JUNIOR DOCTORS
REBEL
AGAINST GOVERNMENT’S IMPOSED CONTRACT

MOBILISE TO SAVE THE NHS!

On Thursday 11 February, Tory health minister Jeremy Hunt announced that he had broken off negotiations with the BMA and would impose his new terms on junior doctors. BMA Junior Doctors’ Committee chair Johann Malawana responded by promising continued action.

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Anti-Muslim campaign targets Sadiq Khan

By Sacha Ismail

The campaign to stop Sadiq Khan being elected Mayor of London is starting to take on a nasty, distinctly racist, anti-Muslim flavour.

On 12 February the centre pages of the Evening Standard carried a double page spread with the headline “Exposed: Sadiq Khan’s family links to extremist organisation”.

“Extremist” is the word of choice in the anti-Khan campaign. It was also in the Sun’s headline on 8 February, and is littered across the mainstream media’s web coverage. Zac Goldsmith preferred to call Khan “radical and divisive”, obviously with the same implication. Namely: Khan is linked to radical Islamism and perhaps even to terrorism.

The 12 February a Standard article was hung on the fact that Khan’s former brother-in-law, Makhbool Javaid, was at one point linked to ultra-Islamist group al-Muhajiroun; and that as a lawyer Khan defended some Islamists unjustly treated by the British and US governments.

The attempt to link Khan to Islamism is absurd. Bourgeois politicians of all parties and stripes are often insufficiently careful about whom they associate with, and insufficiently sharp and clear in the political lines they draw around themselves. The idea that a paper like the Standard, owned by Russian oligarch Evgeny Lebedev, has any right to criticise such things is laughable.

But in this respect Khan really has nothing to answer for. He is being targeted because he is Labour and because he is Muslim.

This sort of “expose” is a lurid attempt to say, without actually saying it: “Look, he’s brown and his name is Khan — perhaps he’s got something to do with extremism and terrorism”. If this campaign gets any grip, it will no doubt become even more unpleasant.

There is plenty for the left to criticise in Sadiq Khan’s politics and campaign. But aside from our desire for a Labour victory, having an Asian, Muslim-background mayor of London would be positively good.

The right-wing, anti-Muslim campaign against Khan is shameful.

Failed by the “justice” system

By Gemma Short

Sarah Reed was found dead in her cell in Holloway Prison, north London, on 11 January.

In 2012 Sarah was the victim of police brutality when stopped by police on a shop-lifting allegation. PC James Kiddie was caught on CCTV grabbing Sarah by the hair and then punching her as she lay on the floor of the shop. The attack was so violent a fellow police officer gave evidence against Kiddie in court.

The circumstances of Sarah’s death in Holloway prison are unclear. The Ministry of Justice simply reports that Sarah was “found unresponsive in her cell” and that “prison staff attempted CPR”. The independent Prison and Probation Ombudsman will conduct an investigation.

Sarah’s story is a tragic and shocking tale of a woman who was denied help by every part of society and abused by the police and prison system.

Sarah’s newborn baby died a sudden death in September 2003, after which she suffered bouts of severe mental ill-health. Whilst detained under the Mental Health Act in Maudsley hospital in October 2015 her family says she suffered a sexual assault. They believe that this incident, where she had to fight off the attacker, led to staff calling sexual assault. They believe that in Maudsley hospital in October 2015 her family says she suffered a

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Not really an extra billion

By Todd Hamer

On 15 February, the government responded to a report on mental health by pledging an extra £1 billion a year.

This will be used to fund an extra 600,000 places a year to talking therapies for low-level depression and anxiety, improve child and perinatal services, and increase community crisis support which is non-existent in some parts of the country.

However, it appears that the “extra funding” is actually funding that has already been announced.

The new response simply details how it will be spent. It is “extra funding” in the context of a 8% cut in NHS mental health services during the last parliament and 13.2% cut in local government funded mental health services between 2010-14. It is “extra funding” in the context of £22 billion “efficiency savings” for the NHS between 2015-20 and local government services being reduced to a rump.

NHs England’s Mental Health Taskforce Five Years Forward had reported that suicide rates have increased after years of decline. Less that one quarter of people with a mental health condition receive treatment from a chronically under-resourced part of the NHS.

The lack of inpatient beds means that 500 patients a month are transported out of county in search of a bed. Often these will be people in acute psychiatric crisis, removed from family and friends when they are at their most vulnerable and least able to understand what is going on.

The taskforce report suggest bed occupancy is dangerously high at 94%. Royal College of Psychiatrists recommend no more than 85% occupancy rate). Yet the plan does not include any new investment in inpatient beds.

Inpatient bed numbers are at a historic low. Around 2100 beds (about 10% total capacity) closed between 2011 and 2014, after a 39% reduction in bed numbers from 1998 to 2012.

Prevention is better than cure, the acute inpatient wards underpin the rest of the service. Overcrowded wards are less conducive to recovery. Pressure on beds leads to late admissions with the person deeper into crisis requiring a longer hospital stay as well as early discharge with increased risk of rapid relapse and the need for readmission.

All this leads to worsening prognosis and increased dependence on services. Paradoxically, an increase in inpatient capacity could significantly reduce demand on the entire service.

PRIVATISATION

The underfunding of mental health services (including inpatient beds) is due to the difficulty in marketingising mental health care whilst aggressively privatising the NHS.

While it is relatively straightforward to attach price labels to hip replacements and cataract operations, it is less clear how much schizophrenia or depression might cost. Commissioners have tended to pay physical health trusts per treatment, each neatly priced up in the payment-by-results system, and then give the remainder of their budget to mental health.

As budgets have been squeezed, mental health trusts have suffered. The response of mental health trust bosses has been to try and create their own payment-by-results system. Unfortunately they have created nothing but a lot of clinically useless bureaucracy. The underfunding of mental health services is yet more evidence of the waste and inefficiency of applying capitalist market logic to healthcare.

Lastly, the report does nothing to address the social causes of mental illness. It states that one person in four will suffer a mental health problem this year, but does not tell us why.

There is one reference to the negative effect of insecure jobs and housing on people’s mental health, but no critique of the policies that have promoted that insecurity.

For all the volumes of psychiatric research and psychological theorising, relatively little is known about the workings of the human mind and the causes of depression, anxiety, mania or psychosis. However, there is broad consensus that these conditions emerge as a result of stress.

Writing in The Observer in the same week the taskforce published their report, Tim Adams suggests that “the frontline of labour disputes has shifted from picket lines to worry lines”. The modern epidemic of stress (which accounts for 10 million lost working days a year) has coincided with the decline of militant trade unionism. It is a result of individuals coping with injustice, inequality and frustration as individuals rather than fighting as a collective.

The labour movement must fight for adequate services for people suffering mental health crisis. But we must also fight to transform our society and create a world where mental health problems are the exception rather than the norm.
Can Bernie Sanders win the Democratic nomination?

By Danny Katch, International Socialist Organization

When the loudmouths at Fox News used to warn about the threat of America being taken over by socialists, they probably weren’t thinking about people in Iowa and New Hampshire.

But with Bernie Sanders’ decisive victory in the New Hampshire primary on February 9, to go with his tie with Hillary Clinton in Iowa, the most support so far in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination has gone to a self-described socialist. No, it’s not the same as the unemployment-rate drop of the means of production, but Sanders’ unlikely surge doesn’t show any signs of slowing.

Sanders was always expected to do well in New Hampshire, next door to his home state of Vermont, and he announced the former Secretary of State and one-time prohibitive frontrunner by more than 20 percentage points.

As in Iowa, Sanders dominated among voters under 30, winning a lopsided 82 percent of the vote, according to exit polls. He had the edge among women, too, young and old — who Clinton supporters had alternately attempted to guilt and to shame into joining Team Hillary.

Sanders’ success is clearly based on widespread anger about economic inequality and insecurity — the urgently felt issues that always gets short shrift among mainstream political leaders. Even as the official unemployment rate dropped and old — who Clinton supporters are coming off as entitled and out of touch — from the pundits who sigh that Sanders voters don’t seem to understand our political system isn’t meant to actually get anything done; to the strange “feminist” appeals from rich and powerful women to young debt-ridden ones to help Hillary move into the White House.

Presidential elections in the US aren’t about platforms or personalitites so much as they are about paths. Campaigns carefully weave their candidate’s biographies and political beliefs into a symbolic narrative about the country we want to live in.

In 2008, Barack Obama thrilled millions with his story of an intelli- gent outsider whose unique perspective could bring white and black people together to acknowledgde and finally overcome the country’s long history of racism.

It’s easy to smirk at how wrong almost every part of that sentence now seems, but a lot of the people doing the smirking, at least those old enough to remember, are lying to themselves if they claim they didn’t feel it at least a little bit.

This year, Bernie Sanders is inspiring voters with another narrative. He’s the last honest politician, the guy everybody laughed at as they got rich on Wall Street gambling, while he kept to his principles — even socialism! — until the day he got rich on Wall Street gambling, too.

In the face of the Bernie’s surge, Clinton supporters are coming off as entitled and out of touch — from the pundits who sigh that Sanders voters don’t seem to understand the way or the other given the stakes.

So far, 359 superdelegates have already pledged to vote for Clinton, versus 14 for Sanders. In other words, Sanders will have to do much better than win a majority of primary voters — he has to overcome the head start that Clinton has by virtue of being the nearly unanimous choice of the party establishment.

If Sanders can hold up under the pressure of the combined media attacks and continue winning the same level of support from primary voters and caucus-goers in other states, then things will get interesting.

WALL ST

His continued success will further harm the likes of Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein.

Clinton has been courting support from Wall Street for many years, despite her occasional bouts of watered-down populist rhetoric. (Unfortunately, given Sanders’ thorough mastery of the talking points on foreign policy, including support for the “war on terror”, the military-industrial complex won’t have much reason to be alarmed.)

But the impact of a continued Sanders surge could go further and shake things up in many liberal organizations, such as NARAL, Pro-Choice America, the National Abortion Rights Campaign, which reflexively endorsed Clinton.

Can Sanders actually win enough votes in the primaries to win the Democratic presidential nomination? He’s already considered a big underdog. But it can’t be entirely ruled out so far in advance, and with so many unpredictable factors — including the potential for the Clinton campaign to self-destruct.

But Sanders supporters need to ask themselves whether, if Bernard Sanders could manage to win the Democratic Party presidential nomination, can he win the Democratic Party to support anything he stands for?

As SocialistWorker.org wrote in an article that day: “Sanders’ insistence on talking about health care is a breath of fresh air in the post-ACA political climate. But it is, in fact, unrealistical to propose a single-payer health care system as a candidate of a party that is just as much in the pockets of the insurance and pharmaaceutical industries as the Republicans. Were Sanders ever to find himself in a position of trying to achieve single-payer, his own party would stab him in the back.

“Sanders says he wants to bring a ‘political revolution’ to Washing- ton, but what does that really mean? When he defines it, he usually means that the grassroots of support to get him elected would also help a Democratic majority in the Senate and House, which could enact his progressive policies and get money out of politics.

“Political revolution” depends on the party supporting his plat- form — while its leadership makes clear every day that it doesn’t.

If Sanders can hold up under the pressure of the combined media attacks and continue winning the same level of support from primary voters and caucus-goers in other states, then things will get interesting.

But recognising the difficulties in winning them shouldn’t take away from recognising the impact his campaign has already had and will continue to have in the coming months.

* Abridged from socialistworker.org

Chicago teachers restart their fight against cuts

By Conway Williams

Chicago teachers are beginning to stir again following the threat of huge cuts to school budgets across the city.

Since July last year the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) has been attempting to negotiate a new contract with teachers. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and in particular, the City Mayor, Rahm Emanuel, have been trying to use these negotiations to impose cuts to pensions and pay, as well as threatening 2000 teacher redundancies.

Now using slick PR and media stunts, the mayor has announced a disingenuous plan to expand nurs-

eries provision by 1,000 places, when the reality is that he plans to cut main school budgets by $120 mil-

lion. These cuts come on top of years of retrenchment since the strikes of 2012. But the cuts of the last five years have been masked by teach-

ers working longer hours for less pay, effectively running all extra curricular and sport curricular provi-

cion for students in their own time. However, the CTU has been busy building an impa-

ressive coalition to resist the cuts, forging links with the community and with students as in 2012. A recent poll showed that more than four times as many people in Chicago support the teachers as the Mayor, despite his extensive publicity and media campaign.

Earlier this month more than 3,000 CTU members, parents, stu-

dents and other supporters marched in protest against the strikes in support of a fair contract for teach-

ers and in opposition to education cuts. During the protest, 16 union activists staged a sit-in at the Bank of America and were arrested.

They used the arrests as an opportunity to expose corrupt prac-

tices in the city’s public finances and to demand serious negotia-

tions with the Union over the contract. “Rahm has money for the
dbanks but not for our students,” said teacher Sarah Chambers, one of the arrestees. “When it’s reached a point where teachers are occupying banks to make their voices heard, it shows that we need an elected school board.”

A dispute like this can go one way or the other given the stakes involved. The CTU, so far, appears to have played this well, using protests and other levers to force the hand of the administration.

Sooner or later some serious industrial action is likely to be necessary if the government of Chicago are to protect the teachers and the education serv-

ice.

For Conway Williams

Help Luqman Onikosi

In 2007 Luqman Onikosi came to the UK from Nigeria to study at the University of Sussex. Whilst in the UK he developed chronic liver disease. After finishing his degree, he began to work for the Immigration and Nationality Commission, before becoming ill to continue work.

In 2012, the Home Office attempted to deport Luqman. If he had been deported in all likelihood he would have died. For fear of losing access to treatment, Luqman appealed for further legal advice, and a cam-

paign to save his life.

* www.campaignforluqman.org.uk
Prevent: not convinced

Omar Roi (Solidarity 390) and Patrick Murphy (Solidarity 391) both draw attention to the shortcomings and potential dangers of the Prevent programme, aimed at countering “extremism”/“radicalisation” in schools and colleges.

It does indeed seem to be the case that in some instances Prevent has been implemented in a heavy-handed manner by over-zealous and/or ill-trained teachers. I can also agree that Prevent is potentially a threat to free speech — discouraging free and open discussion of the issues surrounding terrorist ideologies and thus making it more difficult to counter them.

However, there is a great deal of credible evidence showing that much of the opposition to Prevent stems not from “ordinary” parents and teachers, but is being organised and co-ordinated by ultra-reactionary Islamists, specifically Cage, Mend and their front organisation, Prevent Watch. Many of the media stories about heavy-handed and/or inappropriate Prevent interventions were, in fact, put about by Prevent Watch with the intention of spreading fear and confusion in Muslim communities. Several of these stories have turned out to be exaggerated or, indeed, downright false — for instance the story about the Muslim boy in Accrington whose family received a police visit after he wrote at school that he lived in a “terrorist house” when he meant what he was a terraced house. Sections of the media had a field day with this story, but it now turns out that the police visit had nothing to do with Prevent or “terrorism” but happened because the boy had also stated that he’d been subjected to physical violence at home. Prevent Watch continues to carry this false story on their website.

Omar and Patrick rightly point to the foolishness of much of the Left (and the NUS leadership) in allying with Cage/Mend/Prevent Watch in opposing Prevent. But both comrades take it as read that we should oppose Prevent, albeit “for the right reasons and with the right allies.” I’m not convinced. Teachers and others in positions of responsibility towards young people are, quite rightly, required by the state to take action to protect their charges from grooming and all forms of physical and mental abuse. Surely protecting children and young people from terrorist ideologies is a similar responsibility that socialists should not, in principle, oppose?

A final (genuine) question: Omar states that Prevent “is aimed exclusively at Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism”: is this true?

I have read elsewhere that only 56% of those referred for intervention under Prevent have been Muslim.

Jim Denham, Birmingham

This bureaucratic drive is probably counterproductive

Yes, of course, we should oppose the government’s anti-Islamist strategy, Prevent. It is heavily-handed and, probably, counter-productive.

Teachers already have a legal obligation to actively stop children being put in danger, and keep them safe. So, for example, I have reported to the school’s safeguarding officer that one of my students had been attacked by his dad. The senior member of staff then reported the incident to the police.

In the same way I recently reported a student for Islamic extremism. That report led to a police raid on his family’s home. How can I justify reporting this student? Because I might have saved his life (and the lives of others he might have hurt if he had ended up on the wrong side of the law). On the level of the obligation to keep kids safe there is no need for extra legislation.

Nor is there any need for force to teach a “broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils” already a legal obligation in schools like mine.

If the government wants to stop religious radicalisation, the best first step would be to abolish religious schools. My school does quite good work promoting gay equality and women’s rights; I bet you can’t say the same about the independent religious schools attached to the mosque at the end of my road, or for any priest-and-run-infested schools as well. All religious schools maintain boundaries, encourage isolation and obscurantism.

The problem with Prevent is that, firstly, it is part of a ruling-class ideological offensive against Islamists which is done in the name of the ruling class and with their ideas. The government knows it is part of a bureaucratic elite, and they are seeking to co-opt teachers and others into gathering information for them which they wouldn’t be able to collect otherwise.

But the net is far too wide. If a kid tells me they are in favour of sharia law I would like to talk to them, not to get them arrested or put under state surveillance. I can draw a distinction between a student who might be about to sign up with Daesh, and another who is curious, or awkward, or bloody-minded, or contrary, or a bit sexist.

And finally this policy will be overseen by school head teachers who are paranoid about becoming the next school to have a student disappear to Syria (with all the bad press and interest from Ofsted that generates). They will over-report to cover their own arses.

Obviously what is required is for the unions to develop an independent policy. We should oppose Islamist terror in our own name, and educate students to value liberty and equality.

There are groups which oppose Prevent for their own reasons (because they are Islamists, or the Islamists’ “useful idiots”), but that shouldn’t stop us critiquing the government from a socialist perspective.

A London teacher

Peter Tatchell is not a racist or a transphobe

By Cathy Nugent

Veteran LGBT and socialist activist Peter Tatchell is no racist or transphobe, and we should defend him against those charges.

His alleged racism and transphobia were the grounds on which an NUS LGBT officer refused to share a platform with him at the “re-radicalising queers” event at Canterbury Christ Church University on 15 February.

The LGBT officer was, in their view, following the policy passed by the LGBT conference of the National Union of Students which could be read as obliging an officer of the union not to share a platform with an “oppressor”. Of course they are entitled to follow the policy of their organisation and, in fact to refuse to share platforms with another speaker on many grounds. But Tatchell, an “oppressor”? The evidence cited by the LGBT officer in private emails was not Tatchell’s alleged racism, but an open letter Tatchell signed which opposed so-called “no-platforming” of some feminists such as Germaine Greer and Julie Bindel. The letter argued that Tatchell is at lot more than this in relation to transgender. Both have denied trans women are women. Still, why is Tatchell being labelled a transphobe for signing a letter defending freedom of speech?

Speaking on Newsnight (15 February) the journalist Paris Lees, herself a transwoman, argued that it was indeed ludicrous to characterise Tatchell as a transphobe to make him “guilty by association” by signing that open letter; to assume or act as if he agreed with feminists such as Greer, whilst he is in record with directly opposed views.

Yet Lees did understand why people were angry with Tatchell for signing the letter. By doing so he was implying that it was easy for transpeople to “engage” with the likes of Greer.

Lees went on to say, “... more broadly, yes I think it is right that people should not engage with transphobes... marginalised people have had to explain themselves over and over again.

ENGAGE

“There are certain people who are just not willing to engage in debate. They have heard the arguments. This person [Greer] has made personal attacks on individuals trans people before.

“They have argued for conversion therapy, which has proved to be very dangerous. Those people should not be given platforms to air their prejudices.”

Lees is wrong in her conclusions, but she has, of course, made an important point here.

For any human being, to have to justify their very existence; to experience, as a consequence, constant dehumanising harassment, is intolerable, and must make you feel very vulnerable indeed.

Nonetheless there are real problems with “outlawing” the views of people like Greer. As we have previously argued in Solidarity, Greer and others are not simply bigots (though in their absolute refusal to interrogate their views they give a good impression of being bigots); nor are they people who follow through on prejudice by beating people up on the streets. They are, as Kelly Rogers put it, “one side of a (largely) generational divide between second-wave radical feminists and younger feminists who adopt a more trans-inclusive socialist feminism!”

We should oppose Islamist terror in our own name, and educate students to value liberty and equality.

A London teacher

This bureaucratic drive is probably counterproductive

Peter Tatchell is not a racist or a transphobe
Junior doctors rebel against contract

On Thursday 11 February, Tory health minister Jeremy Hunt announced that he had broken off negotiations with the BMA, which would impose his new terms on junior doctors.

The new contract, which Hunt plans to impose from 5 August, aims to force junior doctors to work longer and even more unsociable hours, especially more weekends (the “seven-day NHS”), with a slash in their wage of up to 30%.

The new contract also removes barriers to prevent hospitals making their junior staff work overtime for no extra money.

14 out of 20 bosses of NHS Trusts, cited by Hunt as supporting the move to impose the contract, have said that in fact they oppose it.

BMA Junior Doctors’ Committee chair Johann Malawana responded by promising continued action. “Junior doctors cannot and will not accept a contract that is bad for the future of patient care, the profession and the NHS as a whole, and we will consider all options open to us”.

The junior doctors have come a long way in six months. Their combination of public campaigning activity, grassroots mobilisation and strong industrial action had a profound impact.

The stubbornness with which the Tories are running the NHS into the ground despite mass public discontent shows that any less active campaign could win little.

The junior doctors need to keep strong industrial action — basically, strikes — at the core of their strategy. Yet it is increasingly clear that this is a political fight.

A great strength of the campaign has been willingness to link the issue of the junior doctors’ contracts to the wider struggle to save the NHS, defend workers’ terms and conditions across the board, and stop austerity.

That is not completely uncontroversial in the BMA, but the most active junior doctors argue that the temptation to back away from the political implications should be opposed.

Even if the new contract were perfect (rather than very bad, as it is), the junior doctors would be right to fight against imposition. To allow the government to make unilateral changes to the contracts would set a dangerous precedent and embolden the government in its drive against other health workers and indeed all workers.

The discussion at the BMA Junior Doctors’ Committee meeting on Saturday 20 February should include the following ideas for action:

1. To oppose both the currently proposed contract and its imposition as not safe and not fair. To highlight its impacts on Saturday working; evening unsociable hours; LTFT [part-time/ flexible working] trainees; in counting as working hours, for doctors on call, only the hours actually worked; on first refusal on locum work.

2. To escalate industrial action.

The action so far has been well supported, and junior doctors are more angry and determined after Hunt’s latest move. The direct employers, the NHS Trusts, are in difficult financial situations and do not want sustained periods of action.

The BMA should set an escalating pattern of strikes, the details to be decided by the executive. Escalation should some periods include pulling out junior doctors working in accident and emergency and on call. Patients will be covered by consultants, meaning a greater impact on clinics and elective work.

The action should also include a walk-out of all junior doctors on new work days the government wants to say are social, i.e. Saturdays.

3. The BMA should explore all legal avenues to stop imposition, without in any way relying on such avenues. Industrial strength and organised campaigning which will win this dispute. Legal action is an auxiliary.

The junior doctors’ committee should campaign among members to stress the importance of actively backing and working with other workers in dispute, particularly health workers, and where possible coordinate industrial action.

Junior doctors should speak to GP and consultant colleagues to look for ways to co-ordinate with their battles with the government. The TUC should also be approached to work with the junior doctors’ committee to organise a joint national demonstration against the imposition of the contract in support of our fight, against the removal of student NHS bursaries, for an end to privatisation, and for the reinstatement of the NHS as a comprehensive, well funded public service.

5. To issue a public statement setting out this strategy.

All unions in dispute should be supported. But this dispute especially. The NHS is vital for all working-class people.

Support from other workers who can hit profits directly is important for NHS workers to win disputes; and the junior doctors’ initiative can be built on to crystallise the widespread anger against the Tories’ sabotage of the Health Service into an active movement to save the NHS.

Abolish Trident! Welfare and jobs, not warfare and mass murder

Nuclear weapons — and especially those nuclear weapons whose use would incite tens of millions of civilians — are an obscenity.

A future Labour government must abolish Trident. In the first instance, this is a moral question: Ban the Bomb!

Imagine, if you can, the worst case: a nuclear attack on the UK in which London and other big cities were destroyed and millions were murdered by a foreign power. Perhaps the attack came from a rogue state run by a bad leader, as it is. The junior doctors would be right to fight against imposition.

To allow the government to make unilateral changes to the contracts would set a dangerous precedent and embolden the government in its drive against other health workers and indeed all workers.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) estimates of its running and replacement costs over the next several decades seem to run to £100 billion or more.

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Labour should write into its Manifesto that it intends to abolish Trident and spend the money, instead, on the NHS, homes and abolishing tuition fees. Labour should be clear and bold; Labour MPs should understand it is expected they vote to abolish Trident. Such a policy could be a big vote winner.

The left should advocate all those opposed to Trident and for socially useful spending join the Labour Party and fight for the policy now. If some Labour Party right-wingers re-sign, so be it.

Cost

Even if the Trident nuclear weapon system were free it should be abandoned. However Trident is very far from being free.

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Jobs

Several thousand UK jobs depend on building and maintaining aspects of the Trident programme.

Opposition inside the labour movement to abolishing Trident comes from — amongst others — Sir Paul Kenny, leader of the GMB union.

Sir Paul was recently knighted. His job at the GMB pays, apparently, £121,000 a year. Just because Sir Paul is a loudmouth and occasional cynical-left talker does not mean his view, that a Trident upgrade should go ahead, is right.

The GMB should be gold and stand with their battles with the government. A Labour government could do this and still have £100 billion to spare.

It seems that a large part of the British ruling class’s attachment to Trident has little to do with the specific worth of the weapons system. It has more to do with maintaining the image of Britain as a world power and keeping the British state inside prestigious international institutions such as the UN Security Council.

These are things socialists have no interest in.

Welfare, education and humanity — not war and imperial prestige.
Responses to Stalinism: raising A... 

Andrew Coates reviews The two Trotskyisms confront Stalinism, edited by Sean Matgamna. Part two of the review will be printed in Solidarity 395.

"Les bruits lointains d’une atlantide disparaie, de cette ville d’y’s engloutie que chacun porte en soi." [The distant sounds of a vanished Atlantis, of that sunken city that everybody carries inside].

— Ernest Renan, Souvenirs d’enfance et de jeunesse, 1883.

Ten years after the 1989-91 fall of Soviet-bloc Communism, Perry Anderson wrote, launching the second series of New Left Review (NLR) that, there was "no longer any significant oppositions" "within the thought world of the West".

The governing and intellectually dominant neo-liberalism had no rival on the radical left. Amongst the aftershocks of the collapse of the USSR, "Virtually the entire horizon of reference" for his generation on the left, "the landmarks of reformist and revolutionary socialism", Bebel, Bernstein, Luxemburg, Kautsky, Jaures, Lukacs, Lenin, Gramsci and Trotsky, have been "wiped away". For students they had become "as remote as a list of Arian bishops".

The second volume of The Fate of the Russian Revolution is, like the first, aimed at re-establishing, in the face of Anderson’s verdict, the present day importance of one of those distant figures, Leon Trotsky. In his Introduction to The Two Trotskyisms Sean Matgamna draws how own parallel with the herearch Arias and his followers. The reference is not, as one might expect, to the unequal contest between the founder of the Fourth International’s circle of supporters and Stalin’s Established Marxism-Leninist Church. It is to disputes within the Trotskyist movement, "The Heterodox were the Arians, and the Orthodox the Catholics of post-Trotsky Trotskyism. The leader of the — "heterodox" Trotskyism — Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (AWL) argues that this division, which originated in the 1940s, amongst those who "embodied the great truths of Marxism" the only "authentic Marxist-communist tradition" was of lasting significance. Revolutionary socialists, "must go back to re-examine the old debates and the flaws and lacunae in the political legacy which Trotsky left at his death — back to 1940." 2

Apart from Matgamna’s introduction we are offered an extensive — over 600 pages long — selection of original articles from 1939 to the early 1950s, by Trotsky, his “orthodox” champions, and those expressing opposing views on the errors and gaps in their political approach. The present work aims to present a demythologised account of the raucous debates of the Trotskyist movement inside the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP — henceforth the SWP referred to) during the 1940s — placing the heretics on an equal, if not superior, footing to the Orthodox. The texts are not always easy reading. Anybody unused to the disputes of hard-core Trotskyism will find the often wildly intemperate language unattractive — the suffix “ite” for opponents’ standpoint, “deviation”, and “petty bourgeois individualism” get freely aired. The articles range from the “Shachtman” opposition to Trotsky’s call for defence of the Soviet Union, to the scepticism of Felix Morrow, a leading American Trotskyist and author of an orthodox account of the Spanish Civil War, who became sceptical about the Fourth International’s prediction of post-war European revolutions. Morrow by contrast could see that it was more probable that, “bourgeois” democracy would be restored, and advocated a left-wing democratic response. Morrow was the main subject of an important 1970s, Where Trotskyism Got Lost by Peter Jenkins, (1977), which which might also seem an appropriate sub-title for The Two Trotskyisms. 3

WORTH

The first thought of the reader is to ask whether it is worth the time and effort to look into this literature. Are we delving into the “archives” of a lost Atlantis, as former Fourth Internationalist Tariq Ali, prefacing the philosopher and lifelong Trotskyist activist Daniel Bensaid’s An Impatient Life (2015) has described records of the Trotskyist movement? A more urgent task might be to respond to the post-Communist “lucid recognition of defeat” — as NLR editorialised a decade after Perry Anderson’s verdict. The “archipelago of a thousand Maoisms”, the research programmes of the academic left which the same Bensaid saw flourishing in Marx for our Times (2002), and which has not ceased bearing fruit, might seem to offer more fertile soil on which Trotskyists too can plant their seeds. But for Matgamna at least the original City of the Trotskyist movement has not been submerged in the deluge following the Fall of Official Communism. We should first of all, like a modern Montaigne, return to the library in its principal Tower. 4

A contrast might be made with Lars T. Lií’s influential Lenin Rediscovered (2005). Lií argues that Lenin’s politics developed in the shadow of German Social Democracy, and its chief theorist, Karl Kautsky. A strategic emphasis on the importance of political liberty, as a condition for the development of the movement, was grounded on a “world historical epic about the coming of socialism”. The task of the left was to bring the “Good News” of socialism to the working class, merging intellectual resources and the labour movement. But for Trotskyists in the 1940s, after two decades of Stalinist rule in “socialist” Russia, forced collectivisation, famine, the Great Terror and the Gulag, there was little tangible to evangelise about. The German Communists had lost to the National Socialists; the Spanish Civil War had ended with defeat for the Republic and the left. Nazi and Fascist tyrannies were now poised to turn Europe into a totalitarian Empire. The old colonial powers of France and Britain, they considered, looked only to protect their own interests, as did the Americans. There was, in short, an abundance of very Bad News. The Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin’s years of leadership during the founding of the USSR, and Trotsky’s battle against Stalin’s rule, remained, for them, touchstones, but their faith in the future of socialism had returned to belief in “things unseen.” 5

Our knowledge of the heterodox side in the early centuries of the Christian Church comes from fragments of their documents, and the commentaries of the victorious Catholics. Backed by Emperors the Orthodox considered the Arian congregations to be rebels against the supreme powers of Heaven and Earth. Although the analogy is strained those who criticised Trotsky and the leadership of the American Trotskyists, the Socialist Workers Party, in the 1930s and 1940s, are like

Reviews and critical commentary on The two Trotskyisms confront Stalinism

"There are some who, for whatever reasons, do not think there is much (or any) importance to such history. To deny that there is anything useful to learn from such excavations and explorations is inconsistent with a serious attitude toward the discipline of history, as well as toward political theory, not to mention Marxism. Sean Matgamna has performed a genuine service for scholars and activists." 6

— Paul Le Blanc

"Trotsky and to some extent Trotskyism did their best to make sense of what must have seemed utterly senseless, like the prioritised mass murder of millions of quite innocent people, but they were somehow too close to the phenomenon to do it justice. Yet to see how hard they tried, how valiantly they struggled, how readily they sacrificed their own futures for the sake of some basic understanding, there is no better place to start than here." 7

— Robert Fine

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Arian ecclesiastics, largely known through the literature of their adversaries.

Max Shachtman (1904-1972), a founder of that SWP, and a member of the Executives Committee of the Fourth International, has, to Matgamna, suffered the worst from the “handed-down” and “apparatus historiologist” of Orthodoxy. The Downfall, from criticisms of Trotskyism to support for American imperialism, was his, and his Silovite’s fate. This parable was part of the consoling “revolutionary mythology” that helped the Orthodox stand together against an assortment of enemies on the left and survive the ascendency of Official Communism. For Matgamna this did not prevent them chasing after, “alien political movements”, and, above all, becoming “critical supporters of varieties of Stalinism.”

Sean Matgamna reminds readers, a few of whom may need this underlined, that Trotsky — by definition the lodestar of Trotskyism — was not infallible. Over the period leading up the War he presented a “large quiver of half-verified, half-erased ‘positions’, ambivalences, and contradictions.” Matgamna is keen to make one point clear. The founder of the Fourth International did not lay down a hard and fast “line” on the central issue of the controversies. “While defending the view that the totalitarian regime created over the foundation the October Revolution laid down, in nationalised property and planning may have been evolving as “transitional society”... he admitted, in effect, the theoretical possibility that the USSR was already established as a new “degenerate” class society, a semi-slave society.” We would also note that Trotsky’s frequent use of the term “anti-totalthink” — and his habit in Marxism circles by the dissident’s dissident Victor Serge — would raise hackles amongst those who have consigned it to Cold War political “science.”

That 1940s Trotskyism divided into two strands is a claim that rests on an account focused on North America. In the 1940s the SWP (US) was the largest Trotskyist group in the world, whose several thousand members had played a substantial part in the trade union movement. The publication by Shachtman of criticisms of dialectical materialism from a “pragmatist” philosophical standpoint by James Burnham in the party’s theoretical journal, New International, in 1938 was not universally welcomed. Trotsky came down hard on the Soviet invasions and fresh slaughters. For the dissidents these actions proved that Russia had acted as an “imperialist” power — acting with a brutality which no slogan could cover up. The claim that at least something of a “petty bourgeoisie” state remained in the country however degenerate, rang hollow. Russia was not in a “transition”, however unstable, towards socialism. Unrestrained violence was embedded in “bureaucratic collectivist” society. By 1938, Trotsky had been marking his policy of “defence of the USSR.” The SWP majority accounted that on the basis of the economic foundations laid down by the October Revolution it was their duty to back the country. For the majority Stalin’s occupation of half of Poland, the invasion of Finland and other Soviet manoeuvres in Eastern Europe, had not “partisan” of the USSR side, to the extent of calling for the people in occupied territory to back the Red Army.

From the Bad News of the Gulag there was soon even worse news about the conduct of the Trotskyists in Eastern Europe. For the dissidents these actions proved that Russia had acted as an “imperialist” power — acting with a brutality which no slogan could cover up. The claim that at least something of a “petty bourgeoisie” state remained in the country however degenerate, rang hollow. Russia was not in a “transition”, however unstable, towards socialism. Unrestrained violence was embedded in “bureaucratic collectivist” society. By 1938, Trotsky had been marking his policy of “defence of the USSR.” The SWP majority accounted that on the basis of the economic foundations laid down by the October Revolution it was their duty to back the country. For the majority Stalin’s occupation of half of Poland, the invasion of Finland and other Soviet manoeuvres in Eastern Europe, had not “partisan” of the USSR side, to the extent of calling for the people in occupied territory to back the Red Army.

The minority was expelled from the SWP in the same year, 1940, as Trotsky’s assassination.

They took 40% of the membership with them. From the pettiness of the minority wing, SWP leader James P. Cannon’s account in The Struggle for a Trotskyist Party, of an organisation that had taken only two years to organise the group’s evolution, or whether bureaucratic collectivism was the nearest label to hand for the Workers Party leadership to justify its — decade long-evolution towards the American political mainstream is hard to determine. For Matgamna the arguments of this dissenting strand of Trotskyism didn’t come from a fit of temper or stray into the ideology of the “petty bourgeoisie”. It can be argued that the theory of “bureaucratic collectivism” was part and parcel of a political response to the Soviet state’s clumsy or its policies in the early years of the War.

This political legacy is important for the renewal of revolutionary Marxism. Indeed, in the 1940s, the “loyalists” — those who had taken up a politics of consistent anti-Stalinism as well as consistent anti-capitalism.”

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References:

2. Page 98. The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism, Edited Sean Matgamna, Second Edition, Workers’ Liberty, 2002. This parable was part of the consoling “revolutionary mythology” that helped the Orthodox stand together against an assortment of enemies on the left and survive the ascendency of Official Communism. For Matgamna this did not prevent them chasing after, “alien political movements”, and, above all, becoming “critical supporters of varieties of Stalinism.”

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6. Page 97–8. TTC.

An antidote for the persisting residue of Stalinism

Herman Benson was a founding member, along with Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, and others, of the Socialist Workers Party, which broke from the US Socialist Workers Party in 1940 following a clash on the question of the party’s participation in the anti-fascist Resistance in Spain. Benson was a member of its National Committee and labour editor of its paper, Labor Action.

In 1939, he founded the Association for Union Democracy and was its first Executive Director.

He spoke to Daniel Randall for Solidarity about the debates which are examined in The fate of the Russian Revolution Volume 2: The two Trotskyisms: confronting Stalinism, in which some of his writing from the time is included.

What, for you at the time, were the primary motives for siding with the opposition in 1939-40 battle?

In 1939, I was not an old-time Trotskyist. I had joined the Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL), the group of Norman Thomas’s Socialist Party (SP), in 1930, at the age of 15. By the time the Trotskyists joined the SP, the depression, the rise of Hitler, and the destruction of German Social Democratic Party turned me into a kind of Leninist, but one repelled by crazy antics of “Third Period” Stalinists and then by their popular-front turn. When the Trotskyists left the SP in 1937, I along with many other YPSLers, went with them.

I mention this to explain why I never gave much weight to the complaints against Cannon’s “Socialism, and the MB Reckitt Trial” (just commissioned by us from the same left trade union). They [the “old-time Trotskyists”] went through unexplained factional frictions and personal combinations in the Communist League of America (CLA), the first US Trotskyist group, founded by Cannon, Max Shachtman, and Martin Abern in 1929, not me. Even now, I don’t think our disputes of that period shed any light on the question of the party.

Old-timers could vent their grudges against Cannon, but for me, and most in early opposition, the immediate issue was clear: the Russian invasion of Poland and Finland was an oppressive “imperialist” attack, to be condemned.

At that point, everybody would still be for defence of the Soviet Union if it really came under attack. It took a long period of intricate debate over complex geopolitical issues to free even us from notions of defending one of the most oppressive regimes in history. Some said, “we’re not supporting the regime, only nationalised property”. People like [Albert] Goldman and [Felix] Morrow needed more time.

Do you think that was inevitable? If not, how could it have been avoided?

I do think that the demise was “inevitable”, whatever that word means. Both sides in the 1939/40 dispute disputed on worldwide socialist revolutions in the post-war period. When capitalist democracies and Stalinist dictatorships existed in isolation, the political-social foundation of that position was undermined. The WP splintered, and the SWP, as the book describes, was transformed into something alien.

A kind of desiccated, academic Marxism found refuge in the universities, without connection to workers’ revolution. In the U, most nominally “socialist” currents lost any distinguishable socialist quality. Once, socialism meant concentration of industry in the hands of the state (nationalised property) and a planned economy in a democratic society. Now, each group has transmuted socialism into an amorphous dissatisfaction with the status quo plus whatever their hearts desire. The perspective of a traditional socialist society emerging from a workers’ revolution and a workers’ state has vanished and is not likely to be revived here. In that atmosphere, the WP could not survive.

Do you think the debates of 1939/40 have relevance for socialists today? If so, what is it?

I believe there is a lot to learn from the old WP/SWP dispute, not only for socialists, Marxists and others, but for all crusaders for social justice. In the broadest sense, it reminds us that when our ideology appears somehow to justify “bomber” or an act of oppression, maybe there’s something flawed in our ideology.

More to the point, especially for me, those discussions restore the defence of democracy in society as a central theme not only for socialists but for all who seek social justice.

Reflection on those debates, for those who undertake it, is an antidote for the persisting residue of Stalinist thinking in the labour and socialist movements.

Verses from the first world war: Poets against profiteering

As the First World War progressed, working-class people became more aware of and resentful of those profiteering from their suffering. While men were wounded and died in the trenches, and men, women and children at home suffered appalling poverty, capitalists saw the war as an opportunity to make money. Poets addressed this with anger, and whether he deals in coal or coke, whether he deals in coal or coke,

If any kingly power on high Would not his lightnings rive the oak And raze the forest with a crash? Who shouts “Hooray!” and draws the cash.

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Writing from ‘Somewhere in France’, Private A.W. Dawson introduced his poem by saying, “we’re not defending the regime, only nationalised property”. Hughes had told French daily newspaper Le Matin, “All our sacrifices in the war will be in vain if we leave to Germany the means of recommencing the commercial war”, and made similar calls while visiting troops in France.

The War To End War — New Style

“We’ve a’ d a perhlic bloke down ‘ere of a most particular kind. E was a Practical Man, ‘e ses, ‘an’ ‘e spoke ’is practical mind; ‘An’ ‘e said, “Why ma’ny a bloke out ‘ere?

O’ sticking’ out this blinkin’ war would all

But work’s the good of fightin’ at all if you don’t get away with the swag?”

“An’ ‘e said, ‘You was unprepared for war, an’ for peace it be the same’; But we answered, ‘Soldierin’ isn’t our job, but we’re learnin’ the rules o’ the game, An’ now that we’ve got our ‘and in’ — But ‘e larfed at us louder still. But wot’s the good of fightin’ at all if you don’t get away with the swag?”

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Albert Grieve’s poem was published on 9 September 1916. He also uses a refrain line, “Human life is cheap to-day”, and like Dawson’s, could be cheap to-day.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to find out any definite information about Albert, although there were several soldiers of that name.

Profit and Loss (A Song of the Profiteers)

Not of the fools am I who say That war is waste and cannot pay. Dear is grain, but I don’t complain, And human life is cheap to-day.

Why must these wage-slaves grumble, pray, No sacrifice too great, I say. Our purpose is to crush the Hun, For human life is cheap to-day.

To it, my Soldiers! Win the day, And steal the Teutons’ trade away. The land I feed, and you may bleed, But we’re learnin’ the rules o’ the game, At the devil’s ghastly joke.

The land I feed, and you may bleed,

Our business is to smite and smash;

Who shouts “Hooray!” and draws the cash.

He also uses a refrain line, “Human life is cheap to-day”, and like Dawson’s, could be cheap to-day.

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The land I feed, and you may bleed,
Lies, damned lies, and Jeremy Hunt’s statistics

By Les Hearn

The government’s argument in their attack on junior doctors’ pay and conditions has been that they had a manifesto commitment to introduce seven-day access to all aspects of health care and that this was necessary to reduce excess deaths among weekend hospital admissions.

The government’s approach seems to amount to forcing junior doctors to work more at weekends for less pay. But, unless they also force them to work longer hours, this must reduce the number of doctors on weekdays. If the original problem of excess deaths was due to a lack of junior doctors at weekends, the result would be to equalise death rates by lowering death rates following weekend admissions and raising those following weekday admissions.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt was very keen to talk about the evidence of excess deaths to justify his actions and, of course, evidence is very important. He claimed “we now have seven independent studies showing mortality is higher for patients admitted at weekends.” We will look at this evidence.

The DH says there is significant evidence of a “weekend effect” where patients admitted over the weekend have higher rates of mortality. The DH lists eight pieces of what they call research in support.

1. The major study cited by DH is from the British Medical Journal (Freemantle et al., 2012), also including Keogh. The National Medical Director of NHS England.

2. The DH argues that the highest category, 25% on Saturdays and 29% on Sundays were in this highest category, 25% on Saturdays and 29% on Sundays were in this highest category, 25% on Saturdays and 29% on Sundays were in this highest category.

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The DH’s evidence is aimed at supporting the idea of a 7-day NHS but they themselves, in their introduction, only mention urgent and emergency care and consultant cover. There is nothing about junior doctors.

Of the eight papers, only three provided data and these were updated samples of the same type of data; one showed that the “weekend effect” was international; the other four called for more consultant support and hospital services at weekends and increased funding; none mentioned junior doctors apart from their need for more senior support.

There is very little possible explanation for this — people are admitted at weekends because they have to be — they are much more ill.

Jeremy Hunt’s attack on junior doctors’ pay and conditions (like his support for homeopathy) completely lacks evidence.

Notes
tal-mortality/research-into-the-weekend-effect-on-patient-outcomes-and-mortality
2. Increased mortality associated with weekend hospital admission: a case for expanded seven
day services? Freemantle et al. 2013
http://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h4596
http://ips.sagepub.com/content/105/2/74.full.pdf+html
4. The Global Comparators project: international comparison of 30-day in-hospital mortality by
day of the week
5. From Academy of Medical Royal Colleges
6. Weekend mortality for emergency admissions. A large, multicentre study
7. Professor Sir John Temple: Time for Training
Labour youth and student conferences

**Labour**

By Michael Elms

On the weekend of 26-28 February, the Annual General Meetings of Labour Students and Young Labour will be held in Scarborough.

Previously a bastion of the Blairite right, with a reputation for venal careerism, sinister banality (elected convenors), and barely legal bureaucratic skulduggery, Labour Students has been buffeted by the winds of change following Jeremy Corbyn’s election. Across the UK, Labour Clubs have seen a surge of interest from leftwing young people from September.

This has, naturally, been met with horror from the outgoing leadership. Blairite chieftains issued instructions to Club chairs over the summer to not hold any meetings in the event of a Corbyn win. In this context, left-leaning new members might not notice the existence of Labour Clubs, and leave them alone.

The results of this strategy have been disappointing. From Glasgow to Brighton, Labour Clubs have seen leftwing activists sweep Club Committee elections and organise discussions about big issues like socialism, capitalism, Trident and war, and get stuck into campaign issues from free education, voter registration and nuclear disarmament.

This influx of new life will be reflected at the Labour Students AGM, where leftwing delegates will bring motions on Free Education, Trident and rebuilding the NHS, as well as standing a slate of socialists calling for the renewal of the organisation as a socialist youth movement.

The rightwingers in charge of the political machine that brought you Jim Murphy and Jack Straw are unlikely to give up without a fight. Punishing transport and accommodation costs in addition to hefty ticket prices for the event form a first line of defence; and the Blairite faction in Labour Students has form for spirited hi-jinks such as cheerfully locking leftwingers in cupboards to keep them from the podium... but friends of Solidarity in the party are confident that this year will see big and overdue changes in Labour’s student wing.

The remainder of the weekend will be taken up with the AGM of Young Labour, the organisation for all Labour members under the age of 27. The conference will elect a new leadership and debate policy — itself a concession wrung from years of leftwing agitation, as Young Labour has no constitution of its own and is regarded by some party officials with deep suspicion.

Following a push by Corbyn supporters to get delegates elected, a Critical Friends of the conference floor looks leftwing, and the prospects for a soft-left sweep of the committee are not bad.

But the most important thing that Young Labour activists can decide to do at this year’s conference is simple: build local groups! Young Labour groups are few and far between at the constituency level. The many young people coming into the Labour Party need local organisations, with independent life, and connections to neighbourhoods and communities.

Instead of city-wide or region-wide Young Labour groups that hold big-ticket events with MPs once in a blue moon, the Labour Party needs a youth wing that can be both an activist force and the seed-bed of a renewed socialist left.

**Right-wing press attacks Momentum activists**

By Sacha Ismail

Following the first democratic national committee meeting for Momentum, the Daily Telegraph has published an attack, written by notorious right-wing hack Andrew Gilligan, on people elected from the meeting to the Momentum steering committee, as well as on the organisation more broadly.

The article is full of lies and inventions, including a claim that the Momentum NC was appointed when in fact, following some arguments in Momentum, it was elected by a more democratic process. Gilligan’s attacks focus on individuals. One Momentum Steering Committee member, as a student union salaried officer, criticised pro-war Remembrance events and defended his fellow officer’s decision not to take part.

Another stood as a socialist candidate against Harriet Harman, six years ago. Another — shock, horror — is part of an organisation that defends migrants and refugees. And so on.

All the claims have elements of lying in them, but mostly these comrades are being attacked simply for being socialists.

The Telegraph headline claims that Momentum wants a “ruthless purge” in Labour, but in fact it is the Telegraph obviously pushing for a witch-hunt against Momentum.

The more Momentum develops, the more attacks it will face. It needs to stand firm in the face of the assault and defend the comrades being targeted.

More generally, it needs a clear campaigning agenda — mobilising its supporters to fight for Labour election victories, to shake up the party, and to campaign on big issues like the NHS — so that it can pro-actively push forward regardless of the right wing’s shrieking.

*Labour* and *Right-wing press attacks Momentum activists* are both from *Workers’ Liberty*.

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**Events**

**Thursday 18 February**

Workers’ Liberty London Forum: How to save the NHS

7pm, Indian YMCA, London, W1T 6AQ

bit.ly/NHSLDNforum

**Monday 22 February**

Barnet Momentum... public meeting with John McDonnell MP

7pm, Middlesbury University, Lon- don, NW4 6BT

bit.ly/stoptrident

**Thursday 25 February**

Tyne & Wear Momentum meeting: Fight to save the NHS

7pm, Tyneside Irish Centre, Newcastle, NE1 6GC

bit.ly/TyneNHS

**Saturday 5 March**

March against Lambeth library cuts

10.30, Brixton Library, London, SW2 1JQ

bit.ly/LambethLibrariesMarch

**Sunday 6 March**

Stop Turkey’s war on the Kurds!

1pm, Trafalgar Square, London

bit.ly/kurdishdemo

**Saturday 27 February**

Stop Trident National Demonstration

12 noon, Marble Arch, London

bit.ly/stoptrident

**Campaign for Socialism AGM discusses way forward**

By Brendan Menezes

The Scottish Labour Campaign for Socialism (CfS) held their AGM on Sunday 14th February.

The meeting heard of “Labour plans in both Scotland and the UK to re-frame the current political debate and provide a genuine economic alternative to Tory and SNP austerity.”

Before the AGM, an open meeting was held with talks by Lesley Brennan MSP and the Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell MP, who spoke at length about democ- ratising the economy at the macro level, the personal pressure he faces from the press, and the fact that the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour leadership was “a once in a lifetime opportunity”.

The AGM itself passed a range of motions on energy policy (the North Sea oil industry and tax- ation), abortion rights, and temporary employment contracts, and elections were held for the execu- tive in which Neil Findlay was elected convenor.

Most notably, it was ratified into the constitution that the Scottish Labour Young Socialists (SLYS) would formally become the youth wing of CfS (although fully retain- ing its autonomy as an organisa-
FE colleges pay strike

By a lecturer

On Wednesday 24 February workers in Further Education (FE) colleges in England will strike over pay.

University and College Union (UCU) members struck in November but this time they will be joined by workers who are organised by Unison.

The dispute is in response to the imposition of a pay freeze by the employer organisation, the Association of Colleges. Imposing a pay award without union agreement is an unprecedented action by the employers, but to be expected given the confidence of the employers.

Why are they confident? There has been no serious challenge from the unions to a year on year attack on pay and conditions. The average FE lecturer has lost £5,950 in pay over the last six years resulting from a collapse in the level of pay awards and increment and scale negotiations.

This is bathed in the background radiation of the systematic dismantling of further education, now happening in the form of the government’s area reviews.

Our trade unions have called for an increase in pay of £1 per hour for all college staff. This is a unifying demand, which is good, but the problem is it is attached to the now ritual strategy of striking to protest rather than to win. One and two day strikes are easily absorbed by an employer in a further education setting.

We need to make the 24 February a solid and loud protest against the assault on further education but it also must be the beginning of an urgent demand from unionists on strategies to win, and with urgency.

We cannot wait for a general election, in fact, to make post-16 education a big business, in fact, to make post-16 education a big business. Let us educate ourselves on how to win.

E-ballot or no, fight the Bill

By Gemma Short

A leaked letter from Business Innovation and Skills minister Nick Boles to Oliver Letwin and Chris Grayling shows the government is considering some “concessions” in order to ensure the Trade Union Bill is passed in the House of Lords.

The letter, dated 26 January, suggests that the government is worried that the threshold provisions for strike ballots will not be passed in the House of Lords. They propose to commit to conducting a review into allowing the use of electronic ballots for strikes, something the TUC and most unions have made a prominent part of their campaign against the Bill.

This does not mean that e-ballots will become a reality. There is currently no time-frame on when such a review must report and no guarantee it will report in favour of e-ballots. Boles says in the letter: “I would not propose that we should also announce the period in which the review would report, although I expect us to come under pressure to do so.”

Tellingly the letter says “there are areas of the Bill where we could make changed … without significantly defeating its primary purpose.”

This is a clear response to the TUC’s campaign, which largely focused on the need to e-ballots and the hypocrisy of the government allowing e-ballots for the Conservative party mayoral selection but not for unions. However the pitfall that always existed in this tactic has now come to bite us, we may be given e-ballots as a way of passing all the rest of the attacks on our class in the bill.

Our movement shouldn’t, and should never have, suggest we are anything but opposed to the Trade Union Bill full-stop. We are conceding to the government meddling in our unions’ democratic processes.

At the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom London rally on Thursday 11 February, union leaders including Dave Prentis talked left, saying we should not settle for e-ballots. However, not one person on the platform made suggestions for where the campaign against the bill will or should go now.

The letter also suggests that the government may remove the requirement for picket supervisors to wear an identifying armband and provide their details, but illegal picketing would still become a criminal offence not a civil one.

E-ballots or not, the campaign against the Trade Union Bill must continue.

• Read the leaked letter: bit.ly/TUbillleak
• Unite adopts policy of defiance on Trade Union Bill: bit.ly/TUbillunite

Tube workers to vote on deal

By Ollie Moore

London Underground workers in the RMT and Aslef unions have begun voting on an offer from the company aimed at settling disputes over pay and “Night Tube”.

The company’s proposed settlement is a four-year deal, giving increases in basic pay of 1% or RPI (whichever is higher) until 2019. The offer also includes a bonus for implementing Night Tube, and commitments to explore schemes for improving work/life balance, particularly for drivers.

Although RMT and Aslef are recommending their members accept the offer, many activists are mobilising a no vote. Unite, which also has members on the Tube, has rejected the deal.


“The elements of the offer relating to work/life balance are vague promises rather than firm commitments, and don’t apply to all staff. We should reject this offer and reinstate industrial action to push for a better one.”

ENo singers ballot over cuts

By Peggy Carter

Chorus singers at the English National Opera may strike after the company announced plans for four redundancies and a pay cut of at least 25%.

The singers’ union, Equity, is balloting them for strikes, and has launched a public campaign to oppose the cuts.

The cuts come after the company’s subsidy from Arts Council England was cut by £5m a year. A strike would not be unprecedented, chorus singers struck in 2003 under similar circumstances. The company was given an emergency grant by the Arts Council that time, something which won’t happen this time.

Equity members have labelled the cuts as “cultural vandalism”.

• Sign the petition: bit.ly/ENOpetition

Paramedics win victory over pay

By a paramedic

Paramedics in Yorkshire ambulance service from Unison, Unite and GMB have won a victory on pay after a long battle on the issue.

Paramedics have had a massive increase in their responsibilities in recent years and pressure has been building nationally for this to be reflected in pay. Last year the government recognised this, including a call for issues of recruitment and retention to be addressed in the NHS pay deal, though they went on to refuse to fund this.

Yorkshire unions were the first to ballot on the issue. An informal ballot of Unison (the majority union) paramedic members showed 97.9% for action on a 76% return, and a formal ballot had been prepared. The day before it went out the Trust agreed re-band.

It’s a sectional dispute and there’s still elements to fight on. We need to use this victory to broaden out gains for all our members. But it’s been a big success and given our members a lot of confidence that we can win through a strategy of industrial action.

Other ambulance branches have had their eyes on Yorkshire over this, and there’s a possibility of a national ballot.

Coventry bins unofficial strike

Bin workers in Coventry staged an unofficial strike last Tuesday (9 February) over the suspension of a colleague.

The strike, which lasted a day, happened after a union representative was sacked for putting up a poster advertising a demonstration in support of two other union members who were facing disciplinary hearings.

Workers went back to work on Wednesday 10 February and their union, Unite, is planning a ballot for official strikes if the union rep is not reinstated.
SYRIA: THE NON-CEASEFIRE

By Simon Nelson

On 12 February, talks in Munich produced an agreement to implement a so-called cessation of hostilities in Syria within a week, and allow the delivery of aid to besieged areas.

On 15 February, however, Unicef said that Russia had bombed three hospitals in rebel-held areas, and it is explicit that it will not cease its air strikes against rebel forces. Turkey shelled the positions of Syrian-Kurdish forces on every one of the three days following the Munich agreement. In fact, the risk of direct clashes between Russia and Turkey in Syria has increased, rather than decreased, since the agreement.

The agreement explicitly allowed for bombing against Daesh to continue. The Assad regime said on 15 February that a “ceasefire” did not mean it would “stop using weapons”.

US Secretary of State John Kerry insists that the UN will “work to develop the modalities for a long term and durable cessation of violence”, and rebel spokesman Salim al-Muslat told reporters: “If we see action and implementation, we will see you very soon in Geneva”, but the rebels do not believe that the agreement will produce a real ceasefire.

The Munich deal should at least allow some new supplies to get in to besieged areas, but Ra’ad al Hussein, the UN’s High Commissioner for Human Rights, said: “The warring parties in Syria are constantly sinking to new depths, without apparently caring in the slightest about the death and destruction they are wreaking across the country.

“Women and children, the elderly, the wounded and sick, the disabled are being used as bargaining chips and cannon fodder day after day, week after week, month after month”.

Confirming that Syria remains stuck in a war of attrition, Russian prime minister Dimitri Medvedev said: “The Americans and our Arab partners must think hard about this — do they want a permanent war? All sides must be forced to the negotiating table instead of sparking a new world war”.

Russia’s aim is to force the US and its allies to settle for acquiescence with the Assad regime. It is ramping up the violence so as to present that as the only alternative to chaos and increased bloodshed.

No big faction in Syria, nor any of their major international backers, is able to believe that current negotiations can really bring a cessation of hostilities.

The power play between the Gulf states, the US, the EU, Iran and Russia continues to drag on, leaving the Syrian people to suffer at their hands.

The International Business Times (13 February) reports a count by Turkish officials of around 100,000 Syrian refugees living in nine ad hoc refugee camps set up inside Syria near the Turkish border, and a tenth being built.

Further floods of refugees are likely. Europe — and Britain — should urgently open their doors to these refugees.

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Printed by Trinity Mirror