



# Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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## OXI MEANS



# OXI!

**Fightback in Greece — See pages 6-7**

## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

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

### Contact us:

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# An opportunity for Iranian imperialism

Iran has reached a deal with the big capitalist powers, the terms of which it will mean limits on Iranian nuclear production in return for the lifting of international economic sanctions. Morad Shirin of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxist Tendency spoke to *Solidarity* just before the deal was struck.

**The Iranian regime is in a very tight spot economically.**

The sanctions that came in in 2012 have significantly reduced its exports. They have also been locked out of the SWIFT banking system, which means that they cannot recoup money from sales.

They have been diplomat-

ically isolated since Chavez's death, Assad's woes and so on.

In some ways Iran has been weakened, but there are also new opportunities for Iranian imperialism. Javad Zarif, the foreign minister recently wrote an opinion piece in the *Financial Times*, calling for "a fair and balanced deal" to address "shared challenges of a far greater magnitude". He says there is a historic choice between co-operation and conflict, and co-operation is the way to combat "violent extremism".

So Iran has been working with other powers in dealing with IS in Iraq; as things improve they'll be able to expand their influence in the region more generally.

The nuclear deal is really the opening for Iran to be locked in closer with others in the region. This will be reactionary co-operation — they could be intervening to put down progressive rebellions, or workers' strikes — but it will also be hitting Islamists.

Iran may get a lot of foreign capital, expertise and technology, and the economy will improve. Workers' confidence can be expected to improve with more employment and so on. So we can hope for an upward trajectory of the workers' movement.

Lots of organisations, such as the Solidarity Center, run by the AFL-CIO and the International Labour Organisation, will

come into Iran and try to set up trade unions which are, shall we say, compliant.

This will present the revolutionary left with a challenge — how to have a policy to relate to these changes and openings, which will likely be very popular, but also how to explain their limitations and connect them to longer-term goals of the workers' movement.

The new situation will wipe out the excuses that parts of the so-called left have used to refuse solidarity to the Iranian workers' movement.

**The new developments will show that the Iranian regime is not an anti-imperialist regime in any way.**

## Iranian teachers' leader jailed

**On 27 June, Esmail Abdi, a leader of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association, was arrested.**

Esmail was trying to obtain a visa to attend the seventh Education International World Congress in Ottawa, Canada. His passport was confiscated and he was ordered to return to Tehran to meet with prosecutors.

Upon reporting to the prosecutors' office he was arrested and a 10 year jail sentence imposed on him.

More than 70 teachers rallied outside the prosecutors' office to support Esmail as he was arrested.

Esmail is the latest of Iran's trade unionists to be jailed. Most recently the Iranian regime cracked down on the Tehran bus workers' union, arresting several of its activists in the lead-up to May day celebrations.

Earlier this year, the Iranian teachers organised nationwide rallies to protest against poverty wages.

The international education union federation Education International is asking for trade unionists to join them in calling for Esmail's release.

**The UK National Union of Teachers has written a letter to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani condemning Esmail's arrest and calling for his release.**



Theodora Polenta speaking in the opening plenary of Ideas for Freedom

# Imagining the future

By Ed Maltby

**Over 200 people attended this year's Ideas for Freedom event, hosted by Workers' Liberty in central London.**

This year, the theme of the event was "Imagining the Future". Discussions and workshops looked at different visions of the future — socialist visions of an egalitarian, democratic future, and what versions of any future capitalism might have in store.

The weekend kicked off with a walking tour around east London, looking at the places where Sylvia Pankhurst and her comrades in the East London Federation of Suffragettes lived and fought. The tour was led by Jade Baker and Jill Mountford.

On Friday 3 July, Workers' Liberty activist Rosie Woods debated David Walker, the Anglican Bishop of Manchester, on "class struggle or love thy neighbour": which is the recipe for a better society? There was a lively discussion from the floor on questions of socialism, secularism, and religion.

Debates — between leftwingers, and between socialists and rightwing ideologues — are a recurrent theme of Ideas for Free-

dom. We think that the important questions facing our movement are best answered through open debate; and we think that publicly debating the strongest arguments for capitalism is an important way of making the case for socialism.

This year we debated Labour leftwinger Michael Calderbank on whether Britain should leave the EU; Scottish socialist blogger Cailean Gallagher on whether the left should support Scottish independence; and pro-market academic John Meadowcroft on whether socialism had a future at all.

Many other sessions and workshops over the course of the weekend ranged from discussions on the future of energy, the Awami Workers' Party of Pakistan, the future of transport and education under workers' control, and old and new directions in socialist feminism, to name but a few.

We also looked at older visions of the future: Daniel Randall introduced Peter Kropotkin's anarchist classic *The Conquest of Bread*; and historian Cath Fletcher discussed Thomas More's *Utopia* and class struggles in Tudor Britain.

**We hope that everyone who attended enjoyed themselves and hope to work with them in the struggles to come.**



# Osborne attacks the poorest students

By James Elliott,  
NCAFC National  
Committee

**George Osborne's budget promised that higher education fees will rise in line with inflation, and that grants will be abolished for the poorest students.**

The budget document states: "institutions offering high teaching quality [will be allowed] to increase their tuition fees in line with inflation from 2017-18, with a consultation on the mechanisms to do this."

This is in line with concerns about new Universities Minister Jo Johnson's speech to Universities UK, in which he talked about "incentives" for quality teaching, and said that they will be published in a Green Paper in the autumn.

This is directly linked to Jo Johnson's Teaching Excellence Framework, which will assess the teaching quality at institutions based on "outcome-focused" metrics which Johnson explicitly said will include employment data.

This is likely to mean that graduate earnings will be used to "prove" quality teaching, and that those institutions where students go on to get the best-paying jobs such as Oxford, Cambridge and London colleges, will be allowed to raise their fees in line with inflation.

The Times Higher Education's John Morgan analysed what this might mean, predicting that once the Conservatives have passed "English Votes for English Laws", they may be in a better position to get a rise in fees for English uni-



versities through Parliament. At that point those that do well in his new Teaching Excellence Framework may be allowed to raise fees.

The other, uglier possibility, is that Johnson and Osborne are openly goading students and the NUS with the talk of higher fees to see what our response is. If it is muted silence and a few

grumbles, they will give in to what their Vice-Chancellor friends have been demanding for years, and allow a rise in fees to £11,000 (Labour's guess at Tories' desires before the election), £16,000 (Oxford's demand), or beyond that towards uncapped fees (as the Browne report in 2010 recommended).

The Budget also stated,

"From the 2016-17 academic year, maintenance grants will be replaced with maintenance loans for new students from England, paid back only when their earnings exceed £21,000 a year, saving £2.5 billion by 2020-21." Currently, students in England and Wales from families with annual household incomes of £25,000 or less qualify for maintenance grants of £3,387 a year; if the family's income is £30,000, the grant falls to £2,441; at £35,000 to £1,494 and at £40,000 to £547. It is not paid when household income is more than £42,620.

This is a direct swipe at the poorest students in education, and makes a mockery of Tories' talk about "access" and increasing the number of working-class students in education by 2020.

In NCAFC we think that problems caused by the rising costs of student loans, and the expanding costs of education as more people continue study, can be solved easily: by taking the vast wealth in the pockets of the rich and business into democratic control by heavily taxing them and using those taxes to pay for high-quality, lifelong learning for everyone. Education should be free to all, including living grants, so that students leave without debt.

**That vision is anathema to the party of finance capital, and "too radical" for the increasingly-conservative Labour leadership. We will only see the society we want if we resist these attacks on education.**

• First published on anti-cuts.com



By Hannah Wood  
Disabled People Against  
Cuts held a budget day  
demonstration in Westminster.

The theme of "Balls to the Budget" saw people throwing a wide variety of balls at the gates of Downing Street as Osborne was due to leave to deliver the budget speech to parliament.

Several hundred strong, the lively demonstration went on to march to Westminster Bridge and block the road. Tourists looked on bemused as a large banner reading "Balls to the budget" was hung over the wall on the south side of the river opposite the Palace of Westminster.

**Hopefully some of the MPs inside got the message that the public are NOT all on board with austerity.**

## Balls to the budget!



Later on Budget Day there were further protests. Alex Booth, school student, writes: "We were protesting against the Budget as it cuts benefits for those who need them the most, like disabled people."

"But young people feel as if we are being ignored. We set off from outside the Houses of Parliament after the police nicked our megaphones. Then we lay down in the road."

"After that, we went to Downing Street and protested outside — then on to Trafalgar Square."

## The flag of White Supremacy

By Sacha Ismail

**Anyone shocked that the Confederate flag still flies from public buildings in many parts of the US South is right to be.**

The murder on 17 June of nine black church-goers in South Carolina by a white supremacist who had posed with the flag has pushed some right-wing Southern politicians to express sympathy for its removal. Before that, however, many of the same people were defending it as a symbol of Southern heritage.

Many will not retreat even now: prominent Republican presidential candidates Rick Santorum and Mike Huckabee have refused to call for the flag to come down, obviously because they do not want to alienate racist voters.

Claims that the "stars and bars" represents some sort of non-political Southern heritage are surreal. This was the flag of the slaveholders' rebellion in the 1860s, as they sparked a civil war which killed 600,000 in order to defend their right to own black people as property.

It was the flag of the white supremacist counter-revolution which brutally denied the ex-slaves political freedom in order to ensure cheap labour from the 1870s. It was the flag brandished by those resisting

civil rights and terrorising those fighting for them in the 1960s — when, bizarrely, its use as a public emblem became more widespread.

Defence of the Confederate flag is typical of the equation of "Southern" with "white racist". Black Southerners, in particular, are read out, as are whites who oppose racism. Even the American Civil War was not really North versus South: 40 percent of the Confederacy's population were slaves and together with whites, mainly poor, who opposed the slave-owners' rebellion this majority of Southerners helped crush it.

The legacy of slavery and segregation is alive and powerful in the US today.

Removing the Confederate flag from public buildings will not solve those deeply entrenched problems of racism and inequality.

**It is nonetheless a symbolic step in the right direction, and the Americans fighting for it deserve complete solidarity.**

• A black woman and a white man, Bree Newsome and Jimmy Tyson, face up to three years in prison and a \$5,000 fine for taking part in an action in which they took down the Confederate flag from the South Carolina capitol. You can support the campaign for the dropping of charges against them at:

[act.colorofchange.org/sign/DropTheFlagDropTheCharges](http://act.colorofchange.org/sign/DropTheFlagDropTheCharges)

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# Yes or No to Europe?

## The Left By Mark Osborn



Last weekend, at the SWP's much-reduced Marxism event, the SWP discussed the forthcoming EU referendum.

Paul McGarr, one of their leaders, put the case for a "socialist no vote". Having advocated this position in their paper, and — apparently — met significant opposition, the SWP top brass have declared a period of discussion on the question in the run up to their December conference.

Ominously, he declared that this debate would take place, "in the best democratic traditions of the SWP." And in the spirit of that tradition he began a 35 minute speech in favour of a "no vote"; those advocating "yes" were limited to three minutes each from the floor.

It is not clear that the "yes" supporters found anything unusual about this procedure, although in the AWL the leadership would not be allowed such a privilege, and opposing views would be allocated equal time from a platform.

Perhaps the "yes" supporters were just glad to get some sort of hearing. They were tentative and we got a glimpse of what they might expect as a couple of leadership supporters wound themselves up for rhetorical effect.

McGarr told us the EU was a neo-liberal bosses' club. He did so in such a way that made me understand he thought the vote would be on a question he'd written. Perhaps the choice in his imagination is: "Neo-liberalism or socialism?" The real choice, in the real world, will be between an existing EU, with all its faults, and a tiny, isolated capitalist Britain with a government led by Tories who are even worse than Cameron and a resurgent UKIP and fascist right.

Why would socialists want to help that happen? Why would we want to help the far right to put up further barriers between the UK and the rest of Europe? Generally the job



Paul McGarr

of socialists is to reduce and remove borders.

McGarr and co. want us to make an equation between the Greek Oxi (No in the recent Greek referendum) and a British No. There are just two problems with this: 1. the questions are different; 2. what is popularly understood by Oxi-No is different.

The 5 July Greek referendum was a vote on whether to accept the harsh austerity conditions advocated by the IMF, EU and ECB. The Greeks voted "no", which was understood as a left vote made along class lines by the working class (despite some support from some of the smaller right wing parties). The UK referendum will be on membership of the EU (and, given the nature of the campaign, on our attitude to foreigners). A "no" vote in the UK will be seen as a vote for UKIP and the Tory right (despite support from some very small far left parties).

A "no" vote in the UK will produce a big political shift to the right and an across-the-board assault on migrant work-

ers' rights.

McGarr rubbished this idea, suggesting a possible attack on migrants is of little interest, as the EU is already racist against migrants fleeing Africa in small boats headed for Europe. However, EU withdrawal will do nothing at all to alter EU policy towards African migrants, but will do a great deal to alter, for the worse, UK policy towards Polish and Romanian migrants.

McGarr went on to complain that those who are bothered about a "no" vote producing a racist backlash in the UK have illusions in the "yes" camp. McGarr told us it was absurd to think Cameron is an anti-racist!

If I'd been allowed to speak I would have made a couple of very simple points on this matter. First, Workers' Liberty has no illusions at all that Cameron is an anti-racist, which is why we told the SWP's leadership it was wrong to get his signature on the founding statement of Unite Against Fascism. Second, while we have no illusions in the official "yes" campaign, it will be fragrant in comparison to the "no" campaign. All we ask is that the difference is noted.

McGarr then told us his partner and his child are Danish. I guess Copenhagen is not so far away and perhaps he figures after a "no" victory he'll be able to visit them during school holidays.

Certainly he can't possibly believe what he actually said: that a "no" vote will be a big blow against Cameron, and one which will throw open British politics and provide an opportunity for the left. Indeed a "no" vote will be a big blow for Cameron; the idea that Cameron's fall will be to our benefit is fantasy. If Cameron goes after a "no" victory, someone worse will get his job.

Finally, it is not clear to me that the SWP's famous ability to sniff out the next recruit, if necessary by abandoning tiresome political principles, isn't failing. As the referendum nears the "no" campaign will become more-and-more rabid.

**I can't see radical students and youth being willing to go anywhere near a "Socialist No Campaign".**

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# Counting child poverty

## Rich and poor By Matt Cooper



The Conservative Minister for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, recently declared that the latest figures on poverty in the UK (the DWP's Households Below Average Income report for 2013/14) show the government is succeeding in tackling poverty and that inequality is falling. Both claims are based on a wilful misinterpretation of that report.

There are several measures of poverty used in the report, the most useful being one of relative poverty (set at 60 per cent of median net household income including benefits). After housing costs, this is currently £232 a week.

Using this measure, the proportion of people in the UK living in poverty in 2013-14 was 21 per cent, and higher for households with children (28 per cent). For most groups there has been no (statistically significant) change in this rate of poverty since 2010-11. The underlying trend is one of relative poverty after housing costs inching up since their low point in 2005.

One group, however, have seen a sharp increase in rates of poverty — households where someone has a disability. Here poverty rates have risen by two per cent since 2011-12, most likely caused by cuts in benefits; it's a squeeze that is set to get worse.

The government expected their report would show an increase in child poverty. When it didn't the government claimed a success. But it was never likely that the 2013-2014 figures would show an increase in child poverty — for two reasons.

Firstly, the median income has fallen by eight per cent since 2010, and thus the threshold for relative poverty has also fallen by eight per cent. If an absolute measure of

poverty is used (based on 60 per cent of median income in 2010-11) child poverty has increased by four percentage points since 2010.

Secondly, the main benefit cuts affecting children since 2010 have been below-inflation increases in out-of-work benefits and the benefits cap. Both affected those already in poverty. It is the cuts to come, particularly in tax credits to the low-paid, that will increase child poverty.

Nor is it true that inequality is decreasing. Duncan Smith has cherry picked the one measure of inequality in this report that shows a small (and statistically insignificant) fall over the year. This figure is not only before housing costs, but is based on an absolute measure of poverty (measured against the median income 2010-11) and is based the 90:10 ratio (that is the ratio of the income needed to enter the top 10 per cent of incomes, to the income needed to enter the bottom ten per cent).

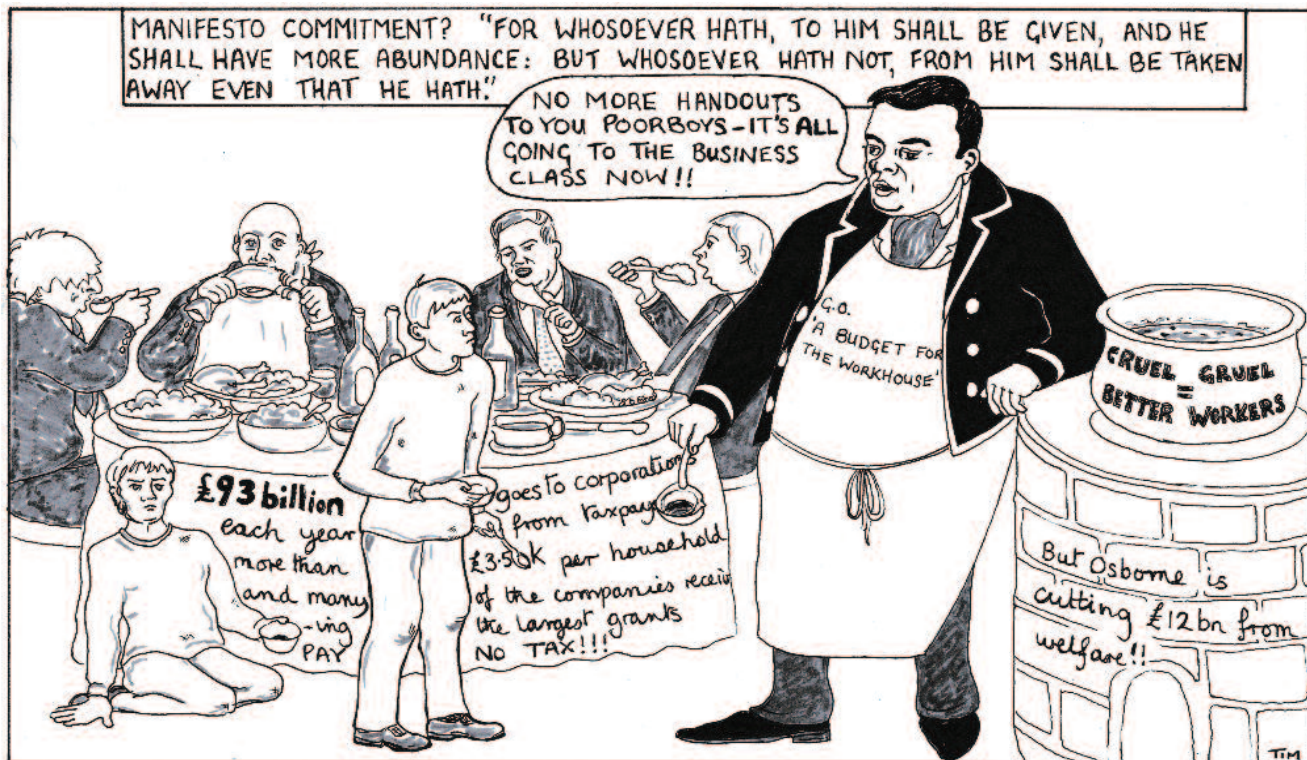
The Gini coefficient is a more robust measure of inequality that takes account of all incomes, and on this measure there has been little change in relative inequality in income after housing costs over the last ten years. What neither measure picks up, however, is the increasing inequality in income, and more particularly increasing wealth, of the tiny plutocratic elite at the top of the scale, the top 0.1 or even 0.01 per cent.

The government did not choose to produce this report; it is required by legislation passed by the previous Labour government. The Conservatives know their planned £12 billion in welfare cuts will drive up child poverty and have signalled their intention to reform the law.

**They will probably want to rely on absolute measures of poverty and related ideas of material poverty (e.g. not being able to afford food etc.) to more easily hide effects of their policy — a plutocracy built on low pay.**

• DWP report: [bit.ly/1eZ2k5T](http://bit.ly/1eZ2k5T)





## Making the poor pay

George Osborne's Budget was a cynical attempt to restyle the Tories as the party of the workers. He announced the introduction of a national Living Wage; starting at £7.20, the hourly rate would rise to £9 by 2020.

There are three immediate problems here.

First the £9 an hour is the same rate that the, now superseded, national minimum wage would have risen to by 2020!

Also, the national Living Wage will not, as Osborne, implied compensate for the Budget's cuts in tax credits. Tax credits may be just an excuse for employers to pay poverty wages, as David Cameron said in justification, but a cut is a cut. No amount of hypocritical moaning about stingy bosses by wealthy Tories is going to put food on the table if you are one of the 13 million families that will lose out.

For the national Living Wage to compensate for tax credit cuts it would have to be £11.65 an hour.

Lastly many of the public sector employers who will now have to pay the new Living Wage rate (a hike from current minimum wage rate of £6.50) are wondering where the money is going to come from? Not the government!

Beyond the spin, this is no more nor less than beating down the poor, the young, the disabled and many other working-class people.

If you are under 25 you will not be eligible for the Living Wage and if you are under 21 you will not be automatically entitled to claim Housing Benefit to make up your lousy wages. If you are a student from a low income background you will lose your maintenance grant. If you are a disabled person who is not quite disabled enough you will lose money as you get downgraded to jobseeker's allowance.

But the Tories are just getting started. They want to make £46 billion cuts to welfare in the next five years. The bottom line for them is that if you are relying on the benefits system you should feel really poor or as they put it, the system "should not support lifestyles and rents that are not available to taxpayers who pay for that system."

Osborne's message to the people he wants to make paupers? Limit your family to two children. If you are under 25, don't expect to be housed, to be warm, to be safe. If you are disabled don't expect to be independent like other people. If you are a child, tough luck if your parents are out of work.

Expect to see many more announcements and policy trailers for many more cuts. On Tuesday 14 July the press reported David Cameron was "open to the idea" of workers funding their own sick pay and unemployment benefit; to a move towards US-style insurance schemes with the state paying the barest minimum of benefits to people who cannot work or who are too low paid to "save up".

If the labour movement does not rouse itself to fight these measures, we will see the final end of the welfare state.

We need to build on direct action and class struggle. Make solidarity with disability, housing and student activist groups; build on mass demonstrations against the Tories; campaign hard for Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour leadership contest; support strikes against cuts in Bromley, Barking and elsewhere.

**We need to oppose the Tories' attacks with clear class struggle policies — tax the rich to pay for jobs, services, benefits, and housing. Expropriate the banks and put them into social ownership.**

## The Corbyn factor

Harriet Harman, Labour's interim leader, is in hot water.

She unilaterally decided Labour needed to be seen to be backing Tory cuts to welfare. Labour, she said, should listen to the voters and become the party of the taxpayer and hard working families. She said Labour would not oppose the cap on housing benefit, nor the plan to stop families claiming tax credits for more than two children. But the poisonous anti-working-class nonsense backfired.

Three out of four of the candidates for Leader of the Labour Party, starting with Jeremy Corbyn, said Harman was wrong. Liz Kendall, who has distinguished herself by being indistinguishable from most Tories, was the only candidate to agree with Harman.

That reaction indicates that political debate has broken out inside the Labour Party! This was, for once, not a debate over presentation, style or how to "triangulate" with the Tories or UKIP on issues like immigration, but a real debate on policies

that will affect millions of people. What's happened here?

The entry of Jeremy Corbyn into the leadership contest, and his popularity among people who are new to Labour, or had become disillusioned with Labour, forced other candidates to follow his lead on the issue of benefit cuts, and to condemn the cuts.

Corbyn's socialist politics are different to the socialist politics of Workers' Liberty. Nonetheless that fact that he is the only one standing out clearly against "New Labour" consensus of cuts is pushing forward the terms of the campaign.

That is a good thing. A strong Corbyn vote will put pressure on Labour leaders (whoever they end up being) to oppose the Tories. It will be a vote to build that necessary wider battle against cuts, to defend trade union rights, and to make solidarity with migrants. Principled socialists should get behind the Corbyn campaign.

• More on Corbyn's campaign, back page.

# Help us raise £15,000

On 2-5 July we held our annual summer event Ideas for Freedom.

At the event we held a fundraising collection which raised £2,534, we thank everyone who contributed. We also sold many books, badges, posters and pamphlets which contributes to our funds.

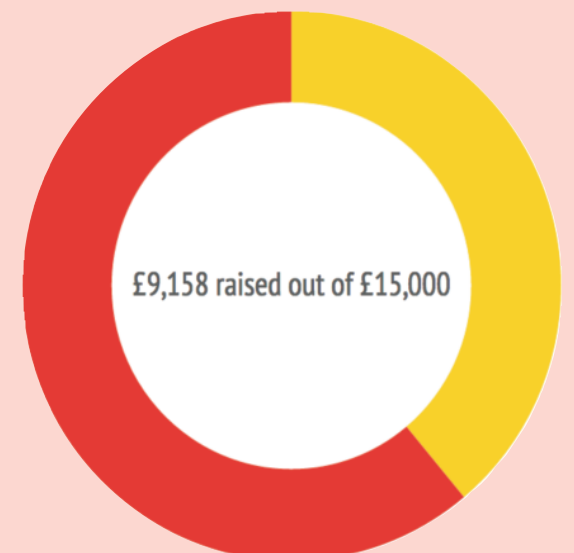
The theme of this year's Ideas for Freedom was Imagining the Future. We discussed what future we hope to build and how we can fight for it in the here and now. Workers' Liberty will continue to fight for that future in many ways, every day.

**If you were not at Ideas for Freedom, or were and would like to help us further, please consider:**

- Getting a subscription to our weekly newspaper, Solidarity — [workersliberty.org/subscribe](http://workersliberty.org/subscribe)
- Taking out a monthly standing order.
- Making a one-off donation
- Organising a fundraising event in your local area
- Committing to do a sponsored activity and asking others to sponsor you
- Buying some of our books, posters, autocollants or pamphlets

For information on standing orders or how to donate visit [workersliberty.org/donate](http://workersliberty.org/donate) For more ideas and information on fundraising visit [workersliberty.org/fundraising](http://workersliberty.org/fundraising)

**Thanks this week to those who gave to the collection at Ideas for Freedom, as well as Max, Emily, Jeremy, Esther, Pete, Traven, Dawud and an anonymous paper subscription. So far we have raised £9,158.**







# From referendum to Memorandum

Dora Polenta takes us through events in Greece in the last week. As *Solidarity* goes to press the vote on the deal had not yet happened in the Greek parliament.

## Flashback: 1991

**The first school students' occupations in Greece. A 15 year old boy speaks with fervour on national TV against the New Democracy's counter-reforms in education and against marketisation. He commands respect from the journalists and becomes one of the voices of the occupation movement. His name is Alexis Tsipras.**

I held to that image as I watched ERT [Greek TV] and saw a deflated Alexis Tsipras repeating one more time that reason will prevail and some sort of smoke will come out of the negotiating chambers.

## Sunday 5 July

61% victory for the thunderous working class "Oxi" to Juncker's proposed memorandum and any old and new memoranda; under conditions of conditions of capital controls... of lockouts... of an economic, psychological and political war... of threats and blackmailing from the national and international establishment.

It was a working class victory, with big "Oxi" majorities in the the working-class and poorer areas. For example: in the working-class areas of Nikaia and Peristeri, 72% and 70% no ("oxi"); in the leafy suburbs of Ekalh and Voula, 85% and 65% yes.

With their "Oxi", working class people voted to leave behind five years of Memorandum humiliation and anti-worker class war which had condemned them to poverty, unemployment, and misery.

Antonis Samaras, leader of New Democracy and former prime minister of the ND-Pasok coalition government. Evangelos Venizelos had resigned as leader of PASOK only a few earlier.

The Syriza government appeared to have regained the initiative. Even within its own limited political logic it could have utilized the political capital of a 60% mandate as a strong negotiating card in order to achieve a compromise agreement milder than the 25 June Juncker's proposals and the government's 47-page proposal.

But soon the top echelons of Syriza were almost openly admitting that if they did anything that risked Greece being thrown out of the eurozone — that is, if they negotiated with any options other than accepting the best that vindictive eurozone leaders could be persuaded to offer — no systematic preparation had been done for a Plan B, and so the "Grexit" would have been utterly chaotic and disastrous.

According to the central Syriza leadership narrative, even the Left Platform was not prepared for a Plan B under disorderly conditions of confrontation. At best they had thought of an orderly exit by Greece from the eurozone, with a four-

month bridging program. Even the Greek Communist Party (KKE), they said, which is positively in favour of Greek exit from both the EU and eurozone, did not advocated an disorderly bankruptcy in the current context.

If the strategy is only to get the best deal that can be got by rational persuasion of the eurozone leaders, and trying to exploit differences among them, then the result is bound to be a bad deal. Regardless of the economic arguments, the eurozone leaders did not want the working classes of the eurozone to see Greece as an example of how resistance can win gains. Only an extension of resistance across Europe could change the balance. And since 25 January 2015 the Syriza leaders had done nothing to develop that.

Alexis Tsipras's first steps to annihilating his political capital from the referendum were already visible his speech on the night of 5 July. Instead of unilaterally cancelling all Memorandum measures and implementing the well-overdue Thessaloniki declaration, Syriza's platform for the January 2015 election, his first political move was to call for the convention of all party leaders. It was almost as if the "yes" had got a 60% majority.

"We are already prepared to continue negotiating. With a credible financing plan. With a credible reform plan, which will have the acceptance of the Greek society. In terms of all the social justice and the transfer of burdens from the weak to the financially strong. And with a credible plan for growth of investments, in cooperation with the European Commission."

"I am confident", he said, "that the ECB fully understands not only the general economic situation but as well the humanitarian dimension as a result of the crisis in our country"

"From now on we are all one," he added. "The current referendum results has neither winners nor losers. It is a great victory for everyone... preserving national unity, restoring social cohesion and economic stability".

## Monday 6 July

Convention of all party political leaders. On the table the overcooked idea of a "national unity" negotiation team to meet the eurozone leaders. Forced resignation of finance minister Yanis Varoufakis

A common platform was endorsed by all political parties except KKE — Syriza, Anel, ND, Potami and Pasok with the exception of KKE — and a sketch of the government's new memorandum proposal to the creditors, almost identical to Juncker's 25 June proposal and more severe than the government's previous 47-page proposal).

Regardless what one thinks of Varoufakis's mission to save capitalism from itself; regardless of his attempts to outsmart the market; regardless of whether he is an erratic Marxist or a classic reformist who believes in solutions within the capitalist system; regardless of whether we agree with statements such as: "it is the Left's historical duty at this particular juncture to stabilise capitalism to save European capitalism from

itself and from the inane handlers of the Eurozone's inevitable crisis"; regardless of the almost naive optimism about the power of his arguments with which he entered the negotiation table — regardless of all that, Varoufakis was made to resign from the critical post of Financial Minister in the name of appeasing the partners in name, blackmailers in practice. It was setback.

## Tuesday 7 July

Euro-MP and veteran left partisan Manolis Glezos addresses the European Parliament President Martin Schulz in Ancient Greek and Latin.

He recites an verse from Euripides' tragedy *The Suppliants*. A herald sent from Thebes asks in Athens: "Who is the despot of this land?" Theseus replies: "Sir stranger, thou hast made a false beginning to thy speech, in seeking here a despot. For this city is not ruled by one man, but is free. The people rule in succession year by year, allowing no preference to wealth, but the poor man shares equally with the rich."

Glezos adds: "Timeo hominem unius libri". Thomas Aquinas: "I fear the man of a single book." I fear the opinions of the illiterate man who has only read a single book.

The facts about the "bail-outs" are summarised.

The European banks were bailed out, not the people of Greece. It is not the people of Greece who have benefitted from bailout loans from the IMF, EU and European Central Bank, but the European and Greek banks which recklessly lent money to the Greek State in the first place.

When the IMF, European and ECB bailouts began in 2010, €310 billion had been lent to the Greek government by reckless banks and the wider European financial sector. Since then, the 'Troika' of the IMF, EU and European Central Bank have lent €252 billion to the Greek government. €34.5 billion of the bailout money was used to pay for various 'sweeteners' to get the private sector to accept the 2012 debt restructuring. €48.2 billion was used to bail out Greek banks following the restructuring. €149.2 billion has been spent on paying the original debts and interest from reckless lenders. This means less than 10% of the money has reached the people of Greece.

Today the Greek government debt is still €317 billion. However, now €247.8 billion — 78% of the total — is owed to public institutions, primarily in the EU but also across the world. The bailouts have been for the European financial sector.

## Wednesday 8 July

Alexis Tsipras addresses the European parliament, defending the Referendum and the "oxi" vote, talking about a Europe of democracy, solidarity and cooperation, a Europe of open borders, extended and guaranteed workers' and human rights, progressive redistribution of wealth, and equal partnership of all countries — a negation of the EU of Merkelism



# Oxi still means oxi!

By Dora Polenta

Around the vote on the Memorandum due in the Greek parliament on 15 July we will see great pressure on Syriza MPs and ministers to take a “responsible” stance and endorse the third memorandum.

There is talk of a government reshuffle and of demands for the president of the parliament and the Left Platform ministers (who abstained on the 10 July to endorse the continuation of negotiations based on the government’s proposed deal) to resign, even of expulsions of MPs and the formation of a new special purpose coalition government.

The working class will not stand by with folded arms. They will use their organ of struggles, their unions, their communities, their assemblies and they will go back to the streets to demand the Syriza government take back its signature from any Memorandum.

The answer is: Back on to the streets of struggle. It is the duty of the revolutionary left in and outside Syriza to defend the “oxi” mandate in the streets as well as in the organs of Syriza. There should be a united front of the Left Platform, the Communist Tendency, and other left components in Syriza’s rank and file to defend and reclaim Syriza as a political tool for the interests of the workers and youth.

Syriza politically represented the world of working-popular resistance, the world of the social movements, the big fights against the memoranda, and faces an attempt to convert it into something like Brazil’s Workers’ Party.

All attempts to convert the Syriza rank and file into propagandists of pension cuts, home repossessions, sell-offs of public property and increasing taxation cannot be tolerated. Instead, it is the duty of the revolutionary left in and outside Syriza to be at the forefront of social resistance.

The current agreement has only temporarily prevented the Grexit. The new memorandum will soon be proven unrealistic and non-implementable. Factoring in the deep re-



cession, new measures will be demanded; but the Greek debt will not be repaid.

It is wrong, from the standpoint of working class interests, for the leaders of the Left Platform to be the champions of “Grexit” on the rotten basis of capitalism, even if they accompany it with some timid Keynesian pro-working class measures. It’s like the left defending the new stage of capitalist crisis over the previous stage.

The main programmatic issue, now more than ever for the left, should be workers’ power and anti-capitalist measures, not restricted (as in the current ideas of the leadership of the Left Platform) to the nationalization of banks and debt default, but going on to socialisation of the banks and all the basic levers of the economy under workers’ power and control with democratic central planning.

and neoliberal fundamentalism. On the left, Euro-MPs waving “OXI” cards on the one side, on the right, the Tories and right-wingers jeering, plus fragments of the social democrats jeering.

The government returns to the negotiating table. We wait for the smoke to rise from the talks. This omens are that it will be pitch black.

Bit by bit, we hear of extra Memorandum measures: shops to open on Sundays, collective redundancies, attacks on workers’ rights, collective bargaining, pensions, wages. The discussion ceases to be technocratic and the eurozone leaders talks about “reliability”. Nobody can trust a nominally left-wing government that dares to call a referendum. The Syriza-ANEL government has lost its credibility because it asked for a popular mandate. Primary budget surpluses are compulsory, but surpluses of democracy are not to be forgiven in the neoliberal eurozone.

Schäuble is provocatively “leaking” to journalists a plan for a five-year Grexit with humanitarian aid, and demands that the government set up an “independent” fund in Luxembourg, to collect the proceeds from privatisations of Greece’s public wealth, to be used solely for Greece’s future financial obligations to the creditors.

## Friday 10 July

The Greek parliament votes its approval for the government’s new memorandum proposals and mandates the Prime Minister to achieve an agreement at all costs. A new national consensus is being formed with 251 parliamentary votes of support — all the ND, Potami and Pasok MPs, and the majority of Syriza.

Seventeen Syriza MPs either abstain, or voted no. Yanis Varoufakis is absent, Zoe Kostantopoulou abstained, and so

did seven MPs of the Left Platform abstain, including its two most prominent ministers, Panagiotis Lafazanis and Dimitris Stratoulis, and Marxist economist Costas Lapavitsas. Fifteen other MPs of the Left Platform, including two ministers, issue a statement: they are voting yes in order not to deprive the government of its majority at this stage, but they will not vote any agreement that includes austerity when it comes to parliament.

Two MPs, Ioanna Gaitani and Elena Psarea, members of the Red Network, the Trotskyist component of the Left Platform, vote no

## Monday 13 July

Memorandum 3! All these measures are just preconditions for Greece to be able to negotiate the possibility of further loans.

1. Greece promises to seek “support” from the IMF from March 2016 both in terms of stewardship and at the level of funding
2. Increases in VAT.
3. A gradual increase in the retirement age, to 67 by 2022. The EKAS supplement to pensions to be abolished for all by the end of 2019. Increase in pensioners’ contributions for health care.
4. Deviation from the primary surplus targets will automatically mean cuts in wages, pensions, and welfare.
5. Opening-up of professions.
6. Sunday will no longer be a holiday for shop workers.
7. Electricity distribution to be privatised.
8. Destruction of collective bargaining agreements. “The labour policy must not mean a return to the settings of the past that are not compatible with the objective of promoting sustainable and overall development.”

9. Massive layoffs and abolition of workers’ protection
10. Governmental involvement on the management of the banks explicitly forbidden.
11. €50 billion worth of Greek public property to be sold off, and proceeds transferred to a fund for debt repayments. At current prices €50 billion is worth half of the Peloponnese.
12. “The government must consult and agree with the institutions [the Troika] on all bills to the relevant issues in good time before these bills put to public consultation or Parliament,”
13. Measures being taken by the government in the past five months should be revised unless fiscal “equivalents” are found). So the recruitment of cleaners, of the ERT workers, of the school guards, of the municipal employees can be reversed.
14. The problem of the unsustainable Greek debt is “dealt with” only with accumulation of further debt. The ratio of debt to GDP will skyrocket
15. Privatisation of the Piraeus and Thessaloniki ports, of the 14 regional airports, and more.
16. Uniform, homogeneous salary scheme for all public sector workers by January 2016, with adjustments in salaries according to their qualifications and job roles: in other words, further reduction of the wages of public sector workers.
17. There is no extra €35 billion to be “injected” into the Greek economy to kick-start development, as it has been misleadingly stated. The €35 billion is pretty much money that Greece would have received anyway as part of the EU scheme ESPA.
18. Expressly excluded is any “haircut” of the nominal value of the Greek debt. Only extended grace and repayment periods may be on offer. Future generations will be enslaved in a debt colony.



# The queer future: Workers rights or corporate power?

By Maria Exall

**In many ways sexuality and gender identity politics has come of age. Instead of the focus on broad-based political demands for equal rights that were necessary over the past decades, when there was legal discrimination and the majority of the population expressed prejudice, there is now a political imperative to draw sharp dividing lines between the interests of pink capitalists and those of LGBTQ workers.**

An emboldened Conservative Party in government, together with its big business backers, is determined to attack workers organisations. There is an ideological war going on to delegitimise workers' organisations and workers' representatives in order to clear the way for cheap labour and the undermining of decent terms and conditions at work. This is manifested in the Tories' proposed Trade Union bill, but we should also be aware this attack has a cultural front, and a specifically "pink" cultural front. We should be prepared to challenge this within our LGBTQ communities as a political issue.

The Conservative Party has a very recent record of prejudice, voting en masse against the comprehensive equality legislation brought in by past Labour Governments. Up until 2009 David Cameron voted consistently against LGBT rights, but just before the 2010 election there was a change of Tory strategy and he decided to endorse a socially liberal approach to detoxify the "nasty Party" brand. This approach culminated in Equal Marriage legislation in the last Parliament. We should note however that this legislation only passed in the House of Commons because of Labour and Liberal votes, as only half of Tory MPs supported it. We should be worried that after the 2015 General Election there is no clear Parliamentary majority for progressive social change on sexuality and gender identity issues.

A capitalist ideological pink offensive is aimed at LGBTQ workers as consumers as well as producers. The reality for working-class LGBT people in our workplaces and in our communities is very different from the bland and superficial world that is presented — our diverse and varied LGBTQ lived experiences are turned by the corporate marketing machines into commodified pink "lifestyles". And corporate interests are coming to the fore, determined to takeover and depoliticise any collective expressions of LGBTQ life such as Pride celebrations. This offensive of the pink capitalists must be resisted.

The first focus of an LGBTQ fightback must be in the workplace. A battle is being waged concerning who speaks for LGBT workers and who can defend our interests. "Pink friendly" corporations want us to trust them and, unsurprisingly

want to suggest that LGBTQ workers don't need trade unions: instead they offer us employee staff networks as the way of dealing with problems at work. They want to claim their place in the Stonewall top 100 employer list rather than deal with LGBTQ workers' real demands.

Despite (nearly) equal employment rights in the UK the most comprehensive survey of workplace homophobia conducted last year shows that LGB workers are more than twice as likely to be bullied as straight workers. Discrimination, overt or covert, is still rife and we are far from having workplaces that are safe and welcoming. The Tory plans for more free schools and academies undermine inclusive education and make it harder to challenge homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools and colleges. The tightening of border controls and the xenophobia and nationalism promoted by both UKIP and the Tories directly affects LGBT asylum seekers and refugees.

There are remaining areas of inequality in UK law: the ban on equal marriage in Northern Ireland, the ongoing discrimination on survivor pension benefits, and continuing religious exemptions in employment rights to equality legislation on sexuality. The campaigns against these led by the TUC and the Cutting Edge Consortium, an alliance of progressive LGBTQ faith and secular organisations fighting faith based homophobia and transphobia should be supported.

## WELFARE

**But LGBTQ trade union groups and LGBTQ campaigning groups must also demand an end to the cuts in public services and repressive social policy of the Conservatives including further draconian welfare reforms which affect housing and provision of mental health services to vulnerable LGBT people.**

We should oppose divisive social policies which threaten to stoke up intolerance and fear which will damage the social solidarity necessary to combat persisting homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in society.

Capitalists want to monopolise political debate and sideline alternative views, especially ones based in working class people experience. It is in this context we have to view the recent behaviour of the Pride in London board and their acquiescence to corporate power. The Tories have always wanted to depoliticise Pride because of their homophobic and transphobic record and to maintain their socially liberal facade. But Barclays, Starbucks and Citibank cannot defend equality or the positive change we need to eliminate homophobia, biphobia and transphobia at work (neither can campaigning groups in hock to such corporate interests such as Stonewall.) The priority that have given to these corporate sponsors rather than the "Pride heroes" from Lesbian and



**Starbucks sponsored Pride in London 2015, but has a bad record on workers' rights.**

Gays Support the Miners in this year's London Pride March is the tip of the iceberg. And the experience of London Pride this year is not untypical of regional Pride events in general many of which you have to pay to attend and also are dependent on business sponsors.

We need a democratic, working-class LGBT political movement to take forward the gains made in LGBT civil rights over the past few decades and make them real. We must challenge the overt and covert prejudice that still exists, the heterosexism that continues to be the norm, and the deep rooted homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in our society which often dovetails with everyday sexism.

Pink capitalists have the money and the power. Their offensive is a direct challenge to LGBTQ socialists. We need a LGBTQ workers' movement that links up with grassroots community organisations. The base for such a movement must come from the LGBTQ groups which now exist in most trade unions and from class conscious LGBTQ workers' campaigns. We must resist any attempt within the labour movement to roll back momentum for LGBT and women's liberation in the name of 'authentic' working class experience as many of the proponents of Blue Labour wish to.

We need to directly promote the interests of LGBT workers — and make sharp distinction between our interests and the compromised interests of LGBT organisations dependent on corporate support. We need a progressive trade union movement where the demands of LGBTQ workers are heard loud and clear. And we need solidarity between LGBTQ and straight workers so they cannot divide and rule.

**It is solidarity that delivered LGBT rights and it is solidarity that will deliver our liberation.**

## Open the doors!

By 1942 it was known in the allied states that the Nazis were systematically slaughtering Jews. The "anti-fascist" powers did nothing about it. This proclamation by the Fourth International was published in the *New York Militant* in February 1943.

**Hitler's mass murders of the Jewish people of Europe arouse in every class conscious worker a feeling of fury against this arch-sadist evil spawn of decaying capitalism.**

The full brunt of Hitler's insane violence falls against the Jewish toilers: workers, artisans and small tradesmen who make up the huge majority of the Jews of Europe and the world. The wealthy Jews have been able, in large measure, to escape or to buy privileges the trapped poor Jews cannot secure.

### OPEN THE DOORS OF REFUGE!

Anger against Hitler and sympathy for the Jewish people are not enough. Every worker must do what he can to aid and protect the Jews from those who hunt them down. The Allied ruling classes, while making capital of Hitler's treatment of the Jews for their war propaganda, discuss and deliberate on this question endlessly. The workers in the Allied

countries must raise the demand: give immediate refuge of the Jews and to all those being hounded for racial or religious reasons or for advocating social progress, who are pounding desperately at the gates. Quotas, immigration laws, visas — these must be cast aside. Open the doors of refuge to those who otherwise face extermination! The right to asylum is an elementary democratic right, which the workers and all honest democrats must support.

The workers, regardless of national, racial or religious origin, must wage war to the death against all prejudices which the capitalist class fosters in order to divide the masses by creating internal antagonism among them. Against the capitalists' attempt to cleave the workers into warring groups, the workers must strive to unite around a program which will bring class victory over capitalism.

In its period of democratic revolution against feudalism, when capitalism was a young and progressive social system, it extended the rights of man and of citizenship to Jews and other religious minorities. Capitalism, in its imperialist period of decay, in its reactionary struggle against the proletariat, the new rising class, is taking away the democratic rights from the masses. The reactionary tendencies of international capitalism find their most developed form in fascism, which while crushing the labour movement and



**Refugee Jewish children arriving in London in 1939**

abolishing all democratic rights, thrusts the Jews into ghettos more horrible than those of feudalism, ghettos that are in reality human slaughter houses.

### HUMAN SALVATION THROUGH SOCIALISM

The Fourth International, leader of the workers in the struggle for world socialism, welcomes the Jewish toilers into all ranks. Only by world socialism can the Jews, above all the Jewish workers, and all oppressed nations and races, be saved from the terrible fate world capitalism has inflicted on them and the even worse fate it has in store for ever-increasing numbers of them.

**Only in world socialism will human brotherhood become a reality and anti-Semitism a hideous memory.**

28 February, 1943



# The human stories of benefit recipients

The Tories plan to stop 18-21 year olds claiming Housing Benefit. Sally Hendrick knows what this will mean.

**It's hard to know where to start with my story of being a "homeless youth". Partly because it feels so long ago now that it's difficult to write as if I was still experiencing it; partly because some of my memories about the chronological order of things are jumbled; partly because I still block a lot of the memories out, it's difficult to conjure them up to be able to write about them coherently.**

I am sure there will be many pieces about this cut, from the different perspectives of housing activists, or charity workers; on this policy, or the housing crisis generally. The rolling-back of the welfare state affects people in a myriad of ways. The real, human stories of the results of these decisions should be known, to strengthen our arguments, and our politics and to remember why we do what we do. This is my attempt to convey that.

Mine isn't a story that would be particularly film-or-news-worthy. It's not particularly violent, or dramatic, or romantic. But it's what happened, and there are many, many stories similar to mine, with many more to come, a thought I find too overwhelming to consider.

All my family — my parents, and their parents — come from council estates. My dad had a steady office job for a while but it turned out to be not so steady and he was made redundant. He then worked night shifts cleaning offices. My mum worked cash-in-hand cleaning people's houses.

When I was little we were poor, but we weren't starving. The kind of poor that is quiet, and unseen, yet goes on in millions of houses in Britain, the fourth richest country in the world. The kind of poor that means your parents get up early on a Sunday morning to get early to the car boot sale so they can try and get the best pick of the clothes. The kind of poor where you cut coupons out of magazines and hurriedly thrust them all into the impatient hands of the cashier at Asda. The kind of poor where you never have the heating on but your parents turn it into a game so you make a den of your bed quilts, on the patio furniture you use as a sofa, and watch Jurassic Park.

So I was used to being poor, I was used to having a No Frills fish finger sandwich for tea and I wasn't used to a certain standard of living that some politicians assume those on benefits enjoy.

I was a bright kid. My parents hadn't gone to university but they were big readers and our Saturdays always involved a trip to the library. I got almost straight A\*'s in my GCSEs, and I enrolled at a local college. By this time my parents were going through a tricky separation, made more difficult by neither of them having the money to find somewhere else to live, especially not with a spare room for little old me. I also experienced a miscarriage around this time, from an unplanned pregnancy me and my then boyfriend weren't ready for. A bit of domestic violence thrown into the mix meant home life was impossible. I was also experiencing severe mental health problems which an hour's CBT a week didn't even scratch the surface of.

I dropped out of college. I would stay on friends' bedroom floors and sofas. When they went off to college during the day, I would wander aimlessly around town, sitting in cafes making a cup of tea last five hours, or sitting in the library, challenging myself to finish a whole book before it closed.

These parents would get uncomfortable about this strange lost girl spending so much time at their houses. I began to anticipate certain conversations: "you know you're always welcome here, but my mum says you've stayed three nights this week, and that's a bit...much — you have somewhere else to go though right?" I'd move on to the next friend, until I'd tested to the limit their parents' patience too. Doing the round of people I knew quickly became a loop — become unwelcome somewhere then move on to the next house.

It would be glib to say I became homeless from embarrassment, but there is only so many times you can swallow your pride to accept charity from parents who you don't know but for a while wish they were yours, and then retract that wish when you hear their whispered conversations about you in the kitchen. I ended up not being welcome anywhere. So finally I fixed a grin, said, "yeah sure, thanks so much for having me, I'll see you soon," grabbed my backpack, heard the front door close and felt that pit in my stomach that had been

gnawing at me for a few weeks rise up into my mouth. I realised that actually, no, I don't have somewhere else to go this time, my options are exhausted.

Town centres are scary places at night time. They're both loud and eerily silent. One of the best ways I found to see through a night was to beg/borrow/steal enough money to get into one of the few nightclubs in town that opened until 4am. Sit there sober, people-watching, until it closed, and then it was possibly only a few hours until the sun rose. Time was divided up like that; you'd break the day down into manageable chunks.

I very quickly learnt other things: like the existence of a drinking water fountain in a free art gallery, or what time a certain bakery would take their bins out, filled with stale but still delicious cinnamon buns. I learnt the easiest place to get away with stealing a toothbrush, toothpaste, some wipes, and would go to a shopping centre and lock myself in the disabled toilet and try to sort myself out the best I could. Your hair does really begin to wash itself after a while so that was a relief.

There is only so long you can attempt to retain your self-respect though, before you get past caring. The cold, the hunger, the boredom, the loneliness, and the never-endingness of it does actually get to you and your standards drop. At one of the nightclubs I began talking to a man, who invited me back to his house. It was bitterly cold that night. He had me at "house".

## HELP

**I got to know some guys who regularly went to one of the dingiest clubs, and I became a "resident" in their squat. The guy that "ran" the squat was a drug dealer.**

He let me sleep in a tiny room that was used as his cat's room. Me and a heroin addict that frequently visited the squat would lock ourselves in that room when there were all night raves, trying to escape the noise and the people, and placate the poor cat. One night, the ceiling of one of the rooms fell in. I lay there wishing it had fallen on me. When you get to such a point you realise you should probably attempt to get some help.

My "room mate" told me that he wanted to get clean, and that his parents, who had kicked him out some years ago, were willing to take him back while he did so, and did I want to come with him? When we got there, his parents, who I had never met, made me a cup of tea and told me they had bought me a little basket of toiletries of my own that I could use while I was there. I burst into tears in their kitchen, touched by their kindness.

With an address at my disposal, the job applications started going in fast. A few months later and I had an agency job at a call centre. And a few months after that I had a tiny bedsit in a rough part of town and looking out over the bins, the proud home to a mattress on the floor and a little pile of books.

The call centre let me go.

I made a scene at the job centre. Surely security guards in those places are supposed to watch out for people threatening staff, rather than a young bony girl threatening her own life, but they threw me out anyway. A kindly worker came outside and told me that I could go to the council office and apply for Housing Benefit there which would pay my rent.

If I hadn't have had that Housing Benefit at that point, when I was under the age limit the Tories now want to impose, I would have been back in the situation where I was before. Except actually I would be dead. Because I just knew I couldn't go back to not having a home, having experienced life with one again. I was still too fragile.

So I went and filled in the innumerable forms, and got my meagre payments, and just about managed to keep my tiny room. And kept off the streets. And I got another job, eventually. And then a different one. And a different house.



Hackney Housing Activists protesting outside Hackney council in 2011

All that happened more than a decade ago and seemingly another lifetime. I have a home now that's clean and pretty. I even have a spare bedroom, for when friends come and stay. My little pile of books has grown into many full bookcases. I never take my home for granted and look upon it with delight every single day. For the last eight years I've had a low-paid but strongly-unionised job that I absolutely love. And it all worked out for me: my parents both remarried to lovely kind people and both have good jobs. We talk again, and are even sort of close, though we never talk about what happened. I even went to university as a mature student, cramming at evenings and weekends whilst working full-time. I'm safe and warm and well-fed and loved and very happy.

I'm also a labour movement activist, because I believe that the way to fight this shitty state of things. For working class people to collectively fight is the route to changing the world. So I'm also politically useful. But I can safely say I wouldn't have or be any of these things if I hadn't received Housing Benefit that time.

What about all those people now who are worse off than I was? What about the quarter of homeless young people who are LGBT? What about young people escaping domestic violence? Leaving care? Experiencing mental health problems? Substance abuse? What's going to happen to all those young people, left without that crucial lifeline? When people call it that, I, for one, know it isn't hyperbole.

**I almost want to write a political polemic to conclude, but perhaps that's for another time. This was just my story, and I think it's important to acknowledge the personal stories behind our politics sometimes. There are thousands of other stories like mine, some that are a little bit different, some that are a little bit the same, and there will be thousands more. But those stories will have no happy ending, if we let this policy happen.**

**Projects and activism such as the ones at the links below are inspiring, and crucial to this fight.**

Labour movement activists should involve themselves with struggles around housing as much as possible, yet these campaigns are all reactive. We need to be proactive.

As a labour movement we need to start the conversation as to what we can do as workers to prevent this. Local authority workers, housing workers, welfare workers, social workers, and charity workers are key to this.

**When becomes the point that, as workers, we refuse to carry out that work? What practical support can other trade unionists who do not work in this field offer? I hope my article can contribute, in a small way, to that conversation.**

[www.crisis.org.uk/pages/roughing-it.html](http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/roughing-it.html)  
[www.akt.org.uk](http://www.akt.org.uk)  
[focuse15.org](http://focuse15.org)  
[fightfortheaylesbury.wordpress.com/about](http://fightfortheaylesbury.wordpress.com/about)  
[housingactivists.co.uk](http://housingactivists.co.uk)



# The four lives of Laurent Schwartz

By Martin Thomas

**I recently came across Laurent Schwartz's autobiography, published in French in 1997, and in English in 2001. Maybe for reasons which I'll indicate, it has not become a well-known book; but there is much to be extracted from it.**

Schwartz was a Trotskyist from when he was shocked by the Moscow Trials, in 1936, at the age of 21, until 1947; and an energetic left activist all his life, often cooperating with Trotskyists.

In 1946-7 he had become active enough to serve on the day-to-day leading committee of the small French Trotskyist movement, and to be invited to work for the movement full-time as its secretary. He quit the movement in 1947, and so, soon after, did almost all the figures of the so-called "right wing" of the French Trotskyist movement at that time, to whom he was closest — Albert Demazière, Paul Parisot, Yvan Craipeau, and others.

Schwartz broke from Trotskyism more thoroughly than Craipeau and Parisot ever did, but remained active, especially in solidarity with Algeria's war of independence (1954-62), against the US war in Vietnam (later 1960s and early 70s), against what he calls the USSR's "new 'Vietnam' war" in Afghanistan (early 1980s), and in a Committee of Mathematicians which campaigned, sometimes successfully, for the freedom of mathematicians who were political detainees in countries from the USSR to Uruguay. He was also a prominent member of the PSU, a leftish split from the Socialist Party generated by opposition to the Algerian war.

His day job, all that time, was as a university professor of mathematics, and an eminent one. His most famous mathematical discovery, which in 1950 won him the Fields Medal (maths' equivalent of the Nobel Prize), was made in 1944, while he was still a Trotskyist activist.

Schwartz's later activism was not the usual sedate academic's business of signing letters to the newspapers from time to time. He organised committees, spoke at meetings. His activity against France's war in Algeria got him sacked from his university job for a year (1962-3). His son Marc-André, also active, was kidnapped by French right-wingers; though Marc-André escaped after two days, the kidnapping left him so scarred that he became mentally ill, frequently attempted suicide, and eventually succeeded.

The autobiography shows that Schwartz remained in contact with Craipeau and Parisot, and often worked with Trotskyists. But he explains his break with Trotskyism on the grounds — surely read back onto his 1947 mind with the hindsight of 1997, when, at the age of 82, he produced his autobiography — that Trotskyists fail to recognise that the working class is not and will never become educated enough to aspire to social power. "The proletariat and peasantry do not progress sufficiently in the educational system, not only because of defects in the structure of the system, but because of their own lack of ambition". Schwartz, oddly for someone in the very hierarchical French university system, considers contemporary education too "egalitarian" and not "selective" enough.

Yet he recounts, with obvious pride, that some people still considered him a Trotskyist, and says that one friend's political definition of him as "a former Trotskyist" is accurate. He is proud of his Trotskyist past, not ashamed of it.

Having (at the time, or in later rationalisation) made such

a fundamental break with Trotskyism, he puts nothing in his autobiography about the debates in the Trotskyist movement either in his time or later. The French Trotskyist movement in 1946-7 was hot with debate. Parisot and others had, for a short while after 1948, links with Max Shachtman's Workers Party in the USA. Craipeau remained active on the left until his death and sardonically entitled his 1999 autobiography "Memoirs of a Trotskyist Dinosaur". He had been (in 1937) the first Trotskyist advocate of a "bureaucratic collectivist" description of Stalin's USSR, and later wrote extensively to argue that it was state-capitalist.

Schwartz comments on none of that. But he attributes his internationalism to his Trotskyist past, and from that internationalist viewpoint gives a vivid picture of many political episodes.

The autobiography is a difficult book. Schwartz, not a modest man, describes himself as still energetic at 82 and having an exceptional memory. It must be true: he could not otherwise have led the life he led, or produced the book.

But I suspect, and am sometimes sure, that at 82 Schwartz is sometimes reading later thoughts back onto earlier events. The book reads as if dictated to an amanuensis (Isabelle Rozenbaumas, a historian who has since become a film director); scarcely copy-edited; poorly translated from French into English; and scrappily proof-read.

Schwartz was part of the Bourbaki group of French mathematicians. He argues that the Bourbaki project would have been impossible except that André Weil, one of its founders, had gone to Germany to study with Emmy Noether and others in the 1920s, when most French mathematicians were trying, for chauvinist reasons, to ban Germans from international mathematical conferences.

## ROLE

**Even if he had done nothing in politics and had he not made his great mathematical discovery in 1944, Schwartz's role in Bourbaki would be a remarkable life's work.**

The group produced 19 books, over many years, as a systematic rewriting of large areas of mathematics in the way that Noether and her colleagues had rewritten algebra.

It was an extraordinary procedure, maybe the only example in history of important books being produced in a more-or-less planned way by a committee. Each area of mathematics was successively named as the subject for a book. (There were many arguments about the order).

One member of the group would then write a "zero-th" draft of a book. The draft would be "completely demolished" in the group's stormy, rowdy monthly meetings. The main organiser of the group once it got going, Jean Dieudonné, whom Schwartz describes as doing mathematics full-tilt 18 hours a day, every day, would threaten to walk out, or actually walk out, at almost every meeting.

Then another member would write another draft. Then another, another... until "around the seventh or eighth version", the group finally conceded that a draft was ready to publish under the authorship of the fictitious "Nicolas Bourbaki". The result was not a textbook, nor a report of research — members of the group wrote their own textbooks, and research reports, separately — but an attempted model of how the particular area of mathematics could be systematised and generalised.

The project never achieved its stated goal. Pure mathematics was expanding much faster than the group's attempts to systematise it, and the group never tried to integrate applied mathematics. But Schwartz is surely right to say that Bourbaki changed the whole style of mathematics.

The book includes large chunks of mathematics, recounted as to another mathematician specialising in Schwartz's chosen areas, with few explanatory concessions even to professional mathematicians specialising in other areas. Schwartz had a fourth life as an ardent butterfly collector, and there is a lot in the book about butterflies.

He recounts that in the 1920s French mathematicians refused, for chauvinist reasons, to pay attention to German mathematics (which then led the world), and even sought to ban German mathematicians from international conferences.

Schwartz met the other Bourbaki mathematicians during World War 2, which, as a Jew and a Trotskyist in France, he survived only through luck. He moved to the Vichy area, and



then to the small Italian-occupied part of France, living in small hamlets, maintaining multiple identities, sometimes meeting people who (he later discovered) really knew he was Jewish but chose to protect him, but often finding French people who hated Jews and the English much more than they disliked the Nazis.

At one point he survived a round-up at a railway station — in which, as was routine, the Gestapo ordered all men to undress and took for deportation all who were circumcised — only because he noticed the officers gathering and slipped out early enough.

## POST-TROTSKYIST

**His post-Trotskyist political activity reads as that of a "Third-Worldist", but his attitudes are not like that at all.**

He criticises, for example, the fringes of the Vietnam movement in Europe and the USA who went for terrorist activity as the most militant form of solidarity: "a dangerous insanity which recalls the insanity of today's fundamentalist Islam... a generally more or less concealed anti-semitism, called 'anti-Zionism'."

He describes himself "breaking with" Noam Chomsky, because Chomsky "continued to support Pol Pot for too long". Schwartz became a member of a committee to expose Pol Pot's atrocities in Cambodia.

On Afghanistan he comments: "One might claim that we shouldn't have expended so much energy on the expulsion of the Soviets... their social program was so much better than the Taliban's. But... the Red Army was a foreign conquering army, bringing bombings, massacres, torture and mass executions. The Afghans unanimously revolt against it... it was impossible not to support them."

"The final result was execrable... But it was the... Soviet repression which gave rise to civil war and the Taliban". Similarly, Schwartz does not regret opposing the Shah of Iran even though "the regime of the Ayatollahs is obscurantist and uses torture even more". Schwartz depicts himself as clearly aware that FLN rule in Algeria, or Stalinist rule in Vietnam, would be horrible, even while he was active in solidarity with their struggles against imperialism.

It is not because he looks to an independent working-class "Third Camp". He sees a moral obligation to stand against repression, and sees no reason why that stand should require illusions about the victims of repression.

**There are worse compasses in politics.**

• Unabridged online at:  
[www.workersliberty.org/node/24655](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/24655)





## Unite prepares ground for unlawful action

By a delegate

**Unite the union held its rules conference in Brighton this week.**

About 500 delegates debated motions from sectors, branches, equalities committees and regions.

Two key and contested debates were about the election of union officials and the union's political structures and affiliation to the Labour Party.

Unite members do not elect any paid officials other than the General Secretary. There were many different motions calling for the election of different types of officers by different constituencies. These motions all fell and the status quo prevailed.

This is a mistake. For the union to be accountable to workers, officials who make decisions on behalf of workers should be elected by those workers. It is clear that some of the details of how this would work in practice need to be fleshed out to win delegates over.

Unite also voted down the various motions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party or to support a "variety of candidates".

Jeremy Corbyn's campaign

for the Labour leadership and Unite's Executive's decision to back him, which was announced on Sunday, energised conference. I spoke against disaffiliation on the grounds that for as long as the affiliated unions still have power within the Labour Party, they should exercise this power to win the party to working-class politics.

The unions have often failed to use this power. The disaffiliation motions were voted down by about 80% of delegates.

The very significant decision to delete from the rules the caveat "so far as it may be lawful" was not contested. General Secretary Len McClusky made clear this was about the existing trade union laws and the Tories' planned new attack on the right to strike.

**McClusky said you cannot defeat unjust laws unless you show your willingness to defy them or stand in solidarity with those who do.**



## Universal Credit strike

By Peggy Carter

**PCS members working in the new Universal Credit benefits system will strike for two days from 20-21 July over increasingly oppressive working conditions.**

Staff voted by 84% to strike about a lack of resources, an oppressive management culture, inadequate training, hard to reach targets and staff shortages.

The strike involves over 1,500 workers at two sites in Bolton and Glasgow, where more than half of all universal credit staff are employed.

PCS represents around 80% of staff at the centres that process claims for Universal Credit and take enquiries from claimants by telephone and online.



The dispute also includes the imposition of new conditions, including predetermined start and finish times and severe restrictions on flexible working.

The two-day strike will be followed by industrial action short of a strike until mid-August.

**The union has not ruled out balloting its members at the other Universal Credit sites in Bangor, Basildon, Dundee, Makerfield and Middlesbrough.**

## Bromley and Barnet battle on

By Gemma Short

**Council workers in the London boroughs of Bromley and Barnet struck again on 7-9 July and 8 July respectively in ongoing fights against cuts and privatisations.**

Strikers from the two boroughs met up in Parliament Square at lunchtime on 8 July to protest at the budget announcement.

In Bromley adult services and transport workers struck for two days on 7-8 July and library workers struck for three days from 7 July. Workers from across Barnet council's services struck on 8 July and many workers at a depot which had previously been organised by the GMB (who have not called strikes) refused to



cross Unison picket lines and joined Unison.

Tory-led Bromley council is committed to become a "commissioning council" and reducing the number of council employees from 4,000 to just 300, despite the £130 million in reserves. Council bosses' organisation the Local Government Association has announced that councils may be making cuts of up to 12% of their budgets next year as they anticipate a £3.3 billion reduction in central-government funding.

Bromley council plans to privatise 14 libraries, hand over disabilities services to the private company Certitude, and the remainder of the council-run parks service was transferred to private company Landscape Group on 1 June. Landscape Group has already planned to make redundancies.

Bromley strikers also rallied to the support of a local resident, Paul Rooney, who faces eviction on Monday 13 July due to £2,000 council tax arrears, to which private company Liberata has tacked on £49,000 in solicitors' fees. Paul, previously a Unite workplace rep, gave



up work to care for his disabled daughter.

Barnet Unison is fighting the outsourcing of up to 80% of the council's services including libraries and children's services. Barnet Unison organised a "thunderclap" on social media site Twitter in the lead up to the strike which lead to over a million users seeing a message about privatisation.

After Barnet Unison's strike on 8 July, branch secretary John Burgess returned home to find his car vandalised with nails stuck in the tyres and a note stuck to the windscreen reading "fucking union faggots"

[sic] get back home from here!"

**It is no coincidence that this happened just two weeks after Barnet Unison took part in the trade union contingent of London Pride, and after the branch condemned the proposed fascist demonstration in Golders Green.**

• Messages of solidarity for John, and Barnet Unison members can be sent to: [john.burgess@barnetunison.org.uk](mailto:john.burgess@barnetunison.org.uk)

• Messages of solidarity for Bromley Unite to: [onay.kasab@unitetheunion.org](mailto:onay.kasab@unitetheunion.org)

## Save jobs at First Great Western!

By Becky Crocker

**On 9-10 July, RMT members struck for 48 hours across the south west of England, from Paddington to Plymouth, from Cardiff to Cheltenham to save jobs on First Great Western.**

RMT is demanding that First Great Western (FGW) guarantees to protect jobs when it introduces new "super express" trains. FGW has not guaranteed to retain guards, on-board catering teams or safety critical

platform staff, strongly implying that it plans to run the new fleet with "driver only operation". FGW has also refused to guarantee to keep its train maintenance staff when the new fleet comes in.

RMT has demanded, and received, assurances about jobs from Virgin East Coast, which will soon introduce the same fleet. This has added to the strikers' sense of injustice. If Richard Branson, not known as a friend of rail workers, can guarantee jobs, then so should First Great Western!

On average, the strike cancelled about 60% of services. ASLEF, the union representing train drivers, did not participate in the strike. The trains that remained in service were driven by ASLEF members, with managers on board doing guard duties.

This was the first strike on this part of the rail network for 32 years; the first since rail privatisation and the first in First Great Western's history. It is a milestone for RMT members. RMT has often come close to calling strikes against

FGW, only to call action off at the last minute to continue negotiations. This time, talks completely broke down. For RMT, there can be no compromise over job cuts. The company is equally determined, with the government demanding job cuts to save money, as recommended by the McNulty Report.

**This was the first round of a battle that must involve further industrial action and political campaigning if it is to succeed.**

## More gallery strikes

By Charlotte Zalens

**National Gallery workers will strike again on the 14-16 and 20-22 July.**

Workers also struck alongside Barnet and Bromley council workers on 8 July to coincide with Osborne's budget announcements.

Outgoing gallery direc-

tory Nicholas Penny has recently stated that he would "very much prefer to keep all the gallery assistants as part of the gallery, if they're not, they don't feel part of the institution in the same way."

**Strikers have challenged him to get back around the negotiating table and stop the privatisations.**



**Save Cressingham Gardens social housing — [bit.ly/1CBCAaR](https://bit.ly/1CBCAaR)**





# Solidarity

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## Support the tube strikes!

By Ollie Moore

**Tube unions Aslef and RMT have announced a further 24-hour strike on London Underground on 5-6 August, with which other unions are likely to coordinate, after a 24-hour strike by all four Tube unions brought the network to a complete standstill on 8-9 July.**

Members of RMT, TSSA, Aslef, and Unite struck over a range of issues, including the imposition of anti-social rosters in preparation for the introduction of 24-hour running ("Night Tube") in September. Unions are demanding more time off to compensate for more fatigue-inducing night shifts. RMT also struck against London Underground's job cut plans, which will see over 800 frontline station posts axed from early 2016. The dispute also covers Tube workers' pay settlement.

After months of talks, during which LU did not budge from its offer of a 0.75% increase, with a £500 one-off Night Tube "bonus" for station staff and £750 for trains, track, and signal workers, it tabled a last-minute offer only days before the strike, involving a 1% increase in basic pay and a £2,000 bonus for drivers in the 11 depots which LU says will be most affected by Night Tube. The offer did not address any of the unions' wider claims for more time off, a shorter working week, or the withdrawal of job cuts plans. LU Chief Operating Officer Steve Griffiths told unions they had until 6.30pm to respond to the offer, making it impossible for any union to meaningfully consult its members.

Picket lines were mounted at stations and depots across London. Despite the usual campaign of vitriolic hostility from the anti-union press, there was a

significant level of public support for the strike, and campaign groups such as Hands Off London Transport and Disabled People Against Cuts supported pickets in various locations.

Unions commenced an indefinite overtime ban from 9 July onwards, which has already caused several station closures and delays to maintenance work.

The rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker*, published by Workers' Liberty, commented:

"It is welcome news that further strike action has been declared. If our officials had gone back to negotiations without named action on the horizon, then there would be no pressure on management to concede anything. Naming a new date makes it clear that last week's strike was not about letting off steam, but about fighting to win; that it was not a one-shot release.

"However, there are serious concerns about whether



single days on strike once a month will exert enough pressure on LUL to make management back down. This is an identical strategy to the one that failed to stop 800 stations job cuts in 2010.

"Moreover, while unity of all four unions has been

great, it also seems to have become a pretext for dates being set behind closed doors, with no involvement from rank-and-file members. At least one RMT branch had already called for a strike of at least 48 hours before the end of

July."

**Many activists, particularly in RMT, are now arguing for strikes to step up from 24 hours.**

• For regular updates, visit the *Tubeworker* blog at [workersliberty.org/twblog](http://workersliberty.org/twblog)

## Unions should back Corbyn for Labour leader

**Jeremy Corbyn's campaign for Labour leader is getting a strong response.**

In addition to being the only campaign with national trade union support

(Unite, BFAWU, ASLEF, TSSA, as well as RMT and FBU), Corbyn is now clear second in terms of nominations from Constituency Labour Parties, with 36 to Andy Burnham's 47; Yvette

Cooper is on 28 and Liz Kendall on only 5. CLP nominations have no direct impact, but they do indicate strength of support among Labour activists.

It is now pretty standard

for meetings addressed by Corbyn to be attended by hundreds. 400 turned out to hear him speak in Merseyside; 40 to a campaign planning meeting in Newcastle and, not long, after 250 to a

short-notice public meeting he spoke at in the city.

Over 50 volunteers helped organised activity at Durham miners' gala, where they gave out over 20,000 leaflets, stickers and beer mats, sold t-shirts and badges, held meetings and signed people up to the campaign. Corbyn himself got an enthusiastic reception.

Campaigners in various parts of London have been organising street stalls; the campaign in Newcastle is planning stalls outside workplaces organised by Labour-affiliated trade unions (local government, health, Royal Mail).

Student and youth supporters of Corbyn have initiated a statement of support, already signed by many prominent student, NUS/student union and Young Labour activists.

The response so far to the campaign is a reminder that



**Corbyn spoke at Barnet Unison picket lines on 8 July**

there is a large constituency in society hungry for left-wing ideas.

**Socialists need to throw ourselves into the campaign, organise activity in the labour movement and on the streets, and engage as much as possible of that constituency in debate and discussion.**

## Unite comes off the fence

**At the 5 July Unite executive the decision was taken to back Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour leadership election.**

In the run up to the meeting there had been some doubt as to whether Len McCluskey would support the call to back Corbyn. There had been a statement circulated calling on Unite to endorse him and the United Left had voted to support him. However, despite the United Left having a majority on the EC, in the past this often hasn't been enough to win decisive votes. This time the

vote was passed.

The decision to back Corbyn is a significant one. It has meant that amongst Labour Party and Trade Union members the campaign is now considered serious. It is not just a token left candidate standing in an election but a candidate who could potentially win a large amount of support. Union resources are being given to help organise the campaign and Unite's members are actively being encouraged to vote. It has strengthened the Corbyn campaign considerably.

It is also significant because it will mean that more Unite members are being encouraged to think about and engage in politics, it opens up Unite's political strategy to scrutiny and will make the debates about how we build a party that represents the interests of the working class have a clearer understanding of why that means having an orientation to the Labour Party.

In Unite, as a result of this decision, we have an opportunity to involve new people in the political life of the union. Union

branches need to contact all of their members, encourage them to register as Labour Party supporters and organise local meetings. Socialists in Unite need to be explaining why we need socialist politics and what sort of political strategy we need to build a movement capable of achieving them. This is a point at which it could be possible to convince many people of the sort of politics we need to transform the labour movement.

**We need to make the most of this opportunity.**