes as in those of the wealthy and more privileged or formally educated.

In recent decades newspapers produced for the mass market have moved decisively downmarket. The replacement of news by celebrity scandal is a significant factor in disarming and sedating our class. And it is this exclusion of our class from politics — much more than freedom of the press — that is at stake in this debate.

And the broadsheet press, which itself occasionally dips a voyeuristic toe into celeb culture, is entirely comfortable with a class division of labour within which they provide serious news to the people who need it while the rest make do with comics.

The serious case that they make against injunctions — that they can be used by big corporations to block stories about corrupt practices — could be taken care of by a far better, clearer law.

You can see how much the British press really values free speech by observing their reaction to the breaching of court orders on Twitter, social networks and blogs.

Anarchy! they cry. Let *us* print this stuff or it will get out but in the most unreliable and damaging way.

What worries them is that rumours and gossip are circulated without the chance for anyone to profit by it. What is the point of paying reporters to collect dirt only to find it published by freelance gossips on platforms they do not control and from which they cannot profit?

I would like to think that the future of celebrity gossip is to be published that way so that it becomes indecipherable noise which no-one listens to properly.

As ever the media barons are less interested in genuine press freedom than in maintaining their power to shape what is considered news and what is judged to be in the “public interest”. The fact that there is a challenge to this agenda, even if it comes from some wealthy footballers and actors, is on the whole a good thing.

E is for Exploitation

ABCs of Marxism

By Tom Urtreiner



Which workers do you think of when you hear the word “exploitation”? The list will include contracted-out workers for some of the biggest brand names — Nike, Primark, Apple — domestic servants, immigrant farm hands, workers who toil hour upon hour for a pittance in pay. They live under constant threats, they work in dangerous conditions, and many are forced to live like indentured slaves.

The bosses who employ these super-exploited workers can make a lot of money very quickly. But making a profit from production does not rely on such extreme conditions. The owners of fully unionised workplaces with decent levels of pay and an eight hour working day still make profits — and very large ones!

How? And are those “normal” profits free of exploitation? Are they a fair reward for “capital”, or “entrepreneurship”, or “risk-taking”?

Karl Marx argued that the relationship between workers and the people who own the means of production — workplaces and the tools and machines used in them — is *always* based on an unequal exchange. Exploitation is not just something that happens to exceptionally badly-off workers, but the basic relation between those two big social classes as a whole.

Labour in capitalist society has a twofold character. Firstly, it is a “concrete” or particular activity creating particular goods or services (use-values). Building a house or assembling a computer are both labour, but no amount of

bricklaying will produce a computer, and you can’t build a house out of microchips.

Secondly, labour has an abstract character. It is the using-up of a certain amount of society’s pool of labour-power (capacity to work).

Houses and computers are equated in exchange — say, five hundred computers “equal” one house — because in the market they count as embodiments of different quantities of *abstract* labour, that is, of labour measured as the number of hours of social labour-time required to produce them, on average. That makes it possible to measure them on a common standard despite the fact that their use-values, and the “concrete” labours embodied in them, are incommensurable.

We talk, and often think, as if our wages pay for what we produce, or for our labour. In fact they pay for our labour-power. Workers own our labour-power and can sell it.

What we produce is not our property, to be sold by us to the capitalist, but the capitalist’s property from the start.

We cannot sell our labour to the capitalist because before the capitalist buys our labour-power our labour does not exist, and is not even possible (because we, the workers, do not have the means of production). Our labour is not what we sell, but the process of the capitalist “consuming” the labour-power he has bought from us.

Our labour-power is bought and sold like other commodities, at a rate broadly governed by the quantity of abstract social labour embodied in reproducing labour-power, i.e. in producing the equivalent of a “living wage” which enables the labour-power to be available again next week or next month.

In return for that limited pittance — which may be smaller or larger, paid in full or short-changed — the capitalist gets a commodity, labour-power, which has the unique property of being the basic creative force of society and embodying the social capacity to produce not only pittances

but also ever more varied and ever more lavish wealth.

The inequality in the exchange arises from the social fact of labour-power being a commodity, in a commodity-dominated society, not from the fluctuations in the price at which that commodity is sold.

Marx wrote that to indict capitalism solely on the basis of low wages would be “as if, among slaves who have at last got behind the secret of slavery and broken out in rebellion, a slave still in thrall to obsolete notions were to inscribe on the programme of the rebellion: slavery must be abolished because the feeding of the slaves in the system of slavery cannot exceed a certain low minimum”.

Or again, that a rise in wages “as a consequence of the accumulation of capital only means, in fact, that the length and weight of the golden chain the wage-worker has already forged for himself, allow of a relaxation of the tension of it”.

Only a temporary and only a partial relaxation, too, because built-in to the relation of exploitation between *classes* is a drive by capital always to maximise profits by maximising the “surplus” which is measured by the difference between labour done (or “value added” by labour) and the labour-equivalent paid for labour-power, or wages.

Capitalism is mass exploitation. All the wealth of the capitalist class and of their state comes from that surplus labour. We, the working class, created the massive wealth now concentrated in the hands of a tiny band of thieves and exploiters.

Ending this or that pocket of low wages is important. But the exploitation of one whole social class by another can be achieved only by replacing production based on wage-labour by production through the free cooperation of equals.

• Further reading: Karl Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*.

Tory attack threatens all pensions

At its conference on 18-20 May, the civil service union PCS will vote to ballot its members for strikes over the issues of pensions, job cuts, and pay.

Pensions will be the headline issue, and the PCS action is designed to link with teachers' unions, NUT and ATL, which have already decided to ballot.

A strike by all three unions, plus the lecturers' union UCU, which has already balloted, is set for 30 June. Other unions, including the head teachers' union NAHT and the giant health and local government union Unison, talk of balloting later in the year, so bigger strikes could follow in the autumn.

In France, in September-October 2010, pensions became the focal issue for a huge wave of protests — including by school students — against the social spending cuts which have followed the 2008 financial crash. Activists will work for the same thing to happen in Britain. In any case, the pensions battle starting on 30 June is not a technical or sectional fight by special groups defending quirky privileges. The unions which take action are leading the way on an issue which concerns all working-class people.

The public sector unions protest against Government plans and measures which:

- Have already (from April 2011) changed the basis on which pensions, once they start paying out, are uprated for inflation, from "Retail Price Index" to "Consumer Price Index". CPI averages about 0.8% a year lower than RPI. 0.8% a year less, after maybe 20 years of retirement, adds up to over 15% less.
- Will (from April 2012) increase the pension contributions taken out of workers' wages by around three per cent of wages. The increased contributions mean no improvement in pensions — rather, the opposite — so this amounts to a three per cent cut in pay.
- Will increase the pension age, even for those workers who kept a pension age of 60 when in 2005 the unions won a shoddy deal with the Labour Government making the pension age rise to 65 for new entrants but stay at 60 for workers already in the schemes.

The Government plans and measures hit teachers especially hard, since they are less likely to opt out of their pension scheme than, for example, local government workers, and more likely to build up a long record of service giving them a relatively sizeable pension.

But the issues here affect all workers, directly or indirectly, in one way or another.

The Tory press often says that public sector workers have "gold-plated" pensions. It's more like public sector workers having decent china plates from which to eat a meagre diet in old age while other workers make do with cracked and chipped ones, but public sector pensions generally are better than those (except for top managers) in the private sector. That is because unions are stronger in the public sector, and better able to resist the general trashing of workers' pensions in recent decades.

Worsening public-sector pensions will not help private-sector workers. It will do the opposite. It will push down the benchmark.

The change from RPI to CPI uprating covers not only public-sector pensions but also one element of the state pension (the "State Second Pension" /SERPS) and all private-sector pensions unless the scheme explicitly mandated RPI uprating. The Government has talked of legislation which would override private-sector pension scheme mandates and impose CPI uprating on them even if the scheme previously specified RPI.

The increases in pension age affect everyone. The Labour Government already set plans to raise the state pension age. The Coalition Government has speeded them up. Last October, the Government announced that it would speed up the increase in women's pension age, so that it will reach 65 by November 2018. The state pension age will then increase to 66 for both men and women from December 2018 to April 2020. Chancellor George Osborne has talked of further increases in state pension age which could push it up to 70 before the middle of the century.

Because of campaigning by the National Pensioners' Convention, and the relatively high rate of voter turn-out by pensioners, the Government has been more cautious about the state pension than the public-sector occupational schemes. From April 2011 the basic State Pension is to be uprated by a "triple guarantee" of earnings, prices or 2.5 per cent.

The existing state system is complicated. Pension Credit, introduced by the Labour Government, is a big part of it, and has the disadvantage that it uses a complex means test and is not claimed by about one-third of the people entitled

cases;

- weakening TUPE, the rules supposed to safeguard workers' terms and conditions when work is transferred from one employer to another, for example by outsourcing or privatisation;
- the requirement to give workers 90 days' notice of redundancies.

The cool-headed *Financial Times* reported lawyer Yvonne Gallagher saying that the workers' rights in these cases all flow from European Union law, and will be difficult for a British government to change.

The government has lawyers too, and may be able to find loopholes.

Osborne's immediate purpose is to keep the unions on the back foot, off balance, on the defensive — keep them worrying about what will hit them next, rather than rallying to fight back.

The unions must fight back, and demand that the Labour Party leadership supports them in that.

Make 30 June a day of debate and decision, not just rallies

In Nottingham, a joint strike committee for 30 June is being convened through the Trades Council, and will meet on 24 May.

Activists are building for a big meeting with as many rank and file union members as possible. Notts Save Our Services has been asked to send observers. Delegates from Unison, GMB, and Unite have been asked to attend, as well as delegates from the unions likely to strike on the 30th, NUT, PCS, UCU, and ATL. Nottingham City Unison has already accepted.

On 30 June, the plan in Nottingham is not just for set-piece rallies where strikers and supporters listen passively to windy speeches by union officials.

There will be a proper meeting, with discussion, not a rally. The Albert Hall in Nottingham, which can seat 900 people, has been booked, and is expected to be full.

Union activists have agreed to have few top-table speeches, and to open the floor for debate.

Some activists are pressing for the meeting to be open for motions and votes, so that strikers can send a clear message to the union leaders about how they want the campaign continued.

to it.

The Coalition Government has talked of simplifying the system by introducing a basic state pension at a much higher rate than now — £140 a week — though only for "new" pensioners.

However:

- In the meantime, Pension Credit for the poorest pensioners is being frozen for four years from 2011.
- The Government makes everything conditional on the dogma that "any options for reform must be cost neutral in each and every year". That means that if some pensioners gain from coalition measures, others must lose out.
- £140 a week is still below the official poverty line. The National Pensioners' Convention calls for the state pension to be set above the official poverty level of £178 a week.
- The Government's plans would probably involve the abolition of "contracting-out", whereby workers with an occupational pension scheme pay less National Insurance.

According to the *Financial Times*, that means that "the diminishing rump of employers who still provide [defined benefit] pensions will finally give up on them, switching employees instead to money purchase schemes".

"Money purchase" schemes mean that you pay your contributions into a pension fund without any assurance in advance of what your pension pay-out will be. It depends on how well the pension fund does with its stock-market dealings, and the calculations the financiers make at pension-age time about what "annuity" (yearly income, payable for as long or as short a time as you live) your accumulated pension-fund stash can buy.

The Government has talked of shifting public-sector pension schemes to that "defined contribution" option. In the private sector, "defined contribution" is already more usual than "defined benefit". "In Britain", reports the *Financial Times*, "people in such schemes have lost an average £10,000 a year of future retirement income over the past decade and will need to save a third of their salary to make up the shortfall". That is because of stock-market ups and downs, and downward shifts in the amount of "annuity" paid out per thousand pounds of pension-fund stash.

A strong turnout on 30 June, and a lively, urgent campaign of continuing action after that, designed to win rather than just to protest, will improve the chances of a decent old age, free from poverty, for all workers.

The unions should conduct their campaign in that spirit. As Karl Marx put it, they must "learn to act deliberately as organising centres

Government steps up drive to "stare down" unions

Emboldened by the Tories' relatively good showing in the 5 May elections, the Government has called on business to "get stuck in" against "unions and interest groups".

Speaking to the Institute of Directors, a bosses' club, on 11 May, chancellor George Osborne said: "If we are going to support private sector growth and create jobs, we can't shy away from looking at difficult issues like employment law..."

"Your voice, the voice of business, needs to go on being heard in the battle. Some of these may be controversial. Unions and interest groups may oppose them. I say to the business community... don't be passive observers. Don't stay on the sidelines. Get stuck in to the argument".

Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat Business Minister, has formally announced that the Government is looking at a series of changes to workers' rights, including:

- limiting the amount that can be paid in discrimination

How anarchism parted ways with Marxism

This is the second part of Martin Thomas's three-part review article on *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, by Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt. The first part (*Solidarity* 203) discussed the many points on which Schmidt's and van der Walt's version of anarchism is closer to Marxism than to traditional anarchism; their claim that Marxism equals proto-Stalinism; and their claim that "the broad anarchist tradition" is equivalent to "socialism from below".

Schmidt and van der Walt insist that anarchism is a class-struggle movement — indeed, the class-struggle movement. Their evidence for this, however, comes down to nothing more than the fact that most anarchists, like most activists for radical change generally and for obvious reasons, have seen the disadvantaged and dissatisfied as their constituency, and welcome strife.

They claim (wrongly, I think) that is libel to say that Mikhail Bakunin looked to the "lumpenproletariat" ("underclass", paupers, people who live from begging, theft, dole, etc.) as the agency of revolution, rather than the core wage-working class.

However, they are explicit in rejecting the Marxist views that the wage-working class — because of the way in which it is "trained, united, and organised by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production" — is the unique and central agency of socialist revolution, and that the possibility of modern socialism depends on preconditions which are and can only be created by capitalism itself (the development of the human basis, the wage-working class, and of technology and communications).

For them, peasants are agents of socialist revolution just as much as wage-workers are, or more so. Schmidt and van der Walt quote Marx in polemic against Bakunin:

"He understands absolutely nothing about the social revolution, only its political phrases. Its economic conditions do not exist for him. As all hitherto existing economic forms, developed or undeveloped, involve the enslavement of the worker (whether in the form of wage-labourer, peasant etc.), he believes that a radical revolution is possible in all such forms alike.

"Still more! He wants the European social revolution, premised on the economic basis of capitalist production, to take place at the level of the Russian or Slavic agricultural and pastoral peoples, not to surpass this level... The will, and not the economic conditions, is the foundation of his social revolution".

And here they enter into dispute with the real Marx, not a proto-Stalinist "Marx" of their own invention. "There [is] no need for the capitalist stage to be completed or even begun... It [is] not necessary to wait for capitalism to create the material basis for freedom; freedom would create its own material basis".

Although, as we've seen, Schmidt and van der Walt, unlike most anarchists, uphold the need for a disciplined revolutionary socialist party with a definite programme and a press, they are like traditional anarchists in that their conception of the "party" has little or no dimension of it being (in Trotsky's phrase) "the memory of the working class".

They disapprove of the Spanish anarchists joining the bourgeois governments of Catalonia and republican Spain during the Spanish civil war, but offer no discussion of lessons to be learned, or differentiations necessary in future anarchist movements if they are to avoid such things (which arose from the fact that the anarchists, having "rejected" all government, did not have a clear awareness of the difference between workers' government and bourgeois government, and so, when faced with the need for some coordinated authority for the war against the fascists, collapsed into joining bourgeois governments).

They claim the Mexican syndicalist movement for their "broad anarchist tradition", but comment on that movement's military alliance in 1915 with the bourgeois politicians Obregon and Carranza against revolutionary peasant armies only by labelling it "tragic".

The whole scheme of "socialism from below" versus "socialism from above" has the same deficiencies in the hands

of Schmidt and van der Walt as it has in those of Hal Draper, despite the many merits of Draper's writings using the same scheme.

Unlike Marx's differentiation, in the *Communist Manifesto*, of socialist currents into working-class communism and various strands of what he called "reactionary socialism" influenced by other classes (feudal remnants, do-gooding bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, etc.), this is an idealist scheme. On the one hand, the good, generous, democratic-minded guys and girls who want their socialism to be "from below"; on the other hand, the bad guys who wish it "from above".

Given that the world includes bad guys and girls as well as good ones, one wonders about the basis for hoping that the good ones will win out within the broad stream of socialist thought. History so far, after all, and socialist history as presented by Draper and by Schmidt and van der Walt, has been more like the old verse:

The rain it raineth every day
Upon the just and unjust fella,
But more upon the just because
The unjust hath the just's umbrella.

The sorting-out of socialists into good and bad types in this scheme tends to be arbitrary. Draper put all anarchists in the "from above" bag, on the basis of the real logic of Bakunin's wish for "invisible pilots" to thwart workers' attempts at organising their own democratic authority after revolution, and some real citations from Proudhon, but in a way that is unfair to many real-life anarchists. Schmidt and van der Walt, as we've seen, want to disavow Proudhon and Stirner as not anarchists at all, and claim De Leon and Connolly as good guys, as "from below" types.

Since revolution is not just a counterposition of "below" to "above", but an activity in which those "below" move to become "above", "from below" versus "from above" is not an adequate paraphrase of "by class struggle" versus "by petitioning or by bureaucratic or military coup".

Lenin put it like this: "Limitation, in principle, of revolutionary action to pressure from below and renunciation of pressure also from above is anarchism... He who does not understand the new tasks in the epoch of revolution, the tasks of action from above, he who is unable to determine the conditions and the programme for such action, has no idea whatever of the tasks of the proletariat in every democratic revolution".

1872 SPLIT

Schmidt and van der Walt are right about one thing. Anarchism as a movement (or maybe the word "movement" is too definite, and the French word "mouvance", which has no exact English equivalent, would be better) does date from the 1872 split in the First International. Bakunin and Kropotkin were much more its founders than Proudhon or Stirner.

But what was that split really about? Was it — as it would have to be, if Schmidt and van der Walt's broad scheme were correct — a split between proto-Stalinism on one side, and class-struggle socialism on the other?

It was not. The issues, as stated by both sides, were:

One: political action by the working class. Bakunin's wing objected to the following resolution of the Hague Congress of the International, in September 1872:

"In its struggle against the collective power of the propertied classes, the working class cannot act as a class except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from and opposed to all old parties formed by the propertied classes.

"This constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to insure the triumph of the social revolution, and of its ultimate end, the abolition of classes.

"The combination of forces which the working class has already effected by its economical struggles ought, at the same time, to serve as a lever for its struggles against the political power of landlords and capitalists.

"The lords of land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economical monopolies, and for the enslavement of labour. The conquest of political power has therefore be-

come the great duty of the working class".

Two: the organisation of the International itself. Marx argued for an extension of the powers of the General Council (actually very modest: it amounted to no more than giving the General Council power to suspend units of the International, subject to a raft of safeguards). The Bakunin wing held that the future society must have no elected central authority, and the International must "prefigure" that future.

"The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International has formed for itself. We must therefore strive to make this organisation as close as possible to our ideal. How could one expect an egalitarian society to emerge out of an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible. The International, embryo of the future society, must from now on faithfully reflect our principles of federation and liberty, and must reject any principle tending toward authority and dictatorship".

Marx remonstrated that this doctrine, despite all the "anti-authoritarians'" acclaim for grass-roots rebellion, meant trying to make the working-class struggle develop not according to its own logic but in subordination to "principles" deduced from the leaders' picture of an ideal future society.

"Had the Communards realised that the Commune was 'the embryo of the future human society', they would have thrown away all discipline and all weapons — things which must disappear as soon as there are no more wars..." "All arms with which to fight must be drawn from society as it is and the fatal conditions of this struggle have the misfortune of not being easily adapted to the idealistic fantasies which these doctors in social science have exalted as divinities, under the names of Freedom, Autonomy, Anarchy".

The "autonomous working men's sections" which the "anti-authoritarians" counterposed to an International led by the General Council would "become so many schools, with these gentlemen from the Alliance [Bakunin's friends] as their teachers. They formulate the idea through 'prolonged study'. They then 'bring it home to our working men's associations'. To them, the working class is so much raw material, a chaos which needs the breath of their Holy Spirit to give it form".

The 1872 split was not a clean sorting-out of "anti-authoritarians" even on Bakunin's definition. Many supported Bakunin, to one degree or another, who were not anarchists, but had grievances against a General Council which they saw as dominated by Marx — for example, George Eccarius, secretary of the International until May 1872; John Hales, his successor in that post; César de Paepe in Belgium; and the "Lassalleans" in Germany, whom Marx had criticised in 1868 for wanting "dictatorialism" and an excessively centralised regime in the workers' movement!

Another strand was complaint against the General Council and Marx for being too "German". Schmidt and van der Walt pick up that strand, stressed at the time by Bakunin. "Classical Marxists [saw] particular states as 'progressive'... Marx and Engels tended to cast Germany in the role of champion of progress in Europe... Their preference for Germany arguably hid an 'irrational nationalism'..."

They make much of Marx and Engels, in private correspondence at the start of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, suggesting that their German comrades should vote for war credits (as the Lassalleans did) because this was for Germany a "war to defend its national existence" which it had been "forced into" by the aggression of the French emperor, Bonaparte. In fact the war had been deliberately engineered by the Prussian chancellor, Bismarck. Although Marx and Engels did not know that, they quickly came to endorse and acclaim the stance of Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel in refusing war credits, and approvingly quoted a German workers' declaration: "We declare the present war to be exclusively dynastic".

Marx and Engels were far from being German patriots. In the midst of the First International period, Marx wrote to Kugelmann: "Lassalle's successors oppose me... because they are aware of my avowed opposition to what the Germans call 'Realpolitik'. It is this sort of 'reality' which places Germany so far behind all civilised countries." (emphasis added).

Karl Marx; Mikhail Bakunin

The real issue was what Schmidt and van der Walt tactfully call “an occasional tendency [by Bakunin] to stereotype the Germans” (and the anarchist historian Max Nettlau called Bakunin’s “nationalist psychosis”).

Whereas Marx, Engels, and their comrades quickly developed an independent working-class stance on the 1870 war, Bakunin explicitly sided with Imperial France. That difference did not become an issue in the split in the International, but Kropotkin’s subsequent support for France against Germany in World War One was a stance with real roots in anarchist tradition as well as a personal lapse.

POLITICS AND ORGANISATION

In sum, the 1872 split was not between a Bakunin arguing for class-struggle socialism from below, and a Marx pressing towards Stalinism. The issues were those which Marxists since then have seen as central disputes with anarchism: whether workers should mobilise politically (in battles for political reform, and in independent working-class electoral activity), and whether workers should have a cohesive organisation based on the logic of class struggle within capitalism, or a loose network designed by reading back from a picture of an ideal future society.

A review of the background, in the trajectories of the First International and of Bakunin, confirms that assessment.

As Marx described it in his Inaugural Address for the First International, the defeat of the 1848 revolutions in Europe was followed by “an epoch of industrial fever, moral marasmus, and political reaction”.

By the early 1860s, things were changing. The “industrial fever” had created sizeable industrial working classes in several countries, whereas in 1848 one had existed only in Britain.

The London Trades Council, though feeble by comparison with future trade-union organisations, became a force. The French workers gained some elbow-room. Oddly, in terms of the subsequent polemics, the major expression of this was an independent workers’ candidature in March 1864 by Henri Tolain, who was a Proudhonist (proto-anarchist) and theoretically hostile to political action.

Solidarity with an uprising by the Polish people against Russian rule, in 1863, and with the North in the American Civil War (1861-5), further mobilised workers and the left.

The London Trades Council and Tolain’s group organised a joint meeting in London in September 1864. The common account by biographers, and by Marx himself, is that Marx had withdrawn into his study and the British Library since the defeat of the 1848 movement. In fact he had remained in-

involved in the affairs of the German worker-exiles in London (who were, given the repressive conditions in Germany, one of the nearest things there was a live German workers’ movement). He was invited to the September 1864 meeting to represent the German workers. He joined the General Council set up from the September 1864 meeting, bringing with him at least four veterans of his organisation from 1848, the Communist League. In the earliest discussions, he was able to steer the new movement towards a class-struggle rather than just an abstract democratic political basis. He won acceptance for a “Preamble” to the Rules of the International which stated its aims in the following terms:

“The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves... the struggle for the emancipation of the working classes means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and duties, and the abolition of all class rule;

“The economical subjection of the man of labour to the

monopoliser of the means of labour — that is, the source of life — lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of all social misery, mental degradation, and political dependence;

“The economical emancipation of the working classes is therefore the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means;

“All efforts aiming at the great end hitherto failed from the want of solidarity between the manifold divisions of labour in each country, and from the absence of a fraternal bond of union between the working classes of different countries” — and therefore the International should organise that bond of solidarity.

• The third and final part of this review article will cover the history of the First International and the split of 1872, and the broad outlines of anarchist development since 1872.

Songs of Liberty and Rebellion



Joe Hill, born Joel Hägglund, was a Swedish migrant worker, organiser and the best-known songwriter and balladeer of the Industrial Workers of the World (“the Wobblies”), the revolutionary syndicalist trade union which led some of the most important class struggles in early 20th-century America.

Hill was executed in 1915 on trumped-up charges and, in a letter to IWW leader Bill Haywood, coined the famous phrase “don’t mourn, organise!”

His ballad “There Is Power in a Union” was, like many Wobbly “hymns”, a satirical adaptation of a religious song which took the tune and adapted the content of the Christian song “There Is Power in the Blood”. Hill’s version is distinct from the better-known song of the same name by Billy Bragg.

There is a power in a union

Would you have freedom from wage slavery,
Then join in the grand Industrial band;
Would you from mis’ry and hunger be free,

Then come! Do your share, like a man.

CHORUS

There is pow’r, there is pow’r
In a band of workingmen.
When they stand hand in hand,
That’s a pow’r, that’s a pow’r
That must rule in every land —
One Industrial Union Grand.

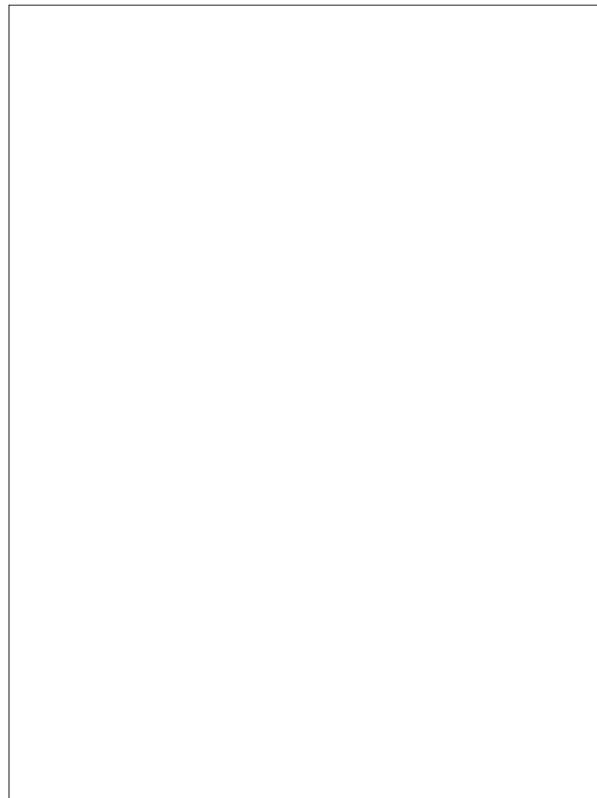
Would you have mansions of gold in the sky,
And live in a shack, way in the back?
Would you have wings up in heaven to fly,
And starve here with rags on your back?

If you’ve had “nuff” of “the blood of the lamb,”
Then join in the grand Industrial band;
If, for a change, you would have eggs and ham.
Then come! Do your share, like a man.

If you like sluggers to beat off your head,
Then don’t organize, all unions despise,
If you want nothing before you are dead,
Shake hands with your boss and look wise.

Come, all ye workers, from every land,
Come join in the grand Industrial band.
Then we our share of this earth shall demand.
Come on! Do your share, like a man.

Return of the slums?



Pete Gilman reviews *The Great Estate: The Rise and Fall of the Council House* (BBC2)

In this programme, author and journalist Michael Collins reviewed the history of council housing and interviewed some of the people whose lives were shaped by it. He presented it as a social experiment with a legacy of failure, and described the vision of "council housing for all" as "utopian". The programme nonetheless went some way to redressing Tory and right-wing denigration.

Before the great council house building programme of the 1945-51 Labour government, "the slum landlord" was king; most working-class people lived in hovels, often paid exorbitant rents, and had no security of tenure. Local authority housing changed this, and proved to be the most efficient and effective way of giving people a decent place to live, which all socialists believe everyone should have as a right. If it has a legacy of failure this is due not to any inherent defect in the system but to the relentless Tory onslaught against it.

The Tories have always hated council housing. To them housing is a commodity to be sold for maximum profit, and nothing boosts profits more than shortage and desperation.

Thatcher began her offensive against local authority housing by virtually ending the building of new housing and by introducing "right to buy". That was never about extending home ownership; it was about reducing the stock of council housing.

After an initial spurt in which tenants living in the best and most modern street properties bought their homes, the "buying" dried up. So tenants were coerced into buying by draconian rent rises.

When Thatcher was first elected, council rents might have been about 10% of a typical working-class household's earned income. Today they could be as much as 50% (e.g. a rent of £100 a week for a two bedroom flat could be the equivalent of half a week's wages). This is one reason why expenditure on housing benefits is so high!

Tory policies have meant the return of the slum landlord, but on a far greater scale. Estate agents and property companies have acquired vast amounts of council property which they then sell or rent for a huge profit. In Inner London you can have a council flat on an estate with a rent of £100 a week, and an identical flat next door which an estate agent got for a song and now charges £400 a week rent for.

The new Tory government plans the final end of social housing — by capping housing benefits and forcing council rents up to 80% of market levels, and the proposed ending of security of tenure. Legislation to bring in those changes is now going through Parliament. It will mean forcing council tenants out of their homes "if their circumstance improve." It will mean a massive increase in homelessness, and will cause appalling suffering and hardship. To the Tories this is good all for business.

By cataloguing these changes the programme showed how council housing dramatically improved the lives of millions.

The hardest anti-colonial war

Bruce Robinson reviews *Outside the Law*

Outside the Law is Rachid Bouchareb's second film to deal with the colonial relationship of France to his native Algeria. It focuses on the Front de Liberation Nationale's (FLN) guerrilla war against France in Paris from the early 50s up to Algerian independence in 1962, as seen through the story of three brothers.

The film sets the context in two scenes which show their family being evicted from their ancestral land on the orders of a French colonialist and the death of their father in the Sétif massacre, in 1945, after French police opened fire on peaceful Algerian nationalist demonstrators.

The three brothers then follow different paths. One, Said, moves with their mother to Paris, living in an Algerian shanty town in Nanterre. Trying to avoid working at Renault Billancourt, he becomes involved in prostitution, running a shady night club and boxing promotion. Abdelkader goes to prison for political activity and while there becomes a cadre of the FLN, which is about to launch armed struggle in France. The third brother, Mossaoud, becomes a French paratrooper in Vietnam. Defeat and capture by the Vietnamese makes him realise the French are not invincible and on his return he is convinced by Abdelkader to join the FLN, becoming his brother's "muscle".

Abdelkader and Mossaoud become single-minded revolutionaries who totally subordinate themselves to the cause at whatever cost to themselves and those close to them. The film's climax comes as this brings them into conflict with their brother who invests everything in a boxing match the FLN does not wish to take place.

The central part of the film shows the two brothers building up the FLN from nothing to dominate the shanty town and the launching of a war against the police in Paris that draws repression directed against the entire Algerian population. Much of the film dramatises actual historical events of the late 50s and early 60s — the FLN assassination of police, who in turn set up their own underground terror organisation to take revenge, the use of torture to gather information on the FLN, the random killing of Algerians forced to drown in the Seine, the use of unobtrusive French sympathisers as FLN couriers (a role played in reality by Trotskyists among others), the financing of FLN arms through money from Algerians in France, the beating to death by the CRS riot police of demonstrators defying a curfew on Algerians and much else.

The film does not romanticise the FLN. Its growth in Nanterre begins, alongside speeches to the Algerians in Renault, with the two brothers' elimination of the local boss of its political rival, the MNA, and the assertion of their power by the killing of a shanty-town dweller who uses "taxes" collected for the FLN to buy a much needed fridge for his family. Later one of the top leaders of the FLN in Switzerland tells Abdelkader, by now risen to command the FLN in

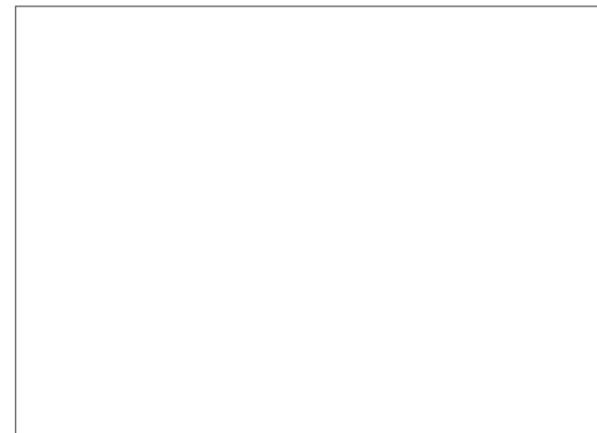
Paris, to continue attacks on the police knowing the high price the Algerian population will pay. Yet it is clear where Bouchareb's sympathies lie and the film shows the backing of the mass of Algerians in Paris for the FLN's struggle.

The antagonistic response of elements of the French right and some historians to the film indicate that the Algerian war still remains a sensitive subject in France. In one controversial scene, Colonel Faivre, the ex-World War Two Resistance fighter hunting down the brothers and in charge of his own semi-official terror group, is kidnapped and taken to meet Abdelkader who tries to convince him that his old fight against the Germans should now lead him to support the FLN. Abdelkader quotes the de Gaulle of 1941, saying that the FLN is now taking the role of the Resistance in fighting an occupier using the means of assassination de Gaulle called for. Faivre prefers to fight for "the honour of France" but acknowledges his opponent's integrity, saying Abdelkader would have fitted well into his Resistance network.

In the final scenes, Faivre, standing on a Metro station looking at Abdelkader's body while the CRS beat Algerian demonstrators in the background, acknowledges that, despite the repression against the entire Algerian population and his own death, Abdelkader has won the war. The film ends with documentary footage of the celebrations of Algerian independence a few months later.

Outside the Law is part thriller, part a study of the brothers' relationships and, most importantly, a historical drama of the Algerian War of Independence. As a thriller, it is sometimes a bit formulaic, but its basis in historical fact and the portrayal of the main characters sustain interest and give one the sense that their individual fates are tied to great events in which one has to take sides.

Bouchareb has brought one of the hardest fought anti-colonial struggles back to life at a time when the "Arab Spring" brings a new wave of very different uprisings to North Africa.



Ideas for Freedom 2011: From Tunis to London, the workers' agenda

8-10 July, Highgate Newtown
Community Centre, Archway,
London N19 5DQ

Ideas for Freedom is a weekend of socialist debate, discussion and workshops hosted by Workers' Liberty. Recently-announced sessions include:

- A showing of Sergei Eisenstein's film *Strike*, introduced by screenwriter and Workers' Liberty supporter Clive Bradley
- Ziyad from Morocco's Revolutionary Marxist Current on the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East
- London Underground workers, supporters of the rank-and-file *Tubeworker* bulletin, on why and how to produce workplace bulletins
- Edd Mustill, socialist historian and activist, on the 100th anniversary of the height of the "Great Unrest", the high-point of pre-First World War workers' struggle in Britain
- London Met SU President Claire Locke, Royal Holloway President Daniel Cooper and Michael Chessum of NUS executive on the way forward for the student movement
- Student activist Aaron Peters and Eric Lee of LabourStart on internet activism and class struggle
- Mike Wood of Workers' Liberty on how Trotskyists debated the creation of Israel and the dispossession of the Palestinians in the 1940s.

Tickets are cheaper if booked before the end of May: £18 (waged), £10 (low-waged), £6 (unwaged) Book online: www.workersliberty.org/ideas

Israeli right moves to curb strikes

By Adam Keller

The [15 May] Palestinian protests were to some extent inspired by struggles in the Arab world. Young Palestinians have already been organising through Facebook and they'd already had a big success — an agreement between Fatah and Hamas was their central demand — and its achievement is in part due to their pressure.

The idea of a Nakba Day on which a big mass of people would come to Israel's borders unarmed is a very old one which has circulated among Palestinians since the 1950s. However, until yesterday no one actually tried to do it. It must have taken some courage.

There were thousands there, mainly young people. The external protests were mainly on the Lebanese and Jordanian borders; Egypt stopped people from even getting across the Suez canal. In the West Bank, the authorities tried to keep things at a low level because they want a big show in September when they declare a state. In any case, the Israeli army was caught by surprise.

The demonstrations on the Syrian borders, of course fit with Syrian interests in distracting attention from repression. In terms of Syrian government propaganda, the IDF played its role perfectly. The other aspect is showing the United States what might happen if the Assad regime is overthrown. On the other hand, we should not assume the young people who went there support the regime.

I think all the people killed by the IDF were Palestinians, but I don't think anyone is certain. Last night (15 May) we had a protest in Tel Aviv, organised in just a few hours, which was relatively successful, with hundreds of people. Another one is being held on 4 June, initiated by Hadash [a broad front linked to the Israeli Communist Party, and the main left force in Israel] and Meretz [left liberals], with its main slogan recognition of the Palestinian state when it is declared in September.

The Israeli government is taking a very tough line. There's

a very right-wing majority in the Knesset [Israeli parliament] which is abusing its power to push through all kinds of anti-democratic and racist laws. These include a law, passed at the end of March, about demonstrating or commemorating the Nakba.

What that means in practice is even more discrimination against Arab organisations, including local authorities in Arab areas. Municipalities rely heavily on funding from central government, and Arab ones are already poor and discriminated against. So if Jewish municipality wants to have a big celebration of Independence Day, great, but Arab ones who want to commemorate the Nakba will be starved of funds. Predictably it has made young Arabs in Israel more determined, which has also fed into the protests.

LAWS

Two other laws have also been passed: the one on "admissions committees" [allowing communities to prevent people moving in, with clearly racist implications] and one which makes it possible to deprive of citizenship those found guilty of espionage or treason.

A law to criminalise boycotts of Israel has been introduced. A law is also being discussed for greater restrictions on migrant workers, legally tying them to one employer so that if they are fired they have to leave the country. Obviously this will make them even more vulnerable to abuse.

There is also a call, though not a specific legislative proposal yet, to restrict strikes. This comes in connection with a railway workers' struggle against privatisation. The media is demanding restrictions of the right to strike, perhaps a law against strikes in central government services. At the same time, the railway workers' fight against privatisation is continuing.

By the way, the rail workers' union is the only one in Israel led by a woman, Gila Haedry.

Everyone is looking to this September, when the Palestinians declare their state.

At the end of the week Netanyahu is going to the United States, where he has got himself invited to speak to Congress. He is trying to bypass Obama and capitalise on the strength of the Israeli lobby on Capitol Hill.

Obama is going to make a statement on the Middle East before he meets Netanyahu. How much pressure will he put on Israel? George Mitchell resigned as US envoy to the region, and he was supposed to be frustrated with Obama's refusal to get tough with Netanyahu. But we won't know more until we hear Obama.

The debate between one stater and two stater is, perhaps, at the point of being resolved one way or another. If the Palestinians succeed in being recognised as a state at the UN and can make moves towards actual statehood, one state will be out the window. If they fail, that might be the end of the two-state solution. So we are at a turning point.

There are several strands to Israelis' attitude to the revolution in Egypt. On one level people see it in terms of "Israeli interests", and worry whether Egypt will continue its peace treaty with Israel. People are very concerned that the Muslim Brotherhood will win the elections.

On the other hand, many Israelis are very happy, and want to know why we cannot have our own revolution. Just after the fall of Mubarak, there were protests against a decision to raise petrol prices, explicitly linking themselves to the Egyptian revolution. These were not established politicians, but ordinary people including some football fans. There were only a few hundred people demonstrating, but the government backed down.

Some Israeli activists were in Egypt during the revolution, but the solidarity links are not very well developed. We would love to do more in this regard.

(Adam Keller is a spokesperson for the left-wing anti-occupation campaign Gush Shalom and spoke to Solidarity in a personal capacity.)

Egypt's new unions reach out

Clive Bradley surveys recent developments in North Africa

EGYPT

New political voices are emerging within the independent trade union movement which has exploded into existence since January. The unions themselves now have 250,000 members and have begun to organise groups of workers previously unorganised even by the old official unions — in fishing, street cleaning and farming.

A doctors' strike in May was successful — with an 80% turnout — despite opposition from the leadership of the Doctors' Syndicate (the leader of the Syndicate broke the strike).

The newly-formed Workers Democratic Party, which aims to be a political voice for the working class, has the support of some prominent leaders within the new unions. It seems to be an initiative primarily of the Revolutionary Socialists, a group with some links to the British Socialist Workers Party.

A more populist new group, called the Popular Alliance, has also been formed. It draws in some people who have resigned in disgust from the old, legal "leftist" party, Tagamu', as well as a group called Socialist Renewal (which seems to have some links to the Counterfire — ex-SWP — group in the UK).

Egypt's referendum, in March, on constitutional changes, resulted in a 77% majority in favour. This was despite a campaign for a 'no' vote by most of the organised forces involved in the revolution which began in January — with the notable exception of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The "no" campaigners had wanted a more radical revision of the entire constitution — and, many of them, more time to organise political parties before Parliamentary elections in September. The overwhelming "yes" vote probably expressed an urgency to move forward on most voters' part — a paradoxical unease about continued military rule and a general endorsement of how the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces have handled change since they got rid of Hosni Mubarak, after thirty years, in February.

Egypt's current military rulers are still managing the transition. They are moving, on schedule, towards the first genuine elections since — at least — the Second World War. But they have repeatedly threatened to ban strikes — which continue to break out across industry — and have introduced a draconian "anti-protest" law.

The elections themselves have a bias against new working-class or radical parties even participating built into their rules. To form a new party, its organisers need five thousand signatures in two daily newspapers, and to fork out a million Egyptian pounds or more. Some new radical parties are refusing to pay a penny; but that probably means they won't be able to stand in September.

The outcome of those elections remains unpredictable. The Muslim Brotherhood, which is for sure the largest organised force, has increased its slate to fifty per cent of seats (it had said it would only stand in a third). It isn't fielding a presidential candidate.

For sure the Brotherhood's backing of the timid constitutional changes in the referendum (which left intact Islam's role in Egyptian law) was important in turning out the vote. And the Brotherhood, long the chief opposition movement, has positioned itself very close to the military government since Mubarak's fall (when Essam Sharaf announced himself Prime Minister to the crowds in Tahrir Square, there was a representative of the Brothers beside him).

Their caution towards the elections is partly strategic — they don't want to frighten the USA, so they say. But maybe they are less confident of sweeping the board than earlier assumptions would have it.

Since the beginning of the revolution, the Brothers have been facing big internal difficulties. A more radical — and, it would seem, at least in some cases more secular — young "wing" has challenged the old guard (while a hardline "anti-political" wing has also been challenging the recent leadership).

LIBYA

The military forces of Colonel Qaddafi have so far held on to power in the west of Libya around Tripoli, though Benghazi in the east remains firmly in 'rebel' hands. For those fighting Qaddafi, reports suggest, UN/NATO intervention remains popular, although there are frequent criticisms that these forces don't 'do enough'.

In Misrata, where Qaddafi has continued to bombard the city, apparently there is a clear link between levels of bombardment and NATO's enforcement of its no-fly zone.

The Transitional Council in Benghazi seems to be a very mixed bag. There are former exiles — from a wide variety of political backgrounds, Islamist, liberal, and even self-styled anarchist — linking up with local people. The council is largely self-selected — so far there is no process of

election, and criticisms are emerging regarding the transparency of decisions. Defectors from Qaddafi are prominent publicly — though on the street, reports suggest, there is much discontent on this score. Much of the basic organisation has been carried out by previously apolitical people — especially from the professional classes. (To be "political" under Gaddafi meant to support the regime).

In general, Libya has a less sophisticated level of political organisation than, for instance, Tunisia to its west or Egypt to its east. Qaddafi was and is a much more repressive dictator, and organised opposition within the country had been effectively crushed. There are no unions or leftist parties.

But in Benghazi there has rapidly developed the beginnings of a real democratic, grassroots based culture.

Qaddafi's support seems, despite some western media accounts, quite small. Public demonstrations of loyalty in Tripoli are not very large. Still, he maintains a formidable apparatus of terror.

Tunisia protest

Workers' Liberty members, along with comrades from the Worker-Communist Party of Kurdistan and other activists, organised a protest on 13 May outside the Tunisian National Tourism Office near Bond Street in solidarity with working-class democracy activists resisting the latest brutal government clampdown.

Anarchism means a classless society

Recent issues of *Solidarity* have carried debate on the differences and similarities between Marxist and anarchist traditions. Here, North London Solidarity Federation (an anarcho-syndicalist group) responds to "Working-Class Struggle and Anarchism", which appeared in *Solidarity* 3/195.

Anarchism, as the author points out in "Working Class Struggle and Anarchism", is a rather broad label, so it would be hopeless to try and identify a single tendency with all of its various groupings. Similarly Marxism, historically and currently, has a million and one offshoots ranging from North Korea and Open Marxism to the SWP. Trying to refer to them all in blanket fashion as "Marxism" would be futile.

Many anarchists would see themselves as being broadly in the tradition of anarcho-syndicalism. The Solidarity Federation, for example, takes a lot of inspiration from the CNT in Spain among others, yet we do not see this as the be all and end all of struggle or a blueprint to follow. It is just a series of moments in time — nothing more nothing less. We can learn from its successes and failures like any other movement.

The idea promoted in the AWL's article seems to be the grand claim that anarchists "historically identify" with the peasantry. Now we could sit here all day and argue the ins and outs of class amongst the larger cash crop farms of the Ukraine and its smaller more subsistence-based ones a century ago, but I'm not really sure what relevance this has to Britain in 2011. Since thankfully none of us are Maoists, and hardly anyone is a peasant in Britain anymore, perhaps it's safe to say we can leave such debates to academia for now.

So for the purposes of this reply, We'll try to talk about anarchism as relevant to today in the UK. The goal of most anarchists is a stateless, wage-less, egalitarian, and industrial society. A society without money where, to borrow a phrase from Charlie M, production is based on human "need" and desire rather than "ability" to pay. This world, where money, war, class and poverty would be consigned to the history books has also been called communism and socialism. Though as with all words, being simply tools in the hands of their users, such terms have been used to describe societies and ideas that are very much the opposite of their original meaning. In short anarchists want not "Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services..." as the "AWL, Labour and the Left" states, but the abolition of class rela-

tions altogether. In an anarchist society there will be no rich to tax and no money to collect.

The society we want to see should be mirrored by any movement or organisation that fights for it today. We want a society with direct democracy, a society in which we don't have politicians and/or representatives (elected or otherwise) telling us they will sort out our problems on our behalf. Thus, our movements and groups should be open and democratic, not relying on a leadership clique—whether that clique are parliamentary politicians or paid officials of a party or union.

A communist society would be one of workers' self-management, where we run our own workplaces and communities democratically and without bosses and wages. To get anywhere near this goal then, today we need movements based in our workplaces and communities. How could teachers and support staff collectively run a school or doctors, nurses and porters collectively run a hospital, unless we all had some experience of self organisation, of acting on our own initiative rather than having bosses and politicians make all our decisions for us?

DEFERENCE

Deference to the Labour Party or to trade union leaderships will get us nowhere. If on the rare occasion we can strike and/or win within the current legal framework, then great, but seeing as generally we can't, we have to go beyond those limitations.

We need actions on the job and wildcats and occupations. These are the sorts of tactics that will get the goods where timid negotiations and one day symbolic strikes fail.

This may mean being inside or outside a mainstream union depending on the specifics of where you work [1]. The Solidarity Federation pushes for actions organised by everyone in a workplace, rather than along the narrow lines of demarcation placed by unions competing for members and/or 'professional respect'. In schools, for example, we would argue for meetings and actions that included all workers on site, in opposition to the way in which current union structures reinforce divisions between teachers and support staff.

We don't support the Labour Party. This isn't just because of its "historic role". It's because it looks a bit silly to be telling people you want both a socialist society and a Labour government. The two are entirely contradictory aims, and

no amount of "fighting inside the Labour Party" can solve that. Certain union leaders such as McCluskey would have us believe that striking against Labour councils is somehow "awkward." Likewise, sections of the left portray the privatisation of NHS, and education cutbacks as being purely "Tory cuts" rather than an acceleration of previous Labour policies legitimised by a recession. Anarchists see no use in spreading such shallow sentiments.

Campaigns can't be won by waiting for a national leadership to sort your problems out for you. This means taking greater degrees of initiative, whether it's within union branches, within the anti-war movement. Surely we don't need reminding how the STWC's centralised approach stifled the anti-war movement in a-b marches and Respect recruitment drives. Similarly, in most UK workplaces, unions have no presence and even those that do are rarely "organised" in any real sense. In any case, workers need to be organising on the shopfloor to build the power, confidence, and skill of our class, not hoping to bring in union negotiators to speak on our behalf.

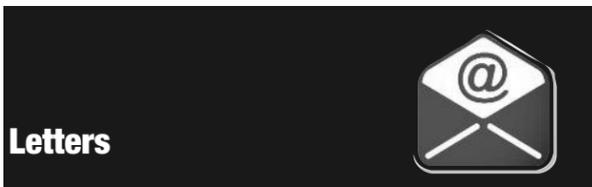
The North London Solidarity Federation would rather not get involved with debates over the historical minutiae of the past. In fact, they cloud real everyday issues. For example, the question of how local political or campaign groups should federate to a regional or national organisation and how a delegate council might make decisions based on mandates given by groups, as opposed to an elected or central and unelected committee is more important than the ins and outs of Bakunin and Marx's exchange of letters.

These questions about democracy and branch/group autonomy are not questions about abstract principles; they relate directly to how effective our fight back can be.

To conclude, anarchists are in full favour of healthy debate within the anti-capitalist movement. However, we believe these debates can only be productive if they are not inhibited by hierarchical structure that inevitable create a division between leaders and the led.

In short, "the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves." It is this self-activity that will allow us to build a society based on our own desires, rather than having them handed down from above.

(1). See the Solfed industrial strategy:
<http://www.solfed.org.uk/?q=solfed-industrial-strategy>



Don't rule out workers' power

Les Hearn's article on nuclear power (*Solidarity* 3/203) seems to be based mainly on the arguments being put forward by George Monbiot and Mark Lynas.

Though he lists the objections to nuclear power, he doesn't even attempt to answer many of them, and on the issue of waste disposal, plant safety and cost, he fails to see the reality of nuclear power within the context of a global capitalist economy.

Critically, he also fails to question the projected "energy gap" which is being used to justify nuclear power expansion. And he doesn't ask what is the best way forward for energy in the interests of the working class.

Capitalism is immensely wasteful of the fossil fuel energy. Insulation and energy conservation could slash by a third our current consumption in Britain. Vast amounts are burned globally to power totally unnecessary production for manufactured consumerist needs, in order to generate private profit. And how many jobs could be created in the insulation and conservation industries, premises conversion, public transport expansion etc. that energy efficiency demands?

People in the rest of the world will have a growing energy need over the next decades, but while they need and have a right to expect more, we in the western capitalist world could use a lot less with no drop in social well-being.

Monbiot and Lynas are ultra-aware of the urgent need to cut CO₂ emissions. This is why the desperate measure of proliferating a hazardous technology seems necessary and acceptable. But it betrays a class attitude which is not acceptable for socialists. It concentrates more power and wealth, with massive public subsidies, into the hands — and behind the fences of — corporations with an appalling track-record. Nuclear power demands high security and centralised control, and in the present world that means an inherent lack of transparency and democratic accountability

which are essential where hazardous industries are concerned.

Monbiot and Lynas play fast and loose with the safety of working people in their calculations — one nuclear accident has the potential to destroy the lives of hundreds if not thousands of workers and working-class communities — even if as it appears some radiation dangers have been miscalculated in the past.

Les says Fukushima "would have been virtually problem-free had a fail-safe cooling system been installed — as should and could have happened". Ah, yes — if only capitalism hadn't cut corners and disregarded safety, it would have been virtually (only virtually?) problem-free!

Les doesn't deal with the proliferation argument at all. But you can't advocate nuclear power expansion in one country without it being for all countries, however unstable or tyrannical they are.

If Les is so confident that designers can improve nuclear design, why not have the same faith in workers in the renewables sector to devise better ways of harnessing the sun's power directly and indirectly?

We need to come forward with a strong and uncompromising socialist programme for energy and cutting emissions, not give any more energy to this divisive and hazardous distraction.

Theo, abridged from website: <http://bit.ly/k8WOD9>

When Callinicos was newbie

Martin Thomas is wrong when he says that Alex Callinicos joined IS/SWP in 1973 ("The Quinlan Terry of Marxism", *Workers' Liberty* 3/33). It was probably 1970 or before, or failing that 1971.

He was an active member of Oxford IS in 1972 when he returned to complete his degree after being sent down for a year for painting slogans somewhere in Balliol College to protest at a visit by a South African or Rhodesian government representative. He had been a member before this happened in mid-1971. He was thus not around in Oxford when the branch split 50-50 over whether to support the expulsion of Workers' Fight [a forerunner of AWL] in December 1971 but did play a role on his return in 1972 when, as a result of the fall-out from that and the general bureaucratisation of the Cliff regime, there was a general factional battle

in the branch which resulted in myself and nine others leaving in December 1972.

Callinicos, as one might imagine, was a slavish and unpleasant advocate of the Cliff line.

Bruce Robinson, Manchester

• I gave 1973 because Callinicos appeared in the SWP press then. And he wasn't visible in the upheavals of 1971-2 in IS. Now I know why... MT

Debating "SlutWalk"

On 4 June "SlutWalk" — a march to protest against blaming rape victims who dress "provocatively" for what happens to them — will take place in London. The original SlutWalk took place in Toronto in April after a policeman said "women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimised."

One aspect of SlutWalk in North America and here in the UK is to reclaim the word "slut". Older feminists here have apparently objected to the march on those grounds. You can't and shouldn't try to reclaim such language.

Back in the 80s and early 90s I would probably have agreed with that point of view. I'm not so sure now.

In a very general way — in music, art, culture — it is getting easier to break linguistic taboos. The power of language when used to express sexist attitudes has not usually been in its content but in its context. In my view it is easier to create different contexts for these words so that they take on different meanings and still be clearly understood.

SlutWalk is a case in point. I think it is very obvious that SlutWalk is a piss take; it is a way of saying "I don't accept your agenda", women shouldn't be blamed for abuse.

The reality behind SlutWalk — of ubiquitous victim blaming — is of course depressingly familiar and reclaiming the language cannot be the main point of a political action.

Only this week the media was emphasising the fact that the hotel worker who has accused Dominique Strauss-Kahn of sexual assault had a "satisfactory" employment record. So if she had been moonlighting as a prostitute, or was a "bad worker" in some respect, an assault on her would have been okay?

SlutWalk is an interesting departure on the feminist scene. What do other readers think?

Cathy Nugent, south London

BA deal: “employers have the upper hand for now”

An activist in BASSA, the section of the Unite union which covers BA cabin crew, spoke to *Solidarity* about the deal negotiated between the airline and union leaders which workers are now voting on.

There has been much debate in various forums about what is, and what is not, included in the deal.

As far as I know all those who have been subject to disciplinary action can have their cases reviewed by ACAS, and ACAS’s decision will be binding on BA. The only people who are outside this part of the deal will be the three people who have already had their employment tribunals (none of them have had an outcome yet).

I believe that one of the reasons that staff travel will be returned to everyone

(should the deal be accepted) is because BA management know that punishing someone for taking legal industrial action is against the law and they are well aware that when the case to decide this comes to court, they would lose. Taking away staff travel had the desired effect in that it was one of the main reasons why many people did not go on strike. As far as [BA boss Willie] Walsh was concerned it was a case of act now and worry about the consequences later.

Many of those who were off sick during the strike were not paid, even though their sickness was entirely genuine. Walsh did not care about the legality of deducting pay, only that in the short term it would make it clear to those who were afraid to go on strike because of loss of earnings

that they could not hide behind a sickness certificate. I believe that BA would eventually have been forced to pay all those who had genuine sickness certificates, and therefore a review of all these cases is part of the deal.

FACILITIES

Importantly, all the normal trade union facilities are to be reintroduced, i.e. union offices and de-rostered union reps [reps on facility time] to deal with the day to day problems.

This can only be a good thing and keep the door open for further negotiations in the future.

The imposition of reduced crewing levels on the aircraft and the new “Mixed Fleet” (on very low pay) has not changed.

If Mixed Fleet proves to be a success, then eventu-

ally all the work will go to them and the current crew will be out of a job.

The deal promises that work between the fleets will be spilt evenly, but it seems likely that Mixed Fleet will grow faster than the old fleets decline (through the take up of part-time contracts and natural wastage), and thus current crew will eventually be fighting over a much diminished access to work and will lose out financially as a result.

The only thing that can change this is if Mixed Fleet is a failure. Currently they are not anything like up to normal BA standards. The work load is punishing, and BA management themselves admit to finding it difficult to find the “talent” (their own words not mine) to work on this fleet.

Only time will tell. Guarantees have been given in

the deal to “top up” the earnings of current crew if lack of work means they start to lose money. However many years ago we had a similar “money back guarantee” and this simply disappeared.

My gut feeling is that crew will accept this deal, because they accept that those who did not support the dispute at the beginning left the door open for BA to action all their plans. An all-out strike right at the start would have changed this; Walsh could not have kept the airline going with just his “volunteers”. This did not happen and now the crew just have to make the best of what we have.

If management can get everything they want from the low-paid cabin crew and their brand doesn’t suffer, then the new fleet will grow as fast as they can train the new recruits.

It is sad to think that a leading company like BA is happy to pay its frontline staff such low wages. Maybe the recession has paved the way for many companies to do likewise.

Overall, I think this was probably the best deal that could be achieved and one can only hope that changing times and conditions will improve the situation. For now, I feel employers have the upper hand.

I hope that other workers will learn from what has happened at BA. The union is only as strong as its members, and if they are not prepared to stick together and stand up for their rights, in the end they will suffer for it.

The ballot will run for four weeks so we should know the result by the middle of June.

Heathrow Express workers to strike

By Darren Bedford

Workers on Heathrow Express, the fast train service linking the airport to central London, have voted to take strike action over a pay deal which RMT general secretary Bob Crow described as “loaded with strings”.

The period of the proposed deal includes the 2012 Olympics, during which Heathrow Express workers — along with other transport workers in and around London — can expect a significantly increased workload. There is a concern, therefore, to ensure that bosses are not allowed to get away with making their staff work harder for less. It is projected that nearly 800,000 extra people are expected to travel on London’s train networks during the Games.

In news that will undoubtedly please Boris Johnson and other senior Tories clamouring for new anti-union laws, the strike was approved by 95% of voting members on a turnout of over 80%, giving the strike a far more solid democratic mandate than Johnson himself possesses as Mayor of London.

Tories attack railworkers as “workshy”

By Tony Byrne, train driver and RMT activist

According to an article in the Times (12 May), “David Cameron is facing growing pressure to take on rail unions amid anger over workshy practices that are said to be putting the future of the network at risk.”

So it is the rail unions that are putting the network at risk, is it? Not according to the opinion, for example, of the Potter’s Bar accident enquiry judge. He recently ruled that “Overall responsibility for the breach of duty lay with Railtrack at senior management level and their failures were significant and extensive.”

The article continues that train companies are troubled by our unions insisting on “a rigid observance of health and safety regulations”! So how should we observe H&S if not rigidly? When he fined Network Rail £3 million for its part at Potters Bar the judge said that Railtrack’s standards and procedures were “seriously inadequate”. Is that the example that train

companies want us to follow then, from one of their own? Is “seriously inadequate” good enough?

Perhaps one of the reasons that union members rigidly insist on H&S is that if we don’t apply the standards and procedures correctly we can lose our jobs. And I’ve seen that happen to workmates. How many senior managers at Railtrack lost their jobs because of Potters Bar? None! That makes it a bit easier to see where the different approaches between workers and managers to H&S come from. In addition, our judgement is not clouded by the bonus culture among senior management which gives them an incentive to cut corners.

According to a dossier of complaints by train companies H&S is one example of bitterly defended rights. Of course it is! We want people to be able to travel and work safely on the railways. Other “workshy practices” include a failure to embrace flexible working (split shifts, no breaks because of operational exigencies, etc) and drivers being paid a bonus to work overtime. We don’t mind “embracing” these things

just as long as we are paid for the sacrifices we are making. If I am going to be making more money for a train company I’d like a share of it too.

But that is just what the government and employers don’t want to do. The government wants to reduce the subsidy it gives to the railway so that it can use the money saved to pay back the money it spent to bail out the banks. The companies know that subsidies will be reduced so in order to maintain their profits they want to attack our terms and conditions, employment law and health and safety regulations.

A blueprint, the McNulty Report, is due to be published during May.

The rail unions need to get together and discuss how to fight the attack, draw the membership into the fight and at the same time link up with all the other unions and local campaigns that are fighting similar attacks against the working class as a whole.

• McNulty:
<http://bit.ly/glg3rs>

Unite health sector: where’s the ballot?

By a Unite member

On 13 April, Unite’s National Industrial Committee for the health sector voted to join in with the planned 30 June strike action over pensions.

Since then very little has been heard, at a time when the union should be preparing to ballot its members in the NHS. No ballot date has been set.

National Industrial

Committees are notionally fully autonomous. If an NIC votes to ballot, then the union should ballot. However, it seems there have been delays in the executive deciding on how to implement this. Time will soon run out to give legal notice to ballot before the planned strike day.

The Unite leadership’s response to the government has been less than inspiring. At the ATL conference, Gail Cartmail

(an Assistant General Secretary), turned up to dissuade ATL members from voting for strikes. In Lambeth, Labour councillors were leaned on by local Unite officials to vote for cuts.

If an industrial committee of our union takes a decision to ballot for strike action, that should mean something. Otherwise all talk of “fighting back” is empty.

On Saturday 14 May supporters of Zara Senkan leafleted customers of The Original Tour London Sightseeing company boarding at Victoria Bus Station, highlighting the sex discrimination Zara endured when she worked for the company.

Zara was sacked at the end of 2010. Over five years she was on the receiving end of bullying, sexism and unfair treatment by managers and co-workers.

Supported by her union, the RMT, Zara is pursuing a case for sex discrimination through an employment tribunal.

The next protest will take place on Saturday 28 May. Meet by Nelson’s Column, Trafalgar Square, at 10am. Nearest tube is Charing Cross. More info: justice4zara@hotmail.com. Photo: Andrew Wiard.

Saltend workers in court protest

By Patrick Smith, Hull AWL

Saltend workers demonstrated outside the Hull Magistrates’ Court hearing on 17 May for GMB national officer Phil Whitehurst, who was arrested on a picket on 4 May.

Whitehurst had been taking part in the regular pickets over the lockout of 430 workers from the failed £200m Vivergo Fuels Ltd bio-ethanol fuel plant project.

A group of about 30 workers and trade unionists protested outside the Court before going inside for Whitehurst’s hearing. Entering to a round of applause, he was charged under section 14 of the Public Order act, used by the police to limit the number of people at a protest to “prevent a breach of the

peace”. In this case, the police decided to only allow 20 workers to protest and as there were 21, police asked Whitehurst to leave, which he allegedly refused to do. He pleaded not guilty and was granted unconditional bail until his trial which will take place between 5-7 September.

Demonstrations at the site continue, with tensions emerging between the GMB, which has been more explicit about supporting the workers, to the point of setting up a £100,000 strike fund, and Unite, which is attempting to distance itself from the dispute.

A national meeting of shop stewards in the engineering construction industry is due in late May, and will discuss spreading the dispute to other sites, including nearby Lindsey which saw enormous strikes in 2009.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Tory adviser boasts: “no mercy for NHS”

By Stuart Jordan

Mark Britnell, recruited by the government as an adviser on the changes it will force through in the Health Service (*Nursing Times*, 3 May), has said:

“In the future, the NHS will be a state insurance provider, not a state deliverer [...] The NHS will be shown no mercy and the best time to take advantage of this will be in the next couple of years” (Guardian, 14 May).

In the *Health Service Journal* (11 May), Britnell proposes Singapore as a model: “the government [...] provide people with a sort of individual savings account that enables them to take greater personal responsibility. The central provident fund enables people to pay for their own housing, pensions, health-care and even their children’s tertiary education”.

He also suggests “co-payment”, whereby people would pay part of the price of care and medicine, while a public fund pays the rest.

Lib Dem bigwig Shirley Williams has publicly challenged David Cameron to “dismiss Britnell and specifically reject [Britnell’s] predictions for the future of the NHS.”

CREDIBILITY

Otherwise, says Williams, Cameron’s denials that “his party intends to privatise the NHS” lack all credibility (Guardian, 16 May).

Cameron has failed to respond, other than via a government statement insisting disingenuously that Britnell is not a government adviser (he is on a volunteer panel).

Professor Steve Field, chair of another panel of advisers, the NHS Future Forum, has said Britnell is “wrong”, but then Field already criticises the government’s proposals as “unworkable” and “destabilising” and wants to change them at the edges. Even with the “listening exercise” pause (announced early April, and due to run to early June) the process of NHS privatisation is driving ahead. The driver right now is the £20 billion “efficiency savings” the government wants to claw back by 2014-15.

- Across the country wards and services are closing down.
- Many non-urgent elective treatments are no longer available.
- Queen Mary’s hospital in South East London has temporarily closed its A&E department and maternity services, a move that potentially spells the closure of the entire 430-bed district hospital.

Many lost NHS services will be replaced by pared down versions provided by the private sector (using NHS money). For example, in April 2011 the Tees, Wear and Esk Valley NHS Trust shut down its operation in the local prison service and that was replaced by Care UK. The commissioning board admitted that Care UK would provide an inferior service but that they had chosen it because they were cheaper.

Though it seems some core services will be protected from competitive tendering, profitable services will be hived off and high risk, high cost areas will remain in the NHS.

Running down the NHS service creates a market for private healthcare. As the free service becomes increasingly limited and sub-standard those who can afford to, will choose to pay.

There are a number of mechanisms which will make expansion of private health care easier, including lifting the cap on the number of private beds in NHS hospitals and introducing top-up payments. Private providers, running NHS contracts, will always find ways to make money directly from their patients. Early indications from the NHS Future Forum indicate these mechanisms will remain.

The final result of the cuts will be to create a “reserve army” of unemployed healthcare professionals. By pushing health workers onto the dole the government is making a gift of highly-skilled (and desperate) workers to the incoming private health corporations.

Even a substantially revised Bill will include GP commissioning, and that will introduce market forces and bureaucratic obstacles at every level of the health service.

TREATMENT DENIED

For the last 60 years, medical decisions were, for the most part, based on clinical judgement. We are now seeing some treatments being denied for financial reasons. This trend will increase.

The logical end is a US-style fully privatised system, where people die of curable diseases because they cannot fight the faceless market-driven bureaucracies of their private health insurers. As US medic Dr Linda Peeno (former employee of Humana health corporation) explains:

“In the spring of 1987, as a physician, I denied a man a necessary operation that would have saved his life, and thus caused his death. No person, and no group has held me accountable for this, because in fact, what I did was I saved a company a half a million dollars.”

The old NHS, based on state-planning and risk-sharing, had a “bureaucracy” of 6% of total health spending. Despite its inadequacies, there was a constant, conscious organisational aim of levelling up health provision across the UK. With the in-

roduction of internal markets and outsourcing, the NHS bureaucracy is now 15% of total health spending. It attaches price labels to treatments and manages the exchange of money.

GPs do not have the time or expertise to provide commissioning services and will buy-in help from the private sector. The result — an enormous, fragmented, privatised bureaucracy — will produce nothing of any benefit except profit for various private interests.

OPPOSITION

If the Tories make enough concessions, middle-class pressure groups like the BMA may drop their opposition. If that happens then there is a danger that the health unions and the Labour Party, which have so far failed to set out a clear ideological defence of socialised healthcare, will fail to mobilise their forces to reverse the privatisation juggernaut.

We need to make the political arguments to build a mass opposition. That means arguments against markets and in favour of human decision-making processes. We need to assert that health needs, not profit, comes first.

When the market comes to govern over healthcare, it dictates matters of life and death. It is an expansionary force that will only be stopped by our intervention.

We need a working-class movement with clear political aims. We need a workers’ government that serves our class interests with the same dedication that the current coalition serves capitalism.

4 June: building for new student struggles

By Daniel Cooper, President-elect, Royal Holloway SU (pc)

On 4 June, anti-cuts groups and activists from across the country will meet to discuss the way forward for the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

Founded in February 2010 to coordinate student anti-cuts struggles, the NCAFC gained huge recognition and influence during the big student protests last winter. However, its failure to create accountable democratic structures has prevented it from consolidating and developing.

The campaign is still organising impressive initiatives and actions, but these are spurts, rather than part of an ongoing, consistent, planned campaign.

In practice, decisions are made by a small group of activists in London, modified by discussion on email lists.

That is why the five local anti-cuts groups which initiated the 4 June conference (Royal Holloway, Hull, Merseyside, Birmingham and Newcastle) called for “democratic structures through which local groups and activists can coordinate and build an accountable national movement.” It is why Workers’ Liberty students and others will be pushing for a clear democratic

national structure to democratise NCAFC and step up its campaigning.

The draft agenda for the event also includes activist training, workshops on ESOL, the London Met struggle and solidarity with workers on 30 June, and discussion on next year, including how to make sure a national demonstration against fees and cuts happens.

At a time when students face £9,000 fees and an avalanche of cuts, this conference could not be more important. Please send people from your college or university anti-cuts group, student union or other campaigning body.

• More information: dancooper13@hotmail.com or www.anticuts.com

London Met fight continues

The campaign to stop the cuts at London Metropolitan University is continuing. Over 400 courses are slated to be cut. Students and staff at London Met are mobilising to demonstrate at the next two Board of Governors’ meetings on Thursday 19 May (demo 11:30-1pm, meeting at 166 Holloway Road) and June 22. More details about these demonstrations and future actions can be found at savelondonmetuni.blogspot.com

Refugees flee Syrian crackdown

By Gerry Bates

On Tuesday 17 May, Syrian activists used Facebook to call for a general strike throughout Syria on Wednesday 18 to protest against the Assad’s regime use of tanks, bullets, and curfews to suppress the rebellion simmering across the country.

As far as can be determined while outside journalists are excluded from Syria, it is unlikely that the opposition is strong enough to pull off anything like a general strike.

A refugee fleeing across the border to Lebanon told Reuters: “They are entering homes and killing everyone in them, men and women. They are destroying everything inside the homes”, in a number of border towns and villages.

Rebels have also reported finding a mass grave near Deraa, one of the first centres of the rebellion.

The “Syrian Revolution News Round-up” blog re-

Assad must go

ports from Deraa: “Curfew is in place starting at 2pm and until 8am. Mosques are closed and men are forbidden to come to the streets on Fridays...”

“Tanks are now back in the streets especially in the downtown area...”

“Despite all this, a mostly women and children demonstration took place on 13 May, and participants still chanted calls for toppling the regime and removal of Bashar Assad from power...”

The British labour movement owes a duty of solidarity to the brave rebels in Syria.