WE CAN AFFORD £10 PER HOUR

Wages are the clearest measure of how well or badly workers are doing capitalist society. Between 1979 and 2008 the share of national output (GDP) going on wages fell from 65% to around 54%. This represents a huge shift of wealth in favour of the profit system and the capitalist class who benefit from it.

MAKE THE RICH PAY!

Vote Labour! Tories will increase cuts, inequality, poverty

Swing to the right in student elections

What is the Front National?

Is France’s Front National fascist? Solidarity assess the party’s makeover.

McDonald’s scraps zero-hours contracts

Solidarity speaks to Gareth Lane from the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union.
International pressure fails to halt Chechen tortures

By Mike Zubrowski

Despite international pressure, the detention and torture of suspected gay men by the Chechen since late March has continued, and more secret concentration camp style prisons have been discovered.

A journalist who helped expose the brutal persecution has gone into hiding after threats from Chechen state officials and Chechen Muslim clerics.

Putin and the Kremlin in Russia has been cynically turning a blind eye, and the Russian police have detained LGBT activists campaigning against this on Mayday in St. Petersburg. But after international pressure the Kremlin reluctantly opened an investigation into the situation.

Four more secret prisons have been discovered — there are six in total — with over 100 men detained, three people confirmed killed, and twenty suspected dead. Those men who have been released have often been released because police believe their family will kill them. Police and Kadyrov — the Chechen leader — have encouraged such “honour killings”.

Chechnya is a republic in southern Russia with a conservative and deeply homophobic society and an increasingly authoritarian state. Very few people are openly gay, and much of the torture aims to find the identity of other gay men.

JOURNALISTS
Novaya Gazeta, the Moscow-based newspaper which first reported this brutal violence has faced serious threats, and one reporter has gone into hiding.

An adviser to Kadyrov and a group of Chechen Muslim clerics called for retribution against the newspaper. It wasn’t allegations of the secret prisons or the torture that confronted them, rather the claim that there were gay men in Chechnya. Kadyrov’s spokesperson described the report as a lie on this basis, and others in his office have demanded apologies.

Six of the newspaper’s journalists have been killed or died in suspicious circumstances since the publication started 24 years ago.

Two — Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova — were shot into hiding after threats from Chechen police believe their family will kill them. Police and Kadyrov — the Chechen leader — have encouraged such “honour killings”.

Chechnya is a republic in southern Russia with a conservative and deeply homophobic society and an increasingly authoritarian state. Very few people are openly gay, and much of the torture aims to find the identity of other gay men.

INTERNATIONAL
Protests around the world, and several international bodies have called for an end to these human rights violations, and for the central Russian government to intervene.

This has pressured the Kremlin at least to open an investigation into the situation and to condemn threats to journalists. The international pressure is an important, limited, brake on the Chechnyan authorities, and it should be increased. However, there are dangers.

Homophobia in Chechnya is linked both to political and conservative Islam, and to nationalism, and has been strengthened by national and ethnic conflicts. Kadyrov has already responded demagogically to the international “attack… attempt[ing]… to blacken our society; lifestyle, traditions and customs.”

There is a risk that international pressure will be manipulated to further feed nationalism, positioning Kadyrov as a protector of Chechen society, and gay rights as something foreign actors are attempting to impose from outside.

This would further strengthen Kadyrov’s authoritarian leadership, and further harm LGBT people as they are used as a political football.

The Russian LGBT Network is helping to evacuate and assist those persecuted in Chechnya, and there have been calls for the UN to implement a similar program. They have been in contact with around 60 people so far, successfully supporting half of them.

To tackle the root of the problem requires ending the pervasive homophobia in Chechen society and the authoritarianism of the Chechen state. We also need to offer practical solidarity to those fighting for LGBT rights, and for human rights against state repression in Chechnya. To the extent that groups are doing this, they are operating underground and are small.

Finding, contacting them and supporting them is far from straightforward.

We should support those in Chechnya and Russia pushing for secularism and for an international perspective that respects the Chechen right to national self-determination, whilst fighting both Chechen and Russian nationalism, with all the conservative ideas they bring.

Corbyn must be clearer on Assad

By Simon Nelson

Jeremy Corbyn was attacked in the press last week for his refusal to talk about Syria at a press conference. He said he would address the issue in other interviews.

Though the outrage was faux, Corbyn’s stance on Syria, and indeed Labour’s as a whole, is contradictory, unclear and tainted with the Stalinist complaisance toward Assad that infects the “anti-war movement”.

In response to the US airstrikes and Boris Johnson’s commitment to help the US with further strikes, without a vote in Parliament, Corbyn called for a political solution: “Let’s get the Geneva process going quickly.”

“In the meantime, no more strikes. Have the UN investigation into the war crime of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and take it on from there.”

Macron and Le Pen woo strikers

By Gemma Short

On Wednesday 26 April far-right French Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen tried to position herself as the candidate for working-class people by visiting the picket line of striking workers in Amiens, northern France.

The strike is against the closure of a Whirlpool washing machine factory.

Emmanuel Macron, the other presidential candidate had hoped to prove he understood the workers by meeting with union representatives; however he told them he wouldn’t keep the factory open if he won but would argue for “good terms for the closure”.

On the other hand Le Pen said, “Everyone knows what side Emmanuel Macron is on – he is on the side of the corporations. I am on the workers’ side, here in the car park, not in restaurants in Amiens. He’s showing disdain for workers, so I’ve come to see them.”

That Le Pen, a millionaire by inheritance, can position herself as the friend of the working class is vile. The same Le Pen who accuses Macron of being part of the establishment has hidden behind parliamentary immunity to avoid investigations over misuse of public funds.

Le Pen is clearly trying to position herself as the defender of the working-class against the rich, the establishment, and globalisation.

It is dangerous. Pitting French workers against workers from other countries won’t keep factories open.

Around 250,000 people marched in Paris on May Day against Le Pen and the Front National. The demonstration was not however, a display of support for Macron, with slogans such as “neither Le Pen the racist nor Macron the banker”.

Latest polling has Macron on 59% and Le Pen on 41%. The second round of the election is on Sunday 7 May.
**“Anti-left” grouping gains among students**

By Ruairiald Anderson

A well organised coalition of aggrieved and right-leaning candidates prevailed against the left at this year’s conference of the National Union of Students (25-28 April).

After three years of substantial shifts to the left on policy in the student movement, the mood of left delegates was, at times, one of exasperation and sadness.

The political tone was set during the earliest debates, when liberal arguments for free education prevailed against left wing counter-arguments. Conference was asked to vote for free education on the grounds that it would be “good for the economy” (i.e., big business) and be more appealing to those in power.

In elections to the National Executive Shakira Martin, standing on an apolitical platform (“listening, learning, leading”) ousted Malia Bouattia. As President, Bouattia’s presidency, despite weaknesses, brought about a tangible leftward shift in NUS.

Successive candidates won other full-time positions — VP Welfare (Izzy Lenga), VP Further Education (Emily Chapman), VP Higher Education (Amatey Doku) and VP Society and Citizenship (Robbie Young).

Although left candidate Ali Mi- loni won the final full-time position, VP Union Development, he positioned himself as a centrist. While we should applaud our analysis in an individualistic way around the winning candidates, this is a concerning outcome.

How did this new grouping achieve success?

For the first time in a very long time, the left candidates — Bouattia alongside left-backed candidates for VP Welfare (Shelly Asquith) and VP Higher Education (Sorana Vieru) — were equated with the mainstream of NUS. Opposition to them came from many areas.

For some, it was a clear political opposition to the left-wing leadership — either as opposition to left politics or from a desire for an “apolitical” NUS.

For some, it was an organisational dissatisfaction with the way the left leadership had operated in a cliquish way and had failed to be effective at reaching out to lots of campuses outside of its own bubble.

For some, it was legimate concerns over the left antisemitism existing in parts of our movement. For some, it was overt or subtle Islamophobia directed towards Bouattia and others that led a drive to oust her.

Through speeches which talked about bringing a change to NUS, the anti-left candidates were able to channel dissatisfaction into winning hundreds of votes in each election for one set, or slate, of candidates.

Part of the reason they were successful undoubtedly lies in the fact that a string of disaffiliation campaigns from right-wing, student unions have taken place during this year. These campaigning brought togethervarious disaffiliated groups and unified them behind a single “No to NUS” campaign, which registered dissatisfaction with the left NUS mainstream.

While many right-wing officers campaigned for students’ unions to stay in NUS, they also openly and honestly made their opposition to the left in NUS well known. By the time of conference, the right was pushing for change in NUS, and a model of disaffiliated groups lining up together with the aim of kicking out a left establishment, had already been practised across the country.

The left understandably feels deflated, but the situation is not as dire as it seems. Before Bouattia and for over a decade, a right-wing (led by Blairite Labour students) successfully argued for a graduate tax against free education in NUS. Those forces are now politically weak. The new anti-NUS coalition hasn’t politically won over its supporters to anything like these poli- tics, nor does it look likely to do so.

**FREE EDUCATION**

**Politics in favour of free education, in support of universal living grants, of nationalising the big six energy companies and of a London-wide free movement all passed. A motion saying that all protests should be peaceful and non-disruptive was voted down.**

The new president, Shakira Mar- tin, is an advocate of free education; the new VP Higher Education not only supports free education, but ran a respectable NSP boycott cam- paign on his campus this year and backed Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour leadership elections.

The point is not that we should expect this group to do left-wing things — we should not but that the political territory that they felt they needed to compete in was vastly to the left of previous years.

The left is has many problems — from antisemitism to cliquish and top down way of organising. Our poor results prove we need to change our game.

We should not try to retreat into secret and informal clickers but should drive forward uncompromis- ingly for democratic organising and a mass movement, as the only effective alternative to the new leadership of the student move- ment, and the only effective way of defeating the Tory government.

A left which focuses on building grassroots campaigns and organis- ing through democratically elected leadership, which has genuine political debate, is a left which will grow and become more effective in the long run.

This has to be our project for the upcoming year: to help spark local activism and bring in new activ- isms and people up with work- ers’ struggles.

We need to build a coherent na- tional movement against the Higher Education reforms which have now become law and for free education in spite of the political shift in NUS.

We need to convince people of socialist politics and recruit stud- ents and campus workers to the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

In the first place Workers’ Lib- erty students will be campaign- ing hard for a Labour vote from students (see back page).

**Student union rights under attack over BDS campaigns**

By Ben Tausz

The Charity Commission is inves- tigating a number of student unions for their policies on boy- coting Israel and may take ac- tion against them, amid right-wing calls for such boy- cotts to be banned.

Successive governments, keen to head off organised opposition to their policies, have eroded stu- dent’s rights to take political action through their unions.

Most student unions have been converted to charities, subject to regulation by the Charity Commis- sion (in England) and to laws bann- ing them from carrying out political campaigning that the Commission does not regard as fur- ther their “charitable objectives” — even if their own members vote for this campaigning.

There has recently been much agi- tation against the BDS campaign (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel), including from the Conservative government which has banned local authorities from taking political considerations into account in purchasing decisions.

In March, two University of Manchester students faced discipli- nary action for dropping a banner saying “Stop Arming Israel”.

Workers’ Liberty fights to end the occupation of Palestinian territory and the repression of Palestinians, and for a free, independent Palest- inian alongside Israel. We believe that consumer, cultural and aca- demic boycotts are not the right tac- tics for socialists to use in pursuit of Palestinian liberation.

Even though supporting BDS does not make a person racist, problems of both explicit and im- plicit antisemitism need tackling within the pro-Palestine movement and can be fed by BDS.

Nevertheless, we are opposed to the Charity Commission’s interfer- ence, which is an affront to basic freedom of organisation and deeply hypocritical from right- wingers who claim to be concerned about union democracy, free speech and political freedoms on camp- uses. It must be up to a union’s members to decide, through demo- cratic debate, what issues are in its remit.

Much of the student union move- ment’s establishment and bureau- cacy — especially the Trustee Boards brought in with the shift to charity status, and the unelected non-students and professionalised salaried officers who sit on them — has internalised the anti-politi- cal, service-provider model of stu- dent unions pushed on them from above, and has taken up the role of ensuring aggressive self-censor- ship.

Even before these latest moves by the Charity Commission, last summer saw UCLU’s own (par- tially unected) Trustee Board strike down a vote for BDS by its democratically elected Union Council, citing concerns that this would cause trouble with the Com- mission. In fact, the Commission ruled that even raising awareness of the repression of Palestinians was un- acceptably political.

This is not just a matter for the BDS movement: it is the thin end of the wedge for all political organis- ations. What begins with BDS could spread to suppressing all sorts of political activity, from international solidarity, to climate change ac- tivism, to campaigns over the NHS and local public services — anything that can be construed to fall outside a narrow, blinkered definition of what affects students solely in their capacity as a student.

Whatever your stance on BDS, we must all defend student unions’ democratic rights.

**Free schools poor value for money**

By Charlotte Zalezs

The government’s free schools programme has been condemned as “incoherent and too often poor value for money” by MPs on the Public Accounts Committee.

The committee’s recent report says that the Department for Edu- cation is spending “over the odds” on unsuitable sites and building free schools in areas where extra places are not always needed. On the other hand, 60% of state schools are more than 40 years old and in need of essential repairs amounting to an estimated £7 billion.

The Department of Education spent £663 million on 175 free school sites between 2011 and 2014, most of which sites cost more than £10 million and four cost more than £30 million. It is plans to spend a further £2.5 billion on large new schools from 2016-22.

Despite all the money spent, many of free schools have in- adequate premises and are not on-site playgrounds or sports facilities.
Scottish Labour and the two nationalist squeezes

**Scottish Labour and the two nationalist squeezes**

By Dale Street

Scottish Labour candidates need to fight the forthcoming general election on the basis of policies which challenge the inegalitarian wealth and power inherent in capitalism, and which will mobilise the labour movement not just to vote Labour but to form the government whatever the outcome of the election.

All Labour candidates throughout the UK should be campaigning on that basis. But the importance of such an election campaign is all the greater where specifically labour-movement and class-based politics have been squeezed out by competing nationalisms. And that is the case in Scotland, where opinion polls show the SNP on 41% (50% in 2015), the Tories on 28% (13% in 2015), and Labour on 18% (24% in 2015, and 42% in 2010).

Based on a now largely discredited and disowned White Paper, the SNP’s pro-independence campaign in 2014 polarised the Scottish electorate around national identities and attitudes to independence.

The momentum from that initial polarisation carried over into the 2015 general election. The SNP ran a straightforward nationalist campaign, promising to “make Scotland stronger” in Westminster etc.

Despite having lost the 2014 referendum, the SNP consolidated the bulk of “Yes” voters into its electoral base. Aided by the first-past-the-post system, it won 56 of Scotland’s 59 Westminster constituencies.

The same momentum and the same polarisation also helped the SNP win the Holyrood election of 2016, even if it lost its previous absolute majority there.

At the same time, British nationalism began to consolidate its own political base, in the form of a boost in electoral support for the Tories. Pitching themselves as the foremost champions of the Union, the Tories increased their representation at Holyrood in 2016 from 31 to 37.

As the nationalist polarisation of politics in Scotland intensified and day-to-day politics got degenerated into a permanent referendum campaign, Labour was squeezed remorselessly between the two competing nationalisms.

Labour, standing on an election manifesto with a clear focus on social and economic issues, and one which advocated policies well to the left of the SNP, the 2016 Holyrood election campaign saw Labour MSPs collapse to 24, leaving the Tories as the official opposition.

Surgeon’s announcement in March that she wanted to secure a Westminster section 30 Order, to allow a second referendum to be held on Scottish independence, added a further boost to political polarisation around national identities.

Scottish nationalists, only too happy to ignore the SNP’s actual record during its ten years in power at Holyrood and whose sole political purpose in life is to secure Scottish independence, were given a fresh lease of life.

Inevitably, the SNP’s demand for another referendum, based in breach of their manifesto commitments by Green MSPs, triggered a fresh surge of support for the Tories. Winning between eight and ten seats in the forthcoming general election is now a real possibility for the Tories.

It suits both the SNP and the Tories to transform the general election in Scotland into a referendum on a second referendum.

Whereas Scottish Labour backs federalism and Corbyn would not oppose a second referendum saw not Labour move to the left and whose sole reliable opponents of independence and another referendum.

This conveniently diverts attention away from the Tories’ actual record in power in Westminster since 2010, and also away from the policies which the Tories are fighting this general election.

However, Labour was initially wobbly on how to present the general election, before falling in line behind Alex Salmond and treating the election as a referendum on a second referendum.

This likewise conveniently diverts attention away from the SNP’s record as a party of government which has not delivered for the common good or given the country a break.

Literacy and numeracy standards have declined, child poverty has increased, FE teacher and student places have been declined and the NHS has notoproperly increased, the NHScare has suffered from shortages of doctors, nurses and GPs, the gap between rich and poor has increased, and Scotland’s economy now teeters on the brink of recession.

**TRANSFORM**

Scottish Labour candidates need to transform the terrain on which the general election is fought. But some candidates — all of whom were selected by a sub-committee of the SNP’s National Executive Committee — seem to want to out-Tory the Tories.

According to the first election campaign leaflet from Blair McDougall, former Director of “Better Together” and now Labour candidate for East Renfrewshire, for example: “I ran the winning campaign against independe-

The pro-independence left, on the other hand, the rise of the left-wing socialists and trade unionists in 2015, debating themselves into believing that it created a mass opening for socialist politics, only to be brutally disabused of such illusions when they stood candidates in 2016.

And now, because one nationalism begets another, they would find that the space for advocating socialist politics has narrowed even further — if it were not for the fact that they have now adopted support for a second referendum as a surro-

gate for fighting for socialist politics.

**LETTER**

Emmanuel Macron is facing a huge problem. The more voters see the less we like.

Macron’s performance since winning his place to second round of the French Presidential election has been catastrophic.

Soon after winning 24% of the popular votes, Macron went to the very posh La Rotonde, a well-known restaurant in Paris, with his close friends and allies. Among them, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, soixante-huitard turned pétainist, the Paris mayor, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, representatives of the Scottish independence campaign working out how they could have got things so wrong.

They campaigned for a “Yes” vote in 2014, pretending that they were putting forward a socialist, left-wing nationalism as opposed to functioning as no more than an echo chamber for the SNP.

They welcomed the defeat of labour movement politics by nationalism in 2014, deluding themselves into believing that it created a mass opening for socialist politics, only to be brutally disabused of such illusions when they stood candidates in 2016.

And now, because one nationalism begets another, they would find that the space for advocating socialist politics has narrowed even further — if it were not for the fact that they have now adopted support for a second referendum as a surro-

gate for fighting for socialist politics.

For them, Macron is still a representative of the failed and hopelessly unpopular Francois Hollande’s government. Macron is too liberal for them. They wanted a candidate that will undo gay marriage and put Catholic tradition back in the public agenda.

Macron behaves like he has already won the election, and ignores the polls that show him losing support for Le Pen. His “move-

ment” thinks that he is in the same spot than Jacques Chirac was in 2002. The fear of the far-right will be enough for Macron to win comfortably.

But the comparisons with 2002, when the FN leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, knocked out the Socialist Party candidate, Lionel Jospin, in the first round of the presidential election, are misleading.

The 2002 result was a shock to France and the FN themselves. They had no credible pro-

gramme and no real ambition to win the elec-

tion. Thus, France voted massively for the conservative Chirac.

Today, however, Le Pen wants to win and is more “experienced” than Macron in fighting election.

Latest polls suggest that Macron should win with a two-thirds majority of the votes. But the support for the FN will grow under Macron’s presidency as he will not abolish the social issue that feeds fascism in France.

Macron seems to be at best a temporary, very temporary alas, rampart against the Front National.

The crisis happens on Sunday 7 May, the crisis in France is so bad, so deep and the need for change so great that the country is at boiling point.

The only clear term as President will only help the crisis to grow.

Stéphane (French socialist now active in the Labour Party).
Make the rich pay!

Wages are the clearest measure of how well or badly workers are doing in capitalist society. Between 1979 and 2008 the share of national output (GDP) going on wages fell from 65% to around 54%. This represents a huge shift in wealth in favour of the profit system and the capitalist class who benefit from it.

Following an economic crisis in the 1970s, the capitalists set out to roll back the gains made by workers in the previous decades. Over thirty years global capitalism has reduced relative wages and fundamentally undermined the strong trade union organisation and workplace militancy which once set firmer limits on exploitation.

Labour’s policies — a £10 living wage, stronger employment rights from day one in a job, ending zero hours contracts and ending the 1% pay cap for NHS workers, restoring collective bargaining in the public sector, reintroducing bursaries for training NHS workers — will all boost working-class living standards. Labour’s £10 living wage (up from its current £9) will boost the incomes of more than 20% of the workforce. These steps will push back against almost 40 years of redistribution in favour of the rich!

For over six years, five million workers in our hospitals, schools, fire stations and a host of other essential services have been subject to a government-imposed pay freeze. Year after year pay rises for these workers have been capped at 1% regardless of the rising cost of living, the growth of productivity or the problems of recruitment and retention in their services. The effect has been that these workers who see their living standards fall on average by 7%. We are just over half way through a planned ten year pay freeze, with four more years to go.

Re-electing the Tories means a continuation of institutionalised low pay and ever lowering living standards for millions of workers and their families. In public services it also means an acceleration in staffing shortages as demoralised and underpaid workers continue to drift out of jobs that don’t pay their bills.

Those who hanker after a return to business as usual in the Labour Party should recall Labour’s stance in 2012. Labour’s then Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls accepted the Tory-Lib arguments on the public sector pay freeze and promised that it would continue even if Labour were re-elected in 2015. He said, “I understand the anger in the public and private sectors at that income squeeze, but the reality is, given the economy failing as it is, that pay restraint is going to have to continue.” Balls also said, “the priority has got to be getting people into jobs rather than people being paid more.” The truth is Labour’s support for the Tory-Lib coalition policy did nothing to get more people into jobs, let alone decent, well-paid jobs.

A decade of low pay and real pay cuts on impacts on everything: how often we eat, where we can afford to live, how much time we spend with family and friends, whether one job is enough to survive on, whether a holiday can be afforded, and so much more.

POVERTY

In modern capitalist Britain the great majority of people on benefits are also in work. They are struggling with rent arrears and other debts, parents go without food so their children can eat, teachers bring food into schools to feed hungry children, nurses use food banks, young women school students are combining to weaken the left in the Labour Party.

Discussing the possibility of the Greens being able to affiliate to Labour is worthwhile. Then the Green Party, like the Co-Op Party, would have some autonomy but unite with Labour for elections. As it stands, it is better that the Greens stand down in every seat where they threaten the Labour vote.

Labour should stand in every seat!

The pay freeze should be ended across all services, and pay rises should be argued for explicitly as a matter of Labour’s commitment to high quality effective public services for all.

The increase in Living Wage should be a start of further hikes and, future rises should be tied to the cost of living.

The Tories and their many friends and allies in the press will attack these policies as a hand-out to the unions who fund the party. That argument will have some sway unless we turn it into a debate about the sort of society we want and who it benefits.

It helps that Labour have said they will fund their NHS measures by reversing the reductions in corporation taxes introduced by the Tories. But Labour needs a comprehensive policy for redistributing income — including scrapping VAT on basic goods and raising taxes on those with the highest incomes.

Help us raise £20,000 to improve our website

We need to build a left that is open to debate and is serious about self-education.

Our website, including its extensive archive could help build a different kind of socialist culture — one where discussion and self-education are cherished.

From Trotskyist newspapers of the 1940s and 50s, to older Marxist classics, to discussion articles on feminism, national questions, religion and philosophy and resources such as guidelines for Marxist reading groups — it’s all there on the Workers’ Liberty website.

But to make our archive of real use we need professional help to make all content fully integrated, searchable by date and subject and optimised for mobile reading. We need to finance a website co-ordinator to ensure our news coverage is up to the minute and shared on social media. We want to raise £20,000 by our conference in November 2017. Any amount will help.

In the last week Solidarity sellers have increased standing orders and made donations, bringing £200.

• If you would like to donate by paypal go to www.workersliberty.org/donate
• Or set up an internet bank transfer to “AWL”, account 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, Birmingham, 60-83-01 (please email awl@workersliberty.org to notify us of the payment and what it’s for); or
• Send a cheque payable to “AWL” to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3BG (with a note saying what it’s for).

No progress in the Progressive Alliance

“Labour is fighting to win this election and will field candidates in every seat...”

This is Labour’s response to a letter from Labour MPs, members and supporters calling on the Party to stand aside in Brighton Pavilion, the seat held by the Green MP, Caroline Lucas and, bizarrely, in the Isle of Wight, where in 2015 the Greens were second to the Tories, and 500 votes ahead of Labour.

The letter says, “...with the progressive vote split, the danger of a Tory landslide and all it means for our country now looms darkly on 8 June.”

That’s a real threat, right? But advocates of the so-called “progressive alliance” want the labour movement to shackle itself. Some even say that by voting Green in safe Labour seats Corbyn will be pushed into sticking to his more radical policies. The best way to make sure Corbyn does that is to vote Labour and prepare to fight for Labour not to back down! Building a labour movement capable of asserting itself must be our priority, not propping up those who will only weaken the labour movement once elected.

The Greens record in Parliament has never really been tested, as they have just one MP. But, in charge of Brighton Council, they unleashed appalling cuts to the terms and conditions of Brighton’s bin workers. They have helped prop up a Tory/Lib Dem coalition in Leeds which undertook similar policies.

Those who have given up on the idea of a strong labour movement — or, with the likes of Polly Toynbee, who never wanted such a thing — are combining to weaken the left in the Labour Party.

The possibilities created by the election of Jeremy Corbyn that Labour goes into this election promising to change all this.

In the coming weeks of the election it is important these commitments are reinforced and expanded. For instance, a much bigger and more important way to ensure that we can protect our living standards would be to repeal the anti-union laws that have allowed the bosses to assert their power and enrich themselves so lavishly at our expense.

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It helps that Labour have said they will fund their NHS measures by reversing the reductions in corporation taxes introduced by the Tories. But Labour needs a comprehensive policy for redistributing income — including scrapping VAT on basic goods and raising taxes on those with the highest incomes.
Tories seek mandate to increase taxes

By Martin Thomas

“Mrs May”, writes the Tory-leaning columnist of the Financial Times, Janan Ganesh, “could not survive an election campaign saying so little often if people paid attention”. Since so many don’t, “the repetition of slogans in lieu of answers carries no cost”.

Fraser Nelson, another Tory, comments in the Spectator: “She seems to think that, if you refuse to give the press anything, the public won’t care. Worse, she seems to be right – for now, at least”.

May’s purpose, so Nelson writes, is not to “seek a mandate”, but to evade one. “That’s what this election is really about: a bonfire of these Cameron promises [from 2015]. From 9 June onwards: Theresa time!”

So far May’s election pitch has been more about what she is not promising than about what she is promising. She will not rule out tax rises (i.e., she wants to free herself from the Tories’ 2015 pledge not to increase taxes). She will not, unlike the Tories in 2015, commit to the “triple lock” which pushes pensions upwards.

On Brexit, having written a nasty bottom line — create a tight filter on immigrants to Britain from the EU — May has already secured parliamentary votes for her to negotiate the Brexit deal without accountability or control, or even to crash out of the EU without a deal if she wants to (“no deal is better than a bad deal”).

The Daily Mail front page headline on 19 April summed up how she sees the election serving her Brexit drive: “Crush the saboteurs”. That is, strengthen her position for long enough to take them well past Brexit-point. They want a snap vote now:

• when the Brexit negotiations have not yet gone sticky, as they surely will at points even if overall they go well for the Tories
• when the after-effect of two years of (mild) increase in average real wages — after many years of slump, following 2008 — still holds, and before the new decline in real wages, already under way, hits harder
• when Labour’s new left-wing leaders have not yet managed to reshape the party so it can efficiently convince voters that better things are possible
• just after the local government elections on 4 May, which are likely to give the Tories a boost
• before the scandal about Tory election expenses in 2015 spreads.

BREXIT

After the Brexit referendum of 23 June 2016 we pointed out that the one certain result of the referendum result was not the supposed £350 million a week extra for the NHS, or anything like that, but a more right-wing Tory government with the wind in its sails.

In March, before the election was called, the Resolution Foundation think-tank reported: “If nothing is done to change [the] outlook... [2015-20] will go down as being the worst [period] on record for income growth in the bottom half of the income distribution. It will also represent the biggest rise in inequality since the end of the 1980s”.

The Tories’ election campaign is designed to strengthen them against any and all pressure to “change the outlook”.

The toxic mix comes from low wage growth — which the government’s own Office for Budgetary Responsibility predicts — and a great wave of pre-programmed cuts in working-age welfare benefits.

The percentage of children living in poverty, which soared from 18% to 33% in the Thatcher 1980s, then decreased from 34% to 27% in the Blair-Brown years, has been rising steadily since 2010 and is set to rise further. There are now three and a half million children in poverty. In some local authorities, that’s around 40%. The worst-hit five are Tower Hamlets, at 43.5%; Manchester, 40.0%; Westminster, 37.7%; Islington, 37.7%; and Newham, 37.5%.

The latest figures from the Trussell Trust, the biggest network of foodbanks, show that in the year to 31 March 2017 they distributed 1,182,954 three-day emergency food packages. Of this number, 436,938 went to children.

Use of foodbanks was only 40,898 packages in 2009-10, went up to 913,138 in 2013-14, and continues to rise since then. Meanwhile profits are high. Since 2014 the net rate of return for private non-financial corporations has been back to its pre-2007-8 rate of about 12.5%, a historic high. The Sunday Times gave its 2017 Rich List report the headline: “Boom time for billionaires”, reporting that “London has more billionaires than any other city in the world”.

On Wednesday 4 January, the High Pay Centre reported that after just two and a half days of the year Britain’s top bosses had pocketed more money than the average UK worker would in the whole of 2017.

The National Health Service is faltering under the pressure of cuts after cuts, and the siphoning-off of resources into private contractors and increased managerial overheads. Hospitals are jammed full, waiting lists get longer and longer, and death rates are rising. Since 2010, £4.6 billion has been cut from social care budgets. Despite an ageing population, 400,000 fewer people are getting care funded by local authorities. 15% less money is being spent on nursing homes.

The Tories will continue on that path.

SCHOOLS

School funding cuts already programmed will by 2020 take £403, on average, per primary student, and £554 per secondary student.

Of the little money available, much will be diverted into starting new “free schools” — with no regulation of teacher qualifications or conditions — and new grammar schools.

As of March 2017, 69% of secondary schools were Academies or “free schools”, and 23% of primaries. Since secondaries are mostly bigger than primaries, there are now more students in Academies or “free schools” than in local authority “community schools”. Even “community schools” now get their budgets direct from the government, bypassing the local authority.

The Tories dropped a scheme to force all schools, by law, to become Academies, but continue a drive to squeeze out local democratic control of schools and replace it by control by central government and by pseudo-markets based on exam league-tables and competitive enrolment.

Already by 2015, the “adult skills budget”, for “non-academic” education and training for those 19 or over, had been cut by 40% since 2010. Further education colleges continue to be cut drastically.

In universities, from 2017-18 onwards, the £9,250 fee cap will rise with inflation; maybe the Tories will decide to raise it even further.
The burden of repayments on student loans will rise steadily with inflation, since the Tories have frozen the nominal pay levels at which repayments start and at which higher interest rates kick in. Student maintenance grants have already been abolished, from 2016-7.

The Higher Education and Research Act, which became law on 2017, opens the way to make university education even more “marketised”.

By 2015-6, the number of public libraries had gone down by 632, or 14%, since 2009-10, to 3850. Campaigners reckon another 500 are under threat. Many operate with reduced hours or only volunteer staff. The Tories will cut libraries even further.

The Tories’ Trade Union Act, which restricts workers’ rights to collective action even more than the drastic laws of the Thatcher regime, had most of its clauses come into effect on 1 March 2017. These include:

- 50% turnout requirement for ballots on industrial action
- 40% (of electorate) support requirement for industrial action ballots in public services
- two weeks’ notice to be given to employers of industrial action
- obligation on unions to supervise picketing
- opting in (not out) by union members on political funds.

These clauses promise to cripple national-scale industrial action by public sector unions, the sort of action which challenged the government’s pension cuts in 2011, and thus to protect the Tories’ policy of imposing a 1% limit on public sector money-wage rises at least until 2020 — with increasing inflation, year-by-year real-wage cuts. They also aim to strangle the Labour Party’s funding.

All those clauses will be enforced by the Tory government if it wins renewed office on 8 June.

The Tories will ease the way for the lurch to low-paid, insecure work to continue. It has been a marked trend since 2008. Contrary to many claims, it is neither a universal rule, nor an inescapable result of the world market. It is a product of Tory policies and the weakening of trade unions.

Between 2011 and 2016, almost 40 per cent of the growth in employment (excluding the self-employed) was in insecure jobs, zero hours contracts or insecure temporary work. Low-paid “self-employment”, which is often in reality just wage-work with reduced employer obligations, has also risen fast. Almost half the self-employed today are low-paid.

If recent trends continue until 2022 — and the Tories’ aim in this election is exactly to make sure that they can continue those trends — by then three and a half million people will be in zero-hours contracts, temporary or agency work, or low-paid self-employment.

No-one knows what the Brexit negotiations will bring. The substantial voices in the ruling class who pushed for a “soft Brexit” — with Britain staying in the Single Market, or at least with “passporting” rights for British-based banks — have fallen back, reconciling themselves to worse because of the Tories’ immovable obsession with cutting immigration.

One certainty is this: Brexited Tories, seeking as ever to “sell” Britain as a site for global capital, will want to offer global bosses compensation for the disadvantage of the new barriers between Britain and the EU. Increased division between countries means increased competitive pressure on governments to court global capital. The compensation can only come in the form of reduced social overheads, that is, reduced standards for the working class.

TRADE

The weight of ruling-class interest both sides of the channel pushes for the Tories and the EU to make a deal that keeps trade restrictions manageable and light and preserves areas of common regulatory standards.

The Brexit Tories talked about compensating for EU barriers by seeking trade deals elsewhere, but there are no signs of that. Despite Theresa May’s talk of a crash “no-deal” Brexit being an option, and despite some Tories positively favouring a path that makes up for trade barriers by offering Britain as a low-regulation offshore site with workers’ rights and wages slashed, a deal may well be made to limit the barriers. But not without glitches and crises. And the pressure for reduced social provision will only be limited, not reversed.

The Tories made Nissan bosses a secret offer to persuade them to keep car production in Britain. No similar offers or guarantees over Brexit for working-class people!

The best guess must be that the Nissan offer was for an arrangement to have production in certain sectors certified as complying with EU regulations and thus able to arrange supply chains across the channel without crippling tariffs and paperwork.

The Tories’ drive against freedom of movement is a cultural and economic blow against the working class. Immigration helps not only the migrants, but also those already here, in terms of enriching culture and of a flow of keen young workers who pay much more into social budgets than they take out.

Without immigration my Further Mathematics classes at school would not exist. I do some Saturday sessions for the keenest Year 13 students across south east London. The best students are of Ukrainian, Romanian, Albanian origin.

The “strong and stable government” which the Tories promise is “strong and stable” pressure towards a narrower, meaner, nastier, bleaker, more marketised society. Our interest is in weakening and destabilising the Tories.

Cuts in immigration will increase pressure for social cuts, both by reducing governments’ tax revenue much more than they reduce demand on benefits and services, and by excluding workers on whom the public services would otherwise rely.

The Tories evidently think Britain can do without libraries, social care, and adult education. And without maths too?

The “strong and stable government” which the Tories promise is “strong and stable” pressure towards a narrower, meaner, nastier, bleaker, more marketised society. Our interest is in weakening and destabilising the Tories.
Politics, hope and organising for change

The surge in membership of the Labour Party after Corbyn’s election showed that many, particularly young people are attracted to socialist politics going far beyond that of any Labour leader of the post-1929 Labour Party. Only the most sectarian on the left, at least in England and Wales, reject voting Labour now. This represents a big political shift.

In 1997 Tony Blair led the Labour Party, in the words of the Labour right, to “a historic landslide victory”, a victory that Blair is still trying to cash in on. The huge vote to get rid of the Tories was an immense relief but it came at a large price. Blair would establish a consensus in Labour politics, where accepting Tory dogma and having faith in the market and capitalist competition were sacrosanct.

The death of the Tory government has thoroughly beaten. Blair betrayed the hopes of millions. His tune.

How to think beyond and survive the exam season

A report on 2 May from the Health and Education Committee of MPs found that government cuts are pushing many schools to scrap or limit mental health provision in schools. Dominic Thomas explains why that help is important.

There has been more recognition of the importance of mental health in the media lately.

From the Facebook Live video of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, to the hugely successful 2017 London Marathon, the aim — to encourage more people to have conversations about mental health, as well as changing the way that these conversations can be had — is good.

Mental health is a spectrum, just like physical health. Some people may be at one end of the spectrum which is characterised by wellbeing and coping. At the other end of the spectrum people have trouble functioning in everyday life and have reduced coping and emotional resources. This may be when symptoms of depression and anxiety begin to reveal themselves.

The UK Mental Health Foundation defines depression as “a common mental disorder that causes people to experience depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy, and poor concentration”.

Anxiety is the second most common mental health condition. Anxiety is described as “a type of fear usually associated with the prospect of a threat or something going wrong in the future, but can also arise from something happening right now”.

Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to symptoms of depression and anxiety. It is estimated that at least 50% of mental health issues experienced by mid-teens and 75% by mid-twenties.

Young Minds (the leading charity for youth mental health) is calling for government action, and pointing to how the education system exacerbates problems for young people. They say: “The education system is fundamentally unbalanced, with an over-emphasis on exams and too little focus on student wellbeing. It is time to ensure that the wellbeing of students is as important as academic achievement in schools.”

Neglecting student wellbeing and over-emphasis on exam achievement can lead to a range of issues such as: poor concentration, memory issues, poor self-confidence, increased juvenile delinquency, reduced academic performance, poorer health, increased social difficulties or isolation, and reduced employment and further education opportunities.

So, what can be done? The good news is that schools can help promote student wellbeing, mental wellness, and resilience.

Step 1: Have a conversation about it and show that it’s okay to talk about mental health. That can be done in a school assembly or in class.

In addition, increasing the visibility of student support (e.g. school counsellors, chaplains, etc.) can help promote student engagement.

Schools can also help students through implementing mindfulness in the classroom. An evaluation of the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) concluded that mindfulness interventions led to improvements in young people’s mental, social, emotional, and physical health and wellbeing.

The intervention reduced stress, anxiety, reactivity, and disruptive behaviour. It also led to increases in sleep, self-esteem, calm, and relaxation.

Some mindfulness techniques to incorporate at the beginning and/or end of classes, at home, as well as before exams can include:

- Deep breathing exercises
  - Close eyes or focus softly on a neutral place
  - Inhale for 5 counts
  - Hold for 5 counts
  - Exhale for 5 counts
  - Bring back the mind to the breath if it wanders

- Body scan
  - Close eyes or focus softly on a neutral place
  - Breathe deeply
  - Start to identify how different parts of the body feel
  - Work your way from your toes to your head
  - Bring your attention gently back if it wanders

- Progressive muscle relaxation
  - Start to curl or clench the toes, holding for a breath or two, and then releasing. Do this with the remaining muscle groups of your body, working your way up progressively

There are a range of wonderful mindfulness resources out there for adults and young people, such as Calm, Headspace, Smiling Mind. Just remember, it doesn’t take much to take a moment to really ask someone, one-on-one, how they have been going.

We can start to change the way that mental health is approached, especially with youth in schools, who can often be suffering the most.

Notes
2. Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) concluded that mindfulness interventions led to improvements in young people’s mental, social, emotional, and physical health and wellbeing.
The Front National and fascism

By Martin Thomas

France’s Front National, which now has a real though outside chance of gaining the country’s powerful presidency, is not a fascist movement comparable to the Nazis or Mussolini’s Fascist Party when they were on the eve of power in the 1920s and 30s.

Neither, however, is it a conventional hard-right party like UKIP or Germany’s AfD. The makeover the FN has given itself since 2011 is a makeover.

When Jean-Marie Le Pen founded the FN in 1972, it took the Italian party claiming to represent Mussolini’s heritage, the MSI, as a model. In the 1990s, the MSI denounced its fascist heritage, and eventually merged into a mainstream right party. The FN has not done that.

The FN still has a fascist core cadre and a fascist ideology. It functions as the electoral-political wing of a broader fascist current. It softens and dresses up its message to win votes, but it fits the characterisation of fascism outlined by Leon Trotsky in the 1930s: “a plebeian movement in origin, directed and financed by big capitalist powers. It issued forth from the petty bourgeoisie, the slum proletariat and even to a certain extent, from the proletarian masses… with its leaders employing a great deal of socialist demagogy. This is necessary for the creation of the mass movement.”

It fits, except that it is still way short of being a fascist movement. The FN is sandwiched between the Radical Left, both under Marine Le Pen, and under her father Jean-Marie, the FN has promoted its leader above all else, and given that leader absolute powers within the party:

• A cult of the state. In her closing speech at the FN congress where she was made leader, in 2011, Marine Le Pen declared: “Today, when globalisation rages and everything is collapsing, we still have the State… When things have to be regulated, protected, innovated, our naturally turns to the State”.

Since its foundation the FN has operated in conditions of bourgeois democracy and capitalist economy more stable than in the 1930s, when Trotsky and other Marxists plausibly believed that political and economic collapse were certain, in one country after another, unless a socialist revolution could be made within a few years or so.

Its active base remains small compared to that of the 1920s and 30s fascist movements. It has 30,000-odd paid-up members and two function almost exclusively as electoral campaigners.

Its “stewarding squad”, the DPS, had a fearsome reputation in the early years, but even then was cautious and weak compared to the street-fighting squads of 1920s and 30s fascism. Today the FN instead contracts out its stewarding to a commercial security firm, Colisée.

The Nazis at the start of 1933 had 1.5 million members in their party, and 425,000 (some not party members) in their paramilitary SA. Mussolini’s Fascist Party was formed from his “fighting squads” at the end of 1921, and then had 300,000 members.

The twist, however, is that Colisée is not just any security firm. It was founded by Axel Loustau, a former cadre of the brazenly fascist student group GUD (Groupe Union Défense). Loustau also runs a printing company, Presse de France, which has produced the FN’s publicity materials since another company, Riwal, run by Fréderic Chatillon, a former commander of Loustau’s in the GUD, was banned from doing so in a court case over political-finace laws.

Although Loustau and Chatillon have no high posts in the FN, they and other GUD-ers are among the closest advisers of Marine Le Pen. They also keep links with the GUD.

DIVISION OF LABOUR

The division of labour which FN leaders see between their cafe latte and a varying range of France’s espresso fascist groups is candidly summed up by Jean-Marie Le Pen — become, at the age of 87, garrulous and reckless — in November 2015.

The Parti Nationaliste Français was being revived to regroup the members of L’Oeuvre Française, a brazenly fascist group active since 1913 but now renamed the govern- ment. Jean-Marie Le Pen wrote to the PNf conference:

“Jeanne Nation and Oeuvre Française, be- longing their founder Pierre Sidois, have led an independent national struggle for several decades in parallel to the Front National of which I was president. We have the same goal: to save our homeland and its French people from a decade which we know to be deadly.”

“The tsunami of immigration calls for a general mobilisation of patriots and the coordina- tion of all national movements. Each one of these movements should be stronger and stronger in its own sector”.

How much Marine Le Pen can do if she wins the presidency, we still don’t know. A part of the mainstream right, led by Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, has called for her to step down. Will others? If she wins, how will the FN do in the June legis- lative elections? In 2011, Marine Le Pen, even with his 300,000 members and the Italian ruling class anxious for revenge after the factory occupa- tions in 1920, took four years to impose a full fascist regime. If details of history turned differently, it might have been overthrown in that time.

Le Pen cannot move as fast as Mus- solini. But it is en- tirely imaginable that she can do harm in France on the lines of what Putin, Erdogan, or Orban have been doing recently in Rus- sia, Turkey, Hungary.

The FN’s official line on the trade unions is that its desired changes in the law will make them bigger and better but needing fewer strikes. But Nazi leaders before 1933 such as Gregor Strasser declared: “We consider the organisation of workers into trade unions an absolute necessity… As a workers’ party, National Socialism recognises the right to strike without restriction”.

The FN’s opinion of France’s biggest union confederation, the CGT, is: “The CGT shows its true face: still the transmission belt for a far left which is moribund but still pseudo-revolutionary and often ultra-violent”.

Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the FN, first came into politics as a teenager in late 1940s with Action Française. AF had been founded in 1899, as part of the agitation around the Dreyfus affair: monarchist, Catholic-traditionalist, obsessed with hostility to Freemasons, for whom it blamed such events as the French Revolution of 1789-94. In 1956 he became an MP for the quasi-fascist Poujadeist movement. He served in the French army in its colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria.

He did not join the Organisation Armée Secréte, a group of French army officers and Al- gerian settlers who sought by terrorism to stop France coding independence to Algeria in 1962, and killed thousands in Algeria and some dozens in France; but in 1965 he was the campaign manager for the presidential campaign of Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour, a veteran fascist who denounced the “abdom- nament” of Algeria.

After May 1968, new fascist groups sprouted, like the GUD and L’Oeuvre Française, focused on fighting the left and “communism” rather than the older enemies. They were mainly student-based. What we are seeing today is illustrated by a May 1969 episode re- counted in a left-wing pamphlet of the 1970s. Some 40 fascists set out from their base in a small town in northern France being threatened by twin “totalitarian” dangers, “globalism” and the EU on one side, “Islamisation” on the other, sharpens the fascist edge of FN ideology. ©Workers Liberty
Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists’ control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth 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 must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty wants 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 trade unions and the Labour Party to break with “social partnership” with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

• Independent working-class representation in politics.
• A workers’ charter of trade union rights — to organise, to Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest Global solidarity against global capital — workers imperials and predators big and small.

If you agree with us, please take some workplace or community to global social copies of 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 domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. 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.

• 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!

McDonald’s scraps zero-hour contracts: next stop, £10 an hour and a union!

Fast food giant McDonald’s recently announced it will scrap zero-hours contracts for its workers in the UK. Solidarity spoke to Gareth Lane, an organiser for the Bakers, Food, and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU), about this move, and his union’s ongoing efforts to organise fast food workers.

The BFAWU has been organising fast food workers for nearly two years now.

Organising fast food workers is not easy to say the least. Economic hardships like extreme poverty and chaos caused by low income and insecure hours makes organising routine and communications among workers quite difficult.

Every day is a real slog for our members building a union within these fast food workplaces, often faced with aggressive and bullying managers, difficult financial circumstances, poverty living conditions, and long hours.

Despite this, BFAWU members in McDonald’s, KFC, and Burger King have been forced to lift my spirits to improve my concentration, and determination to win a union in some of the most difficult circumstances to organise in the UK.

Our members have been taking McDonald’s on for some time and winning victories in workplaces; they have been winning some of the less glamorous victories, the ones that the media will never report on, but the victories that are vital to winning a union.

Just over the last couple of weeks, our members have won specialist equipment for disabled workers; they have successfully raised the issue of bullying and harassment and removed bullying managers; they have supported each other when management has refused to support workers when they have been harassed by customers.

So it was great news to hear our members have beaten McDonald’s over the issue of zero-hour contracts. For over two years McDonald’s workers have demonstrated, taken direct action, occupied stores, and spoken to thousands of workers around the country. Now 115,000 McDonald’s employees will have the choice of whether to accept guaranteed hours or not.

VICTORY

This is a seminal victory for our union and our members.

This victory means that no longer can McDonald’s managers use the threat of cutting our workplace activists’ hours as a disincentive to being active trade unionists. No longer can the threat of poverty be used to frighten our members into silence.

As an organiser who spends the bulk of my time talking to fast food workers, the significance of this victory is huge. We are now able to point to something big and solid that our union has won. We are able to say to workers, “if we can beat the biggest employer in the world, we can beat your employer too. You can win If you take action.”

Our message is clear: if you work in McDonald’s, KFC, or Burger King, join the BFAWU. Get in touch with us, take part in our organiser training and change your workplace for the better.

There is no use in us dreaming of the kind of economy we had in the 1970s, where everyone worked in well-paid union jobs. We have these jobs now, we should do like our grandparents and great grandparents did, and fight to make these bad jobs good jobs now.

If not us then who? If not now then when?

Victory to the Bectu members fighting the same battles in cinemas, victory to the BFAWU!

Next stop, £10 an hour and union recognition!

Events

Saturday 6 May
Croydon All Out to Stop the Fascists!
10am, Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road, Croydon CR9 2BY
bit.ly/2oHfRxy

Saturday 13 May
Surround Yarlswood
1pm, Yarlswood immigration detention centre, Bedford MK44 1FD
bit.ly/2pByLOT

Tuesday 16 May
Haringey Radical Readers: Light Shining in Buckinghamshire
7pm, The Big Green Bookshop Brampton Park Road, London N22 6BG
bit.ly/2p4Rmnf

Saturday 20 May
Momentum NHS national conference
11am, Unite the Union — London & Eastern, Moreland Street, London EC1V 8BB
bit.ly/2p1AY8A

Saturday 27 May
Stop school cuts Newcastle rally
12.30pm, Grey’s Monument, Newcastle, NE1 6YJ
bit.ly/2pBK21t

Have an event you want listing? Email: solidarity@workersliberty.org
Drivers crucial to DOO fight

By a railworker

RMT members on Northern rail struck again on 28 April. The strike was every bit as solid as the previous two days’ action, reducing the company’s service to 40% of its usual level, with scab labour being provided by managers.

The union is yet to announce its next move. It will need to think carefully about what to do next, taking into account the various different situations at different Train Operating Companies around the country. At Southern, talks have been held between RMT and the employer but no resolution is yet forthcoming. This is against a backdrop of RMT members starting to come back to work and the company being able to run around 95% of its usual service.

The drivers’ union, Aslef, is still supposed in talks with the company but no details are coming out. It is clear that rather than playing the decisive role it should be playing, Aslef is intent on settling the dispute and taking its members out on strike. It is clear that rather than playing the role it wants to, Aslef does not see things its way, and is giving up on settling the dispute. The decisive role drivers can play in making industrial action in the rail industry effective as possible is increasingly clear, and so is the cowardice of the leadership of their union, Aslef. If Northern and Southern drivers can follow the lead of their fellow Aslef members at Merseyrail and respect RMT picket lines in large numbers, this dispute can still be won in impressive fashion.

The necessary culture of solidarity required for that to happen does not yet exist other than at Merseyrail, but it can and should be built.

Aslef is clearly not in a state to be relied upon to protect the future of the industry so workers must do it without them.

RMT protests at sweatshop-hotel

By Ollie Moore

Members of the RMT union protested at Liverpool’s Adelphi Hotel, owned by the Britannia Group, in support of low-paid hotel workers, on Friday 28 April.

The protest, which saw a brief occupation of the hotel’s lobby, aimed to draw attention to working conditions RMT reps have called “sweatshop-like”. RMT organises workers at the Adelphi, as the hotel was formerly owned by British Rail. The Britannia Group saw its profits more than double to £33.3 million in 2016, up from £14.2 million the previous year. The Adelphi itself increased its profits by 40%. Britannia Group shareholders received a £35 million dividend payout.

RMT says that, despite Britannia’s soaring profits, workers at the hotel are paid less than a living wage. Many are on zero-hour contracts, and are subject to productivity-based speed-ups: chambermaids have recently had the time allocated to strip down and clean rooms after guests’ departure from 25 to 20 minutes. Union reps report workers, many of whom are from migrant backgrounds, collapsing with exhaustion in the linen cupboards. Workers who drive to work are not provided with parking, and have to pay to use the hotel’s car park. Many report bullying and harassment from bosses, as well as sexual harassment from guests.

RMT members at the hotel struck in December. The union says its campaign will continue until workers win living wages, secure employment, and decent working conditions.

Picturehouse can afford to pay!

By Gemma Short

Workers from five Picturehouse cinemas in London struck on Monday 1 May in a repeat of the largest cinema strike in UK labour movement history in April.

The strike takes the total number of strike days at Picturehouse cinemas in the last eight months to over 40.

Workers from the five sites, Ritzy in Brixton, Crouch End, East Dulwich, Hackney, and Picturehouse Central in Soho, joined the May Day march in central London before going to picket Picturehouse Central in the evening.

Community campaigners and supporters held ‘community pickets’ at Crouch End and East Dulwich which meant customers knew there was a strike on, and which turned away many customers who would have otherwise used the cinemas.

But, the workers’ union, is now unfortunately conducting an unnecessary re-ballot of members before strikes continue, as they continue to interpret anti-union laws in the most extreme way.

A Bectu member from East Dulwich Picturehouse spoke at the closing rally of London May Day and said: “There is no question they can afford us the Living Wage. They can afford to pay us sick pay; they can afford to give us maternity and paternity pay, but they choose not to. Cineworld made over £98 million in post-tax profits last year. CEO Mooky Greidinger personally took home £2.5 million last year.”

“He alone could afford to pay Picturehouse workers the Living Wage and still take home £1 million.”

Teachers turn up heat on council

By a Lewisham teacher

On Wednesday 3 May National Union of Teachers (NUT) members at Forest Hill school in Lewisham struck for the 7th time in their on-going dispute against a management proposed restructuring to deal with a £1.3 million deficit.

The management’s proposal sheds 15 teaching jobs, significantly increases teachers’ workload, radically reduces the depth of the creative aspects of the curriculum, ends any specialist English as an Additional Language (EAL) support, and massively diminishes the support for students with Special Educational Needs.

The strikes are part of a campaign to pressure Lewisham’s Labour Council to intervene to assist the school and protect education in the borough. After the strike on 3 May the teachers have announced a week’s hiatus in their strikes to allow management to provide various documents to the teachers including an equality impact report (which they have to supply) and the detailed books (which are subject to a freedom of information request).

In addition the campaign will use the time to build for a public meeting on 11 May at Forest Hill Methodist Church. Further strikes are planned, and the NUT group has now set a calendar of strikes through to the end of term. Beginning on Tuesday 16 May, they will be striking Tuesday one week and Wednesday-Thursday of the following week. The clear message to the council and the management is: we aren’t going anywhere. There are increasing signs of splits within the Labour Group on the council.

We have heard reports that a lively discussion followed a representation from a Forest Hill teacher and another NUT member (both Party members) to the council group on Monday 24 April.

“Of course, the question of who the cleaners’ employer will be could be settled in a very simple, direct way if LU took cleaning services back in house.”

Tube news round-up

By Ollie Moore

Uncertainty for ISS cleaners

Multinational cleaning contractor ISS, one of the two major companies to which London Underground outsources cleaning services, has informed its workers that its contract will not be renewed past the end of 2017.

It has sent all cleaners a letter informing them their employment will be transferred over to a new contractor under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Earnings)) regulations. As yet there is no indication who the new employer will be, leaving thousands of workers in the dark as to who will be paying their wages come 2018.

The rank-and-file bulletin Tube worker commented: “RMT reps have consistently pressed ISS, and LU, for info, and have been stonewalled. Cleaners are worried about who will be paying their wages come the new year.”

London Bridge station staff to strike

Station staff at London Bridge Tube station will strike on 7-8 May, and conduct indefinite industrial action short of strikes themselves, as they attempt to win the reinstatement of sacked colleague Lee Cornell.

Lee was dismissed after he intervened with a fare evader who pushed a pregnant colleague. Lee was then punched twice in the head, but rather than supporting an assaulted staff member, London Underground have sacked him for defending himself.

London Bridge workers’ action-short-of-strikes will consist of refusing to service ticket machines, and refusing to challenge passengers about tickets.
Why students and youth should vote Labour

By Rosalind Robson

If the opinion polls are correct, Labour is solidly ahead of the Tories among potential voters under 40 years old.

Among women under 40, 42 per cent favour Labour, against 27 per cent for the Tories. Unfortunately, these same people are less likely to vote.

What’s going on? This generation has long been identified as hostile to or alienated by politics and politicians. Not doubt, many still are. But what is attracting some of them to Labour?

In the first place, underlying and accumulated social changes which have badly affected this group are being directly and positively addressed by Labour’s election manifesto. It is the same reason many joined Labour to vote Corbyn into the leadership.

To deal with a higher education system that has put hundreds of thousands of former students into a lifetime of debt, Labour has promised to scrap tuition fees. This will be even more important for those who cannot yet vote, but it is still of tremendous symbolic importance for those who are now paying £9,000 and more every year for a degree when the prospect of any future job, let alone in their chosen field of study, is far from certain.

To sort out the profiteering and slum landlords who rent to “generation rent”, Labour says it will introduce fines for unsafe and substandard accommodation.

To tackle job insecurity and low wages Labour will increase the “living wage” and introduce rights at work from the first day of a job.

This is not a full socialist programme but it is a big step forward from the Tories’ (and for that matter, the Blairite Labour Party’s) couldn’t-care-less attitude to young people over decades.

It is vital that Labour convinces younger people to register to vote and to vote. Students who support Labour have an important job to do in getting their fellow students to do the same. And moreover, to get involved in the labour movement.

Students should join their local Labour Party and get involved — in fights to save services, in building Labour’s youth wing.

They will be repaid with a Labour Party which sticks to its policies and fights for a better world.

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