After Scottish shock, reshape Britain

A democratic federal republic!

Workers should unite against their common enemy — the bosses and the Tories.

See page 5
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 advertise in the guide. When I got there, the room was already full, with maybe 100 people. NUT deputy general secretary Kevin Courtney was there, but it was not an NUT meeting. It was an hoc event organised by an individual activist, Emma Hardy-Mattinson. And Hunt was not scheduled there.

Hardy-Mattinson is a right-winger in NUT terms. The event was chaired by a very New-Labour-sounding Labour councillor from Croydon. When it broke into discussion groups, my group at least was coordinated by people who sounded very New Labour. (“We have to be smart about this...”)

Yet the temper of the event was left-wing. The discussion group I joined was asked to discuss:

“How do we raise standards in a Labour way?”

The question was immediately challenged. What do we mean by standards? Shouldn’t we ask something like: “How do we help students learn better?” For life, and not just for exams and for work?

One teacher in the circle had already proposed to the plenary that formal assessment should check only literacy and numeracy. When I advocated abolition of all school exams and of O and A levels, I got more nods, and fewer “oh, that’s too radical!” shrugs, than I got in the Workers’ Liberty school workers’ fraction.

Another circle reported back for abolition of performance-related pay, another for abolition of faith schools. When one teacher hesitantly defended faith schools, others were vehement against them.

There were speeches for abolishing Academies and faith schools; for at least stripping private schools of their charitable status; for much better pay for teachers; for re-basing the whole schooling system on cooperation, not competition.

Those attending were, it appeared, almost all teachers, there because they had come to the Labour conference as delegates or observers.

In short, there’s more left-wing feeling in the Labour Party ranks than you’d guess from the very-controlled proceedings inside the Manchester Central conference centre.

Inside, CLP delegates as well as the union delegations were mostly cowed into making a show of unity in preparation for the May 2015 general election.

At the conference entry, however, Solidarity sold perhaps more briskly than it would sell at a large far-left event, and the left-wing “Yellow Pages” bulletin was warmly welcomed — despite the fact that the actual Labour people entering the conference, delegates and observers, are now much outnumbered by the event by exhibitors, advisers, apparatchiks, media people, and so on.

The hunger-down factor has affected the “outside” left, though. The flurry of leafleters and campaigners at the conference entry was much smaller than in 2011 and 2012 — with no left papers on sale except Solidarity and the two rival Labour Briefing publications.

Control at the top, ferment below

By Martin Thomas

It was advertised in the Labour Party conference fringe guide as an NUT (National Union of Teachers) meeting with Tristram Hunt, the Labour shadow minister for education, but turned out to be something different and more interesting.

It started earlier than advertised in the guide. When I got there, the room was already full, with maybe 100 people. NUT deputy general secretary Kevin Courtney was there, but it was not an NUT meeting. It was an hoc event organised by an individual activist, Emma Hardy-Mattinson. And Hunt was not scheduled there.

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Neoliberalism with a veneer of socialism

By a Labour conference delegate

There are some promising policies such as a rise in the minimum wage to £8, the scrapping of zero-hour contracts, repeal of the Social and Health care bill, reversal of the 50p tax cut, repeal of the bedroom tax and exclusion of the NHS from the EU-US trade agreement.

However, I would not exactly call these policies progressive. Yes they will hopefully improve the lives of those on low incomes, but they will do little to bring about real social change. Or enable those from all sections of society to enter into positions that have for so long been dominated by the upper classes, particularly white men.

For me real social change begins with education, and unfortunately the education policy seems to be more focused up moulding our children into ideal neoliberal subjects rather than giving them real opportunities to think critically and challenge social reproduction.

The focus of Labour Party education policy is on vocational education, rather than levelling the playing field by supporting and adequately funding a comprehensive education system.

Schools will still exist in a fragmented system with LEA schools given the same powers as Academies, giving more powers to schools really means giving more powers to head teachers, and in many of the academies I know head teachers have used these powers to implement significant changes, such as extending the school day, without negotiation with staff, parents or students.

Thus the education policy, like many of the other policy areas, echoes neoliberal logics — personal responsibility, individualism and re-treat of the government.

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Thousands march on UN climate summit

By Rhodri Evans

Over 300,000 marched in New York on Sunday 21 September, as the UN Climate Summit met there.

About 40,000 people marched in London, and other marches took place in cities across the world.

After the march some protesters moved onto Wall Street with the #floodwallstreet action.

Highlighting the danger of raising sea levels, protesters covered the area with blue dye to symbolise water.

Police arrested more than 100 protesters on Wall Street, and injured many.
USA: 370 million student debt-years

The UK is heading towards a US-style education system. This article by Con Karavias, adapted from the Red Flag, the newspaper of Socialist Alternative in Australia, explains.

Currently, 12 million US citizens borrow money annually to continue studying for their degree. The total number of those paying off student loans is 37 million. It will take each of them an average of 10 years to do it. It'll take a lot of them far longer.

In the US, the vast majority of people are deprived of anything resembling a worthwhile education. The “diverse array of institutions” in the US is two-tiered. At the top are the Ivy League colleges — the Harvards, the Yales and their dignified peers. These institutions have unparalleled global prestige [as imperial and Cambridge have here].

They are lavishly funded, have tens of billions in endowments (more than $30 billion a year in income from its endowment for Harvard alone), attract the most lauded professors and boast campuses resembling royal estates. Where could be better than these beautiful, spacious grounds for the spirit to flourish and the mind to roam at ease?

But their oak and cedar doors rarely open for any but the healthy. Fewer students than ever from working class backgrounds are invited to trapse their avenues. In 2013, Harvard enrolled fewer than 200 students from the poorest half of the population. Students from the bottom half of the wealth ladder account for only 10 percent of enrolments at elite US universities; more than 60 percent come from the richest quarter. US education is utterly corporatised. The pursuit of knowledge is subordinated to the pursuit of profit. “Knowledge will be the most important currency”, said Harvard president Drew Faust as he launched the university’s latest $6.5 billion fundraising drive.

Those for whom the elite institutions are out of reach have a bleak outlook. Student debt now totals more than one trillion dollars. It stands head and shoulders above credit card debt or car loans, and is second only to the country’s monumental home mortgage debt.

Indebtedness exacts a crippling toll on most US graduates. Stories of desperation and aimlessness abound. While 34 percent of graduates under the age of 25 are either unemployed or doing work for which their studies were unnecessary.

The Australian Liberals [Conservatives] want government funding to be extended to private institutions. This is just another way of forcing students immediately to accrue huge debts. In the US, students who attended private institutions are almost twice as likely to default on their loans.

A 2012 US Senate committee report on for-profit colleges found, among other things, “overwhelming documentation of exorbitant tuition [fees], aggressive [student] recruiting practices, abysmal student outcomes, taxpayer dollars spent on marketing and pocketed as profit, and regulatory evasion and manipulation”.

That is, in a system based on massive rip-offs, institutions have become so predatory and uninterested in the education of their “customers” that the US Senate had to issue a repri-mand. The turn towards the US model has been long time coming. Both the Australian Labor and Liberal parties over the last decades have undertaken regressive changes that more and more have corporatised education and allowed private interests to meddle in and corrupt what should be a right for all.

It’s only when we’ve been ready to fight for our right to a decent education that such changes have been challenged and even beaten back.
The flood of Putin’s lies

The following is an extract from an interview by the Russian Socialist Movement with Dmitry Kozhnev, a former engineer and trade union activist in Kaluga (Russia) and member of the Workers’ Platform of the RSM.

The conditions under which trade union activity takes place (in Russia) have changed in recent months. Anybody who wants to now tries to cover up their dirty little games with “patriotic” rhetoric.

Accusing everyone who is dissatisfied and opposed to the current state of affairs of being supporters of the Maidan [Ukrainian protest movement of 2013/2014] and of Bandерism [right-wing wartime Ukrainian movement] has become very popular.

It’s impossible not to recall the well-known saying of Saltikov-Shchedrin [nineteenth-century Russian satirist]: “If they talk about patriotism in Russia, then this means that something somewhere is being stolen.”

These are the methods of the bosses in the enterprises, of “trade unions” which have sold out and are at their disposal, and of the authorities.

What’s interesting is the fact that for some reason or other these gentlemen declare their own personal selfish interest to be the “interest of Russia”, the interest of the country, the interest of the people, etc.

People who want to fight against outrageous practices in the workplace are denounced as “agents of the west”, “Bandерists” and “people who want a Maidan [in Russia].”

The bosses of foreign private companies, representatives of western capital, are not embarrassed to accuse trade unions of “wanting to destroy the Russian economy” and to describe international working-class solidarity as “a plot against Russia”.

The authorities and the regional press also lend a helping hand here.

Attempts to present the opponents of the Maidan [in Russia] as a proletarian class force have no substance at all.

Without doubt, workers are present in the anti-Maidan movement, just as workers are present on the other side of the barricades, amongst participants in the Maidan and among supporters of the Kiev government.

But on both sides workers are merely grains of sand in someone else’s game. They are not the ones who make the decisions, draw up the programme and decide the agenda. They are merely expendable in conflicts over power.

We should not be misled by the use of superficial formal fetishes, such as the red flag and monuments to Lenin in the south-east of Ukraine or the symbols of the [Bandist] Ukrainian Insurgent Army in the west. In reality, they lost their original content and meaning a long time ago.

The same applies to the use of elements of Soviet rhetoric.

I do not see how the Ukraine of Poroshenko is in principle worse or more reactionary for workers than Putin’s Russia, towards which the Lugansk and Donetsk People’s Republics unconditionally orient themselves (unsofar as they do not straightforwardly subordinate themselves to it).

The “power of the oligarchs” in Russia is in fact the liberal (i.e. economically liberal) capitalist economy. At times there is a lot of open fascism in everyday life and at an official level, as well as a conservative, clerical, reactionary ideology, political persecution, and a heavy reliance on the police, above all in relation to the police.

It is quite clear that the whole history of the conflict in Ukraine was an artificial dividing line.

Eric Lee

In an otherwise excellent piece on the TUC’s passing of an idiotic resolution on Ukraine, Dale Street writes that “for the first time since the Second World War the territory of a European country has been seized by that of a neighbouring big power.”

That doesn’t sound right — and it isn’t.

In fact there have been several occasions since 1945 when European countries have been the victims of aggression by neighbouring big powers. There was the Turkish invasion of Cyprus 40 years resulting in a division of the country and an occupation of its northern part that continues until the present day.

That invasion was exceptional not only in the sense that such invasions are rare in Europe. It’s also exceptional because every other example I can think of involves the Russian army.

Bombing tanks and troops invaded Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, and while they did not redraw any borders, they did impose regimes that were considerably friendlier to the Soviets than the ones the local populations would have liked.

In the 1990s the Russian army waged a brutal war of conquest targeting the breakaway Chechen republic, burying hundreds of thousands of anti-war demonstrators marched in Moscow last Sunday once and for all the Leninist myth about a “right of secession”. (There never was any such right.)

More recently, in 2008 the Russian army — no longer the Red Army — invaded Georgia, wresting control of the provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, turning these into “independent” states recognized only by Moscow.

 Actually, that’s not entirely true. The “independent republics” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are also recognized by Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru. Nauru for those of you who are not familiar with the Pacific island country formerly known as “Phoenix Island”, has a population of just over 9,000. The only country in the world that is smaller is the Vatican.

And for Nicaragua and Venezuela, this slavish kowtowing before Russian imperialism is utterly strange. Even in reality, they lost their original content and meaning a long time ago.

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TUC silence on Russian aggression is nothing new

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Scotland is not settled. The whole British political system has been unsettled.

The majority on 18 September against separation — 55/45 — was bigger than expected, and Solidarity is glad the vote went that way. We said “reduce borders, not raise them”. But the Scottish National Party reports an influx of 10,000 new members. There is a storm on Twitter with the #45 hashtag, with which the 18 September percentage for separation sparked link their cause to the feudal-reactorion revolt of 1745, which started in Scotland.

The frantic promises of further devolution given to Scotland by Cameron when he feared a No vote have made the Rube Goldberg contraptions of the British constitution untenable. They subsisted for ages only because they seemed to work and it would be troublesome to rationalise them. Now they are exposed for the nonsense they are.

The SNP has plenty of meat to chew on as it campaigns to pin down Cameron’s promises. A new referendum may be a while off. The 1995 referendum on separation in Ireland was not followed by another, even though it rejected separation by only 1.2% and the separatist Parti Québécois remains strong. But Scotland may be different. In any case, the constitutional questions have been unfrozen.

As socialists we want a response which minimises barriers while giving no nation or markedly distinct population good grounds for feeling that it has been unjustly overridden.

ENGELS
We want a response which maximises democracy and working-class unity.

The old United Kingdom system was never rational. Scotland had distinct systems of education and law even while all the decisions on them were made by an all-British parliament.

In his comments on the German socialists’ Erfurt Programme of 1891, Frederick Engels advocated “the one and indivisible republic” as the general socialist approach. For Britain, though, he argued that “a federal republic...” would be a step forward, “where the two islands are peopled by four nations and in spite of a single parliament three different systems of legislation already exist side by side”.

Labour leader Ed Miliband has called for a constitutional assembly. The first referendum, in November 2004 in the north-east, rejected an elected regional assembly by a majority of 72. Further referendums were abandoned. The regional assemblies were set up only as shadowy unelected bodies, and eventually abolished by the Labour government in its last days (2008-10).

In any case the last thing we want artificial new mini-frontiers. Like it or not, England is a nation, and with a long-standing identity. The offset to an English parliament is not an artificial and disliked parcellisation: it is integrating it into a democratic federal republic, with genuine local government below it, and a democratic federal united Europe above it. We should reverse the expansion of central control and extinction of local autonomy pushed through since the early days of the Thatcher government.

Along with this democratic programme, we want a drive to secure and increase labour movement unity across the territory.

If the #45 campaigners seek to separate off Scottish trade-union organisation from British, they should be resisted. All-British trade unions, instead of haggling for little concessions from Scotland or Wales which then license them to exclude those areas from big strikes like 13 and 14 October, should fight to level up conditions across the territory to the best won anywhere, or better.

Level up, don’t separate off!

Beyond the sidestep

By Dale Street

The Scottish referendum debate drew in thousands of people who had not been previously involved in political argument and activity. Public meetings attracted capacities crowds. Political discussion became a mass activity. When passions run high, as they did in the referendum debate, there will inevitably be excesses. Activists on both sides were equally guilty of such excesses. And, in the end, they were peripheral to the big political debate.

But some toxic divisiveness in the Yes campaign was inherent in its political project. Whereas the workers’ movement seeks to bring together people of different national and ethnic identities and equals in a common movement, the nationalism of the Yes campaign stood for the polar opposite: dividing peoples along national lines.

The history of Britain was reduced to the existence of the British Empire. The centrality of Scotland’s role in that Empire was conveniently ignored: Britain plundered the world, whereas Scotland was apparently just an innocent bystander.

Also written out of British history was everything which represented historical progress, from the revolutionising of the means of production so admired by Marx, to the world’s first powerful working class movement (Chartism).

In the final week before the referendum the Yes campaign produced posters (in Labour Party colours) declaring “End Tory Rule For Ever — Vote Yes”, while the “Radical” Independence Campaign produced leaflets calling for a Yes vote in order to “say goodbye to the Tories and because we’ll always get the government we vote for.”

The key question in the Yes campaign was that national identity defines voting patterns (English: Tory; Scottish: not Tory). But it didn’t.

The appeal of the Yes campaign to gut working-class anti-Toryism was not an attempt to mobilise workers as a distinct social force in society. It was an attempt to mobilise them on the basis of national identity and rope them into a nationalist project at odds with the basic working-class value of solidarity.

In the immediate run-up to the referendum the Yes campaign ran the argument that a failure to vote ‘Yes’ would result in the privatisation of the NHS in Scotland. This was despite the fact that health is a devolved power. Only the Scottish parliament can privatisate the NHS in Scotland.

And three days before the referendum an NHS whistleblower leaked documents showing that the SNP government was considering plans to cut £400 million from the Scottish NHS budget (following on from the £300 million it cut in the last parliament).

There was certainly an element of scaremongering in the professed concerns of certain elements in the No campaign about the social results of a Yes vote. But the response of the Yes campaign was to sidestep. And only that sidestepping allowed the Yes campaign to hold together.

LGBT activists and homophobic big businessmen; green activists and politicians who promised an oil-driven economic boom; feminists and Tommy Sheridan; socialists and the custodians of capital; migrants’ rights campaigners and the architects of yet another border; UNDers and the champions of NATO... But an independent Scotland could not deliver such contradictory aspirations. Now we need to sidestep the sidestepping, and focus on united working-class action to deal with the real problems.
1864: the First International

By Michael Johnson

150 years ago, on 28 September 1864, the working-class movement took a huge step forward with the founding of the International Working Men’s Association.

A meeting at the St Martin’s Hall in London brought together radical and socialist delegates from around Europe, to set up the organisation which would become known as “The First International”.

In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels ended their Communist Manifesto with the famous and ringing declaration: “Proletarians of all countries, Unite!” But in many ways, their theoretical elaboration of an international proletarian movement was far in advance of the actual state of working-class organisation of the 1840s. Though many workers fought bravely in the bourgeois revolutions of 1848-49, the working-class was a small minority, and its leaders were often hegemonised by petit bourgeois democrats and republicans. Marx’s Communist League was a tiny “vanguard” group.

By the 1860s modern industry was making headway in western Europe, and in many regions the industrial working-class began to outstrip in numbers the pre-industrial artisans and other urban plebeians. A proletarian movement really began to take shape in 1864 with the formation of the First International. As the cloud of post-1848 political reaction began to clear, Marx himself returned to large scale political activity after a twelve year hiatus.

The initiative for the St Martin’s meeting came from the working-class movements in England and France, including the London Trades Council, which had been formed in 1860. Largely representative of a stratum of skilled craft workers, it was not socialist and tended to follow bourgeois radicals, especially in the campaign to extend the franchise. The leading figures included George Odger, a shoemaker who would serve as the president of the International until 1867, and William Cremer, a carpenter who later became a Liberal MP.

But international solidarity was becoming a basic imperativeness. Strikes for a nine-hour day in the building trade had seen bosses importing foreign workers as strike-breakers, the Trades Council realised the need to mobilise solidarity in other European countries in order to prevent strike-breaking.

The upturn in economic struggle intersected with important political developments which were also focusing the minds of English workers on international issues. There was widespread enthusiasm in the radical and working-class movements for the Italian Risorgimento, and when Giuseppe Garibaldi arrived in England in 1864, he was rapturously received by the London Working Men’s Garibaldi Committee. When the British government forced Garibaldi to leave the country, a demonstration of London workers ended in clashes with the police.

More important was the American Civil War (1861-5). The war had led to a “cotton famine” which hit production in the north of England — initially much of the workers’ press supported the slave-owning South. However, Manchester’s workers looked past short-term economic considerations.

During the Northern blockade of the Confederacy, which left many Lancashire workers starving, workers gathered on 31 December 1862 at Manchester’s Free Trade Hall. They sent a letter to Lincoln expressing their “hope that every stain on your freedom will shortly be removed, and that the erasure of that foul blot on civilisation and Christianity — chattel slavery — during your presidency, will cause the name of Abraham Lincoln to be honoured and revered by posterity.”

After the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, an enthusiastic campaign of pro-Northern mass meetings played a role in preventing active British involvement in supporting the Southern side.

After the Polish uprising of 1863 against the Tsar, skilled workers organised rallies in support of Polish national independence.

Polish independence had long been a thornstone of the French radical movement, and in July 1863, Henri Tolain, a fellow of the anarchist thinker Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, travelled to London with four other delegates to speak at a meeting in support of Poland organised by the London Trades Council. Odger raised the issue of European workers being imported as strike-breakers, and proposed “regular and systematic communication between the industrious classes of all countries” as a solution. And so it was at St Martin’s Hall on 28 September 1864 it was agreed to form an international organisation.

The International reflected the uneven ideological development of the workers’ movement across Europe. The French representatives elected in September 1864, for example, were republican democrats.

The Italian democrats were followers of Giuseppe Mazzini, and both delegations were hostile to the idea of a politically independent workers’ movement. And as David Fernbach wrote: “The English trade-unionists, though politicised, were indifferent to socialism and hostile to revolution, and the French Proudhonists, who professed a form of socialism, were hostile not only to revolution but to all forms of politics."

Due to its reliance on the English male and skilled working class, it was compromised by caseworkers and the unemployed; it was compromised by endorsements of bourgeois demands for household suffrage.

The passage of the 1867 Reform Act in Britain would lead many of the International’s English supporters to dissolve into the camp of radicalism and the Liberal Party. Though the Reform League was organised by many of the same trade unionists who supported the International, and its meeting in Hyde Park on 6 May 1867 was the largest workers’ demonstration since Chartism, it was never an independent workers’ organisation. Its demand for “manhood suffrage” was qualified to mean “registered and residential”, excluding casual workers and the unemployed; it was compromised by endorsing the bourgeois radical demand for household suffrage.

After the armed Fenian uprising against the British in February-March 1867, Marx and Engels took an ever greater interest in the Irish Question. Frustrated at the unwillingness of most English trade unionists to support the Irish struggle for national independence, Marx defined a new workers’ activity movement for proclaimed Fenians, Marx broke new ground in stating the opposition of the Irish held back the British workers’ movement as a whole. He wrote to German socialist Kugelmann: “The English people will be kept in order by the ruling classes, because they will have to establish a common front with them against Ireland. Every one of its movements in England itself remains paralysed by the quarrel with the
Irish, who form a very considerable section of the working class here."

The First International achieved most fame and notoriety though to its support for the 1871 Paris Commune. Following France’s defeat by and humiliating surrender to Bismarck’s Prussia in 1870, the National Guard resisted government attempts to disarm it and seized power in Paris. A Commune was set up in March 1871, taking its name from the elected local council in Paris established in 1792 during the French Revolution.

In The Civil War in France, Marx wrote that the Commune was essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating classes, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour.

Marx had argued previously against an isolated uprising in Paris, and the International’s section in France had been severely weakened by state persecution. Once the uprising began, the main political forces in the Commune were the Jacobins and the followers of Louis Auguste Blanqui, a brave and principled revolutionary whose views were nevertheless a continuation of the most radical wings of the first French Revolution — the Jacobin-Communists — and whose methods were those of the conspiratorial secret society. There was however a left-wing of revolutionaries connected to the First International. Varlin was the most prominent of these, and was killed defending the Commune.

After the Commune was crushed, with 14,000 workers massacred and a further 10,000 imprisoned or deported, the International was wrongly blamed for its instigation. This was mainly on account of Marx’s impassioned vindication of this “glorious harbinger of a new society” in The Civil War in France.

In March 1872 membership of the International became a criminal offence. Action was proposed against the organisation by Bismarck, and it was discussed at international conferences by the Pope and the Emperors of Austria-Hungary and Germany.

The International eventually perished under the weight of reaction in the 1870s. Another important factor in its demise, however, was the internal crisis caused by the involvement of Mikhail Bakunin.

Bakunin had been involved in the German Revolution in 1848, and was imprisoned in Russia between 1849 and 1863. He later escaped to Italy, and his followers were active not among the workers’ movement but the young middle-class Italian intelligentsia disaffected with the anti-democratic nature of the newly unified Kingdom of Italy. Initially part of the bourgeois-democratic League of Peace and Freedom, Bakunin split and formed its more left-wing elements into the Alliance of Socialist Democracy. He wrote to the General Council to apply for affiliation to the International.

Bakunin’s politics started not from the working-class and its struggle against capital (and, necessarily, the capitalist state as a part of that struggle) but from opposition to the state as such. He came to the working-class when he realised that it was the only class in modern society with an interest in smashing state power.

**PARTY**

Bakunin, however, vigorously rejected the idea that the working-class should form itself into a political party, or carry out any activity aimed at gaining reforms from the existing state.

Moreover, unlike Marx, who saw in the Commune the form of democratic political institution appropriate to the socialist organisation of society, Bakunin denied that the working-class should set up any political authority of its own after the revolution.

He led a campaign against Marx behind the banner of rejecting the General Council’s “authoritarianism.” On this basis he was able to form an opportunist bloc with the English trade unionists who had their own reasons for resenting the input of the General Council into their affairs.

Though rejecting the idea of a political party, Bakunin advocated the construction of a secret leadership (“invisible pilots”), who would carry out a full-frontal insurrectionist attack on the state. His Alliance was merely a front aimed at infiltrating the International, and when it was refused affiliation, he reduced it to its “central section” based in Geneva and re-applied.

In 1870, Bakunin won over a section of the Federal Council of French Switzerland and split, attracting workers who had joined the International’s sections in Italy and Spain.

Though both sides were not above using questionable methods, the subsequent battle between the followers of Marx and those of Bakunin was for Marx a question of political principle: that of independent working-class political action.

Though Marx was able to win a formal majority for his position, and Bakunin was expelled for organising his secret society, the conflict led to the end of the International.

According to Fernbach: “Marx’s majority at The Hague [Conference July 1872] was composed chiefly of Germans, the exiled French Blanquists and a part of the English delegates, as well as his personal supporters on the General Council. Against Marx were ranged forces that counted for at least as much in real terms: the Spanish, the Belgians, the French-Swiss, and a part of the English.” Though Italy was Bakunin’s main base, they refused to attend the same conference as the “authoritarians”.

In order to salvage the International from falling into the hands of Bakunin, Engels successfully proposed, against Bakuninist and Blanquist opposition, to move the General Council to New York, where it would lie in the control of Marx’s German-American supporters. It was finally wound up at the Philadelphia Congress of 1876 and its successor would be the Second International founded in 1889.

The Bakuninists formed their own International which lasted until 1877.

Despite its relatively short life, the First International was a path-breaking attempt to unite the working-class movement at its various stages of development across the European continent.

In 1947, the American Trotskyist Albert Glotzer summed up its importance in the following terms: “The First International ‘laid the foundation of the international struggle of the proletariat for Socialism.’ It disseminated the scientific principles of socialism developed by Marx and Engels and destroyed for all time the power and influence of utopianism, ‘true’ socialism and anarcho-communism, and gave the coming movement of the proletariat its scientific basis.

“The First International of Marx and Engels disappeared with the defeat of the Paris Commune and the beginning of a new epoch in the expansion of world capitalism. But it had sown the seed of the future.”
Anti-Catholic and “anti-Catholic”

By Paddy Dollard

The film “Philomena”, released in late 2013, has been criticised as an “anti-Catholic” polemic by people whose own allegiances invite the comment: “you would think, wouldn’t you?”

In fact it is not a polemic in the sense of being one-sided or tendentious. It is a dramatisation of a true story, a story more or less typical of many thousands of stories and many tens of thousands of lives damaged or destroyed by the ill-treatment of children in Catholic-run institutions in Ireland. (And a story recounted again in a recent TV documentary, “Ireland’s lost babies”).

Philomena in her teens, in the mid-1950s, had an “illegitimate” child, a boy. She was abandoned by her parents, and imprisoned in an institution run by nuns. She was forced to work there without pay for four years, told that she could not leave unless she paid the nuns a hundred pounds — a vast sum in the money of that time to somebody like her. Philomena and the others like her were, to put it plainly, forced into a form of slave labour, working in such enterprises as nun-run laundries (profitable commercial businesses, many of them).

Her child, a boy, was put up for adoption, against Philomena’s will. He was adopted by prosperous Americans and taken to their own country.

The child was not given by the nuns to the Americans, but sold. The trade in such babies was commercial, a business run by the Catholic Church for profit.

Fifty years later Philomena, with the expert assistance of a British journalist, tried to find her son.

Those are the hard facts of Philomena’s life, and of the story the film tells.

With one kind exception, the nuns here are not the “nice”, “good”, “benign”, “nurturing” humane creatures too often in films, even now. But there is no lack of “balance”. The point of view of the nuns and of the Catholic Church is represented vigorously. That may be one of the things its Catholic critics object to.

For there is of course a great lack of “balance” in the facts and what they say to us about those who ran such institutions and about those whose lives they blighted, wrecked, or destroyed outright.

Apologists for the Catholic Church might indeed think that some of the “balancing” elements in the film speak in fact for the anti-Catholic side. One of the nun-villains of the 1950s has the story as though the nuns only covered up what was actually happening. And therefore? The truth should not be told? If the truth speaks against some institution it should be classified as “anti-Catholic”?

The film’s main “anti-Catholicism” consists in letting the villains of the story it tells speak the self-justification that motivated, justified and directed them. It consists in having them defend their behaviour in terms of their basic religious convictions. That is telling it how it was.

On that level of course it is “anti-Catholic”. How could it be otherwise? The facts themselves are profoundly “anti-Catholic”.

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For War — the very name embodies Hell —

A spell of terror — some incarnate dream.

The fellowship of man. And it shall bring

New hope, new life, new love, new everything.

With unrestrained passion, sweeps the sky
To torture man, and sound the solemn knell
Of Death, warming a woman’s pitious cry.

Man cleaves the heart of man. The dying sob
Of those who, broken, lie, remains unheard,
Crushed by a cannon’s roar. The awful throb
Of some infernal music has but stirred
This carnage into some more ghastly form,
And Love lies slain by those who deemed her all.

But look! A tiny spark of hope remains
Among the ashes of a world’s despair;
In the trail, a darkened cloud, that weaves
The stream flows on, the’r’ crimsoned by the blood
Of guiltless men. And o’er the azure seas,
The echoes of a thousand voices float.

The world with tidings of a new born peace,
The fellowship of man. And it shall bring

New hope, new life, new love, new everything.
The origins of “Islamic State”

By Stephen Wood

The IS (“Islamic State” movement), originally ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), has now eclipsed Al-Qaeda in ferocity and publicity. How?

ISIS has been written off as a product of Western and Syrian intelligence agencies trying to pull together a number of disenchanted senior military figures who have had expert training. Much of that narrative just isn’t true.

The most important figure in the rise of ISIS died five years before it came into being. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who would lead the proto-ISIS group until he was killed by a US airstrike in 2006, travelled as young Jordanian Bedouin to Afghanistan in 1989. By 1989 there were no Russian troops left for him to fight. Mostly he wrote reports for various Islamist newsletters and attempted to make contact with local figures who would later go on to form the Taliban. Al-Zarqawi returned to Jordan determined to form an organisation that could fulfil his primary aim, the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy, and its replacement by an Islamic State.

His virulent hatred of Shia Muslims would later put him at odds with other leading figures in the international network of salafi-jihadi groups, including with the leader of Al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden. After being arrested for stockpiling weapons, al-Zarqawi was sent to prison. He continued to network with other Islamist radicals from Jordan, Palestine, Egypt and Iraq. He built an influential network of Islamists, many of whom had experience fighting and plotting attacks across the Middle East.

Al-Zarqawi was never considered a scholar of Islam. He was an enforcer, known primarily for being brutal and intimidating. Upon his release from prison in 1999 he went to Herat, on the Afghan-Iranian border, determined to setup a training camp, primarily for his Jordanian followers. He met with Bin Laden and persuaded him to provide funding for his group, Jund al-Sham (Soldiers of the Levant).

In later years US intelligence would suggest that Bin Laden and al-Zarqawi were close. But they saw each other as rivals and had major disagreements regarding their respective plans.

“FAR ENEMIES”

Bin Laden and the broader ISQ played tactically oriented to fighting what they viewed as the “far enemies”, notably the USA and Israel.

That meant reducing civilian casualties, attempting to win over a range of Muslims internationally to fight the “far enemies”, and downplaying Sunni sectarianism against Shia and other minorities.

Al-Zarqawi was obsessed with the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy, and was fiercely sectarian in a way which is said to have unnerved Bin Laden.

After being injured following the US invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11, al-Zarqawi went to Iran. There, despite his virulently anti-Shia ideology, he was sheltered alongside various AQ operatives and began to regroup his organisation through fundraising and travelling between Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. He remained wanted by the Jordanian Government for plotting to attack the Radisson SAS Hotel.

He entered Iraq in 2002 to seek medical treatment. By 2003 he had founded Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad), which would eventually, after mergers and splits, creating the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group.

The origins of IS date back to the group led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq after 2003.

In 2004, in a deal to get extra funds and fighters, al-Zarqawi formally pledged allegiance toBin Laden, and renamed JT Tanzim Qadat al-Jihadi li Bilad al-Rafidain (Al Qaeda in Iraq).

There remained differences. The AQ leadership believed that AQI’s regular targeting of Shia places of worship, settlements and civilians would put off Muslims abroad who might otherwise back AQ.

In 2006 a US airstrike killed al-Zarqawi. He was replaced by Abu Hamza al-Muhajir and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, both of whom were killed in 2010.

By 2006 AQI were at the height of its powers. But then the US managed to recruit a large “Sons of Iraq” movement among Sunnis who wanted to push out the foreign-fighter-dominated AQI. That movement, and the US troop “surge” of 2007, all but destroyed AQI’s base in Iraq.

Figures such as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi kept the organisation going in diminished form.

Subsequent years of Nouri Al Maliki’s Shia-dominated Baghdad government pursuing anti Sunni policies helped to establish the chaos that allowed AQI, now re-named ISIS, to regain influence.

The Maliki government forcibly demobilised the anti-AQI Sunni force that the US had nurtured.

It did not do as it had agreed with the US, and integrate these fighters into the regular Iraqi army.

When, in June, Iraqi troops fled before ISIS, it showed a sectarian Shia army unwilling to defend historically Sunni territory.

Among Iraq’s Sunni Arabs, a mixture of indifference to ISIS and inexcusable sympathy for it helped it grow. It now has many native Iraqi Sunnis in its ranks.

Was the US to blame? Partly, in that, along with Iran, it produced the name ISIS. Its focus on sectarian warfare and attacking other Syrian rebels rather than the Assad government led to it being shunned by many of its former allies and officially rejected by AQ.

ISIS now has a proto-state with the ability to collect taxes and oil revenue. It trades oil, through middlemen, largely back to the Iraqi and Syrian governments whose territory it is occupying.

The New York Times has stated: “Millions of dollars in oil revenue have made ISIS one of the wealthiest terror groups in history. Experts estimate the value of the output from the dozen or so oil fields and refineries under its control in Iraq and Syria at $1 million to $2 million a day”.

Al-Zarqawi was most likely responsible for the execution of British aid worker Ken Bigley. ISIS knows that most European countries will negotiate and pay ransom for captured civilians.

Some on the left suggest that ISIS is solely a product of the US. The US trained ISIS and fostered it by invading Iraq. That is largely untrue.

The US’s support for al-Maliki, despite his broken commitments to the Iraqi Sunni population, has helped to boost ISIS, attracting supporters who are not wholly in favour of its overarching ideology. But the US did not invent Sunni-Shia intra-Muslim sectarianism.

There is a theory that the US backs ISIS in order to benefit from ISIS’s oil revenues. But in 2012 the US produced 7 million barrels of oil a day, compared to the 40,000 being produced in ISIS-controlled territory.

US senator John McCain has met with leaders of the Free Syrian Army and other militias. Allegations that he met with ISIS are false. The blog http://snowdenhoax.blogspot.co.uk/ has debunked in detail the story that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was trained by the CIA and Mossad.

Conspiracy theories, resting on the assumption that nothing can stir without the unseen hand of shadowy US and Israeli intelligence agencies, are politically paralysing rather than enlightening. Edward Snowden’s lawyers have publicly confirmed that there is proof of the so-called US-ISIS link in anything that has been released from the data he has exposed.

Some members of ISIS have benefited from US-funded military training: that is not the same as ISIS being a US creation. ISIS has taken weapons from the well armed Syrian anti-ISIS armies; that does not equate to them being armed by the US.

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Basic income and the 21st century working class

John Cunningham reviews A Precariat Charter by Guy Standing (Bloomsbury, 2014).

Until reading Guy Standing’s book A Precariat Charter I had not come across the term “precariat” although I understand that it has been in circulation for some time, as early as the 1950s. So what is it?

According to Standing, the precariat is “an emerging class characterised by chronic insecurity, detached from old norms of labour and the working class”. The precariat has few of the democratic rights associated with citizens and are, in fact, denizens — another word that had me reaching for the dictionary.

A denizen is an outsider, someone who is frequently denied many of the political rights of the citizen, someone who was once described (in the nineteenth century) as “in a kind of middle state between an alien and a natural-born subject.” As Guy Standing points out the precariat is not homogeneous. He divides it into three main sub-groups. The first is people who have been “bumped out” of the traditional working class. These temporary skills and jobs are redundant, they are inclined to look to the past and are “more likely to listen to populists peddling neo-fascist agendas.”

The second group is the more traditional denizen — migrants, refugees, Roma, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers — whose anger at their lot may be tempered by “a pragmatic need to survive”.

The third group is growing constantly and consists of the educated, “plunged into a precariat existence after being promised the opposite”.

If we accept these divisions it is easy to see how, for example, those in the first group might come to resent those in the second.

Standing gives his reader a brief description of Italy’s Five Star Movement (M5S) as an example of the precariat (or something approaching it) “in action”. With unemployment at 11%, 9 million in poverty and all the major political parties discredited there was a political vacuum in Italy into which stepped the M5S. In the 2013 national elections the M5S won 163 senators and parliamentarians. Although the M5S certainly caused a stir, as Guy Standing points out, “sadly, it did not offer a threat to neo-fascism; its economic populism had more than a tinge of neo-fascism.”

M5S made a strong appeal with its advocacy of environmental issue, a basic income for everyone and a call to end “prestige projects” such as high speed train lines. Other policies however, were little short of disastrous, with calls for more freedom for capital, public sector job cuts and attacks on welfare. The author suggests that this movement is still at “the primitive rebel stage” and it will be some time before a meaningful discussion and implementation.

Standing then discusses the economic justifications of the basic income. This mainly revolves around globalisation and the nature of the labour market, in particular its flexibility.

With the demise of the old certainties regarding work and welfare, “more workers will be paid wages that are uncertain and inadequate to provide a dignifying standard of living, however hard they labour. Topping up low wages with tax credits is expensive, distorting, inefficient and inequitable, as well as moralistic in its selective conditionality. A basic income would not be distortionary, as it would apply in all cases. A basic income would reduce pressure to pursue full employment. At present full employment means pressuring people to work beyond the normal working day and raise prices. A basic income induces idleness.

Standing argues that the basic income would enhance collective social action rather than diminish it.


In his book Gorz argued that, “The right to a ‘social income’ (or ‘social wage’) for life in part abolishes ‘forced labour’ only in favour of a wage system without work. It replaces or complements as the case may be, exploitation with welfare, while perpetuating the dependence, impotence and subordination of individuals to centralised authority.”

I’m not sure if any ofStanding’s ripostes answers the point Gorz is making and, again, there is clearly room for debate here.

To sum-up, I think this is an important work which deserves a thorough discussion on the left, however uncomfortable this might make us feel. In this year of the 30th anniversary of the miners’ strike — that last great fight of the “old” proletariat — there can surely be no greater service to the memory of that struggle than to seriously discuss why it was, without a doubt, the last of its kind and what has now taken its place. This is not a discussion about whether or not the working class exists (of course it does).

It is a more a discussion of what it means to be working class in the 21st century. The answer to that question should not be a dynamic knock on the work bust, open, no hold barred debate, in which Guy Standing’s book will, I think, play an important role.
Andy Burnham put on the spot

By Gemma Short

On 21 September over 200 NHS campaigners from across the country gathered outside Labour Party conference in Manchester.

We lobbied to demand Labour make serious commitments to rebuilding the NHS.

Andy Burnham, shadow health secretary, was spotted going into the conference centre and persuaded to come speak to the crowd. Burnham confirmed his support for Clive Efford’s bill to parliament which seeks to remove the parts of the Tory Health and Social Care Act which force private tendering of NHS services. The bill, Burnham assured us, would return NHS run services to the position of being the “preferred provider”. Burnham was heckled with calls for the NHS to be the “only Provider”. Burnham is in fact quite the fan of private providers within the NHS. But only, he says, with the correct checks and balances. Burnham evaded the question directly put to him by lobby organiser Jill Mountford: what about reversing cuts to NHS funding?

The lobby also heard from Anita Down, a nurse from the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign, Pete Radcliffe, Brixton CLP, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Labour Parliamentary candidate for Lewes, and others.

All called on the Labour Party to commit not only to repealing the Health and Social Care Act but also to eradicate market forces and fund a full rebuilding of the NHS.

・More information: bit.ly/nhslobby

Cash wins RMT election

By Ollie Moore

Mick Cash has won the election for General Secretary of the rail union RMT by a large margin, with nearly 9,000 votes to the 4,000 of his nearest rival, Alan Pottage.

John Leach, supported by Workers’ Liberty, came fourth, with 1,428 votes. Steve Hedley won 1,885 votes, and Alex Gordon won 1,176.

The election turnout was low, around 20%. Although Cash’s election material used militant rhetoric, his record is far more moderate. Cash has a more cautious and conciliatory attitude to industrial strategy than his predecessor Bob Crow. It will be a step backwards if his leadership makes it harder for members to take action against their employers. Cash is also infamous for failing to vote against the Iraq war when he represented the RMT on the Labour Party Executive — hardly suggestive of a rebellious or oppositional spirit.

Cashroots RMT members will have to organise independently to create a counter-pressure on the leadership.

ISS cleaners vote for strikes

By Ollie Moore

Tube cleaners working for ISS have voted by a 92% majority for strikes, and action-short-of-strike, in their dispute against biometric fingerprinting machines.

Some cleaners have been locked out for three months for refusing to use the machines, and have had to fight within their union, RMT, to get access to funds to support their dispute and keep themselves going while locked out of work without pay.

So far, the union’s leadership has not called action to activate the ballot.

The rank-and-file Tube worker bulletin said: “This is not good enough. Cleaners are amongst the most vulnerable workers on London Underground, RMT prides itself on being an all-grades, industrial union. It needs to fight as hard for cleaners as it does for any other grade.”

Reinstate Noel Roberts and Alex McGuigan!

Tube union RMT is fighting for reinstatement for two of its members, sacked on what the union says are spurious and unjust grounds.

Noel Roberts was “medically terminated” by LU, despite doctors, local management, and occupational health declaring him fit for work. Alex McGuigan was sacked after failing a breathalyser test which failed to take into account his diabetes, which could have given a false positive.

Alex’s urine sample was only tested for drugs. Standard practice is to test for alcohol after a positive breathalyser test.

A second sample, which should be retained for independent tests, was destroyed.

・For details see rmtlonodoncalling.org.uk

Care workers strike over 9.5% pay cut

Staff at Your Choice Barnet (YCB), who work with a variety of vulnerable adults, were on strike for two days last week.

The strike was in addition to two days the previous week, where they held a joint rally with visiting Doncaster Care UK workers.

The dispute is over a 9.5% pay cut being imposed by YCB management — an arms length organisation devolved from the council. As well as defending their pay, strikers are also demanding to be taken back in house.

The strike is very well supported amongst staff, and picket lines are lively and well attended.

Negotiations are happening with YCB management this week. Further strike dates have already been set for 13 and 14 October to put pressure on management.

Unison is demanding that Barnet Council also attend talks, and that the council writes off debt and penalties it is imposing on YCB.

・Send messages of support to: john.burges@bar-netunison.org.uk

Industrial action resumes in Tube cuts fight

By Ollie Moore

Tube union RMT has reinstated its overtime ban for London Underground station staff in its fight to stop staffing cuts and ticket office closures.

The ban begins on 24 September, and, with some stations relying on overtime to function, could lead to significant disruption.

With the recent departure of London Underground Chief Operating Officer Phil Hufton, and Labour Greater London Assembly member Val Shawcross asking questions about the impact of staffing cuts, the profile of the dispute has begun to increase. Unions should use the opportunity to rebuild momentum and escalate their action.

A recent joint letter from RMT and TSSA, a smaller Tube union, suggests developing unity between the two unions is possible. TSSA should join RMT’s overtime ban, and both unions should name strikes.

RMT’s London Transport Regional Council already has policy to push for strikes on or around 14 October, the day of the public sector pay strike.

A one-day strike would have little impact, but a Tube strike on 14-15 October could be effective if properly built for.

Burnham is pressured into addressing NHS lobby

Burnham is in fact quite the fan of private providers within the NHS. But only, he says, with the correct checks and balances. Burnham evaded the question directly put to him by lobby organiser Jill Mountford: what about reversing cuts to NHS funding?

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The ban begins on 24 September, and, with some stations relying on overtime to function, could lead to significant disruption.

With the recent departure of London Underground Chief Operating Officer Phil Hufton, and Labour Greater London Assembly member Val Shawcross asking questions about the impact of staffing cuts, the profile of the dispute has begun to increase. Unions should use the opportunity to rebuild momentum and escalate their action.

A recent joint letter from RMT and TSSA, a smaller Tube union, suggests developing unity between the two unions is possible. TSSA should join RMT’s overtime ban, and both unions should name strikes.

RMT’s London Transport Regional Council already has policy to push for strikes on or around 14 October, the day of the public sector pay strike.

A one-day strike would have little impact, but a Tube strike on 14-15 October could be effective if properly built for.
The idea amongst health workers that this does not The strike on October 13 others will get one percent. 60% of health workers are cent since 2010. This year wages have dropped in real two hours. NHS staff who are not part of emergency cover work 9- turn out. However many out on the 15th. (civil servants), who will be called out on October 14, and PCS workers, who will be called money will only be asked to strike for only two hours. NHS pay has taken one of the biggest hits in the public sector. Health workers’ wages have dropped in real terms between 12 and 15 per cent since 2010. This year 60% of health workers are been offered no rise, and others will get one percent. The strike on October 13 will be important in raising the idea amongst health workers that this does not have to be the case. Activists in the NHS should have conversations in their workplaces and Unison branches about what services should be exempt, and how to maximize numbers on strike. These conversations will also build understanding of the dispute in the workplace and collective confidence amongst members to take action. The PCS (civil servants) union executive voted on 23 September to strike on 15 October. Strikes in the public sector will be spread across three days. This is not necessarily a bad tactic. However, workers may not feel as confident coming out in smaller groups. Both Unison and PCS now have a concrete demand for pay. In local government Unison is demanding whichever is higher out of a £1 per hour increase, or the living wage. In the civil service PCS is demanding a £1200 or 5% pay increase. This goes some way to addressing the 8% pay cut suffered by workers in the last four years. Activists in health already have concerns over the strategy the union will take. Many, in local government too, may fear their union leaderships leading them into a “deal” to wind down the action. Activists should take control of the dispute, starting with organising strike committees in the run up to the strike days. Strikers’ meetings will give workers an opportunity to discuss the dispute and make demands on the union leaders to call more action.

The ballot over NHS pay in Unison returned a yes vote with 68% in favour of strike action and 88% of action short of strike action. Unison has called a four hour strike in all NHS services, from 7-11am on October 13. This is a different day to local government workers, who will be called out on October 14, and PCS (civil servants), who will be out on the 15th.

It is good that Unison has shown leadership in calling action on a ballot with a low turn out. However many NHS staff who are not part of emergency cover work 9-5, meaning many will only be asked to strike for only two hours. NHS pay has taken one of the biggest hits in the public sector. Health workers’ wages have dropped in real terms between 12 and 15 per cent since 2010. This year 60% of health workers are been offered no rise, and others will get one percent. The strike on October 13 will be important in raising the idea amongst health workers that this does not have to be the case. Activists in the NHS should have conversations in their workplaces and Unison branches about what services should be exempt, and how to maximize numbers on strike. These conversations will also build understanding of the dispute in the workplace and collective confidence amongst members to take action. The PCS (civil servants) union executive voted on 23 September to strike on 15 October. Strikes in the public sector will be spread across three days. This is not necessarily a bad tactic. However, workers may not feel as confident coming out in smaller groups. Both Unison and PCS now have a concrete demand for pay. In local government Unison is demanding whichever is higher out of a £1 per hour increase, or the living wage. In the civil service PCS is demanding a £1200 or 5% pay increase. This goes some way to addressing the 8% pay cut suffered by workers in the last four years. Activists in health already have concerns over the strategy the union will take. Many, in local government too, may fear their union leaderships leading them into a “deal” to wind down the action. Activists should take control of the dispute, starting with organising strike committees in the run up to the strike days. Strikers’ meetings will give workers an opportunity to discuss the dispute and make demands on the union leaders to call more action.

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