

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Volume 3 No 173 13 May 2010 30p/80p

an injury to one is an injury to all

**RE-EDUCATING  
THE MOVEMENT**

**PAGE 5**

**EUROZONE  
CRISIS**

**CENTRE PAGES**

**TUBE: JOBS  
FIGHT BEGINS**

**PAGES 14-15**

**Make the  
unions and  
Labour fight  
this  
Tory  
government!**

See page 3

## Cambridge women march for liberation

By JORDAN SAVAGE

**R**eclaim the Night demonstrations have historically been a point of contention within the women's movement. Such marches are often anti-sex work and pro-bourgeois feminism; it has been the job of socialist feminists to fight for class-based, internationalist feminism against a sometimes hostile backdrop.

Cambridge's second Reclaim the Night march since its re-launch last year was different. The demonstration consisted of a self-defining women's demonstration, a vigil open to all genders and a series of talks and music in King's College chapel.

Cambridge University Student's Union women's officer Natalie Szarek kicked off the women's demonstration with a speech about the necessity of anger to the women's movement, something often side-lined by the apologetic nature of post-feminism, keen to deny the radical feminist identity of 1980s feminism.

She commented on the need for women's organisation in the workers' movement, and the problematic question of the Policing and Crime Bill, that outlawed the purchase of sex in many situations from the first of April this year.

The demonstration was 300 strong, with a noisy, assertive demonstration shouting "sexist, racist, anti-gay, you can't take my night away" and "Women, unite! Reclaim the night!", and a men's vigil under the auspices of the White Ribbon campaign which highlights men's role in ending violence against women.

Speakers included one of the White Ribbon campaigner's full-timers, a representative of Rape Crisis UK and UK Feminista's Kat Banyard — who gave an enlightening talk about the personal experience of those who suffer violence against women, as well as outlining her more problematic position on sex work. She was followed by Feminist Fightback and Workers' Liberty activist Cathy Nugent, who, outlining an anti-capitalist vision, reminded us of the importance of women's resource centres and inter-struggle solidarity.

The show was stolen by socialist-feminist Faith Taylor's performance of American folk song 'Caleb Meyer', about a woman who fights off her attacker and holds him to justice. The event was passionate and truly empowering, and highlighted the potential for socialist ideas to take hold in the women's movement as a whole.

## SATS BOYCOTT

# Test boycott hits, but not hard enough

Standardised Assessment Tests for 10 and 11 year olds were supposed to take place 10-13 May, but have been boycotted by head teachers in the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

An East London Year 6 teacher and NUT member explains the limitations and the importance of the SATs boycott.

**T**hey are boycotting the test in my school and in my borough. There is about a 50% take up of the boycott. My impression is that there are pockets where the take up is less than that and pockets where it is more. The information coming out from the NUT is a 50-70% take up rate.

I think it has been an effective campaign, as the idea was to screw the League Tables and we will achieve that. We only needed 20-25% of schools to operate the boycott to achieve that.

The only goal of the campaign is to spoil the League Tables. But then the campaign has been watered down. In the end only the senior leadership were involved in the ballot. And the wording on the ballot was that SATs puts "unreasonable stress" on the pay and conditions of senior management. The unions were worried that if they involved other teaching staff in schools in the action it would be illegal. And the thinking was that, in any case, as teaching for SATs only involves one or two people those people could have been left isolated.

But when the senior leadership team involved there is always a different agenda. Even in my school, which is quite progressive on this and other issues, there has been little filtering

down from the management to teachers about the boycott, little discussion. Mostly senior staff agree about testing in general — they might say "let's do this test a week later". They don't have to teach the test so they don't really understand the issues fully. If the government had said they wouldn't publish the League Tables then senior staff might not have gone for the boycott.

So there has been nothing in this campaign that has said this form of assessment is wrong.

The students in my school have been thrilled that we are not doing SATs. But I've explained why we are not doing it and in any case I haven't been preparing them for the test! The more middle-class parents have also been very with it. Others are not so sure what is going on.

In some schools heads will do the test because it is expected. And children have been asking some heads to do the test — they've been working hard for the test all year and so they want to do it. But it isn't compulsory for year six class teachers to "teach to the test", they can continue with the national curriculum.

In fact it is technically compulsory for year 6 students to get a rounded and whole education, not just revision — that's the national curriculum (kind of) and the only statutory thing we have to teach. But teaching to the test is so widely accepted, that no one thinks twice at students who after nine months of prep are disappointed at not being able to prove themselves.

If heads didn't allow "teaching for the test" then they wouldn't be in the position of feeling they have to do the test now!

Part of the problem is that this boycott

has all been very last minute. The ballot was very late. Then the executives of the NUT and the National Association of Head Teachers met to decide what to do. Then the Headteachers in each area had to decide what to do and it was an autonomous decision for each head. My impression is that head teachers are not ringing each other, not speaking to each other.

But I do think it will have an impact. We will have to wait to September to see whether that impact is lasting. The Tories say they want to abolish SATs but we do not know what they want to replace them with. They will want to strengthen the testing regime in primary schools.

I think these tests are less about the students and more about controlling what teachers teach, about terrifying teachers, about saying "are you good enough?" "can you get your students up to level 4"? The subject matter is very functional.

In literacy the language is very class-specific. For instance in one test I saw, there was a story about an eco-warrior who went to build a tree house in his garden. My students didn't know what a tree house was!

Year Six teachers really feel this pressure unless they are that kind of careerist-minded teacher who doesn't mind ticking boxes and is happy not to use their imagination or powers of thinking.

At least this boycott will give teachers a taste of control, a sense of ownership over what we are doing. It's of the moment, but it could be a big deal, it might lead somewhere in the future.

## Australian Labor government beats down teachers' revolt

**A**ustralian state school teachers took it to the brink this month, when their union declared itself willing to defy legal rulings against their boycott of NAPLAN tests (similar to SATs in Britain).

But in the end a brutal, unashamedly union-bashing approach from the federal Labor government made the union back down. The tests are going ahead, from 10 May.

The New South Wales Teachers' Federation, the largest and historically the most left-wing of the state organisations that make up the federal Australian Education Union, remained defiant longest, but eventually buckled on Thursday night 6 May.

The AEU leaders claim they have won a concession — a "working party", with AEU representation, to study ways of stopping the NAPLAN results being used for British-style "league tables" of schools — but it is only a sop.

The Labor government's project of collating NAPLAN results on a website

has been condemned not only by the state school teachers' union, but also by teachers from private schools, including those which get the highest rankings in the scheme.

The principal of the selective Melbourne High School describes the scheme as "a piece of crock".

Federal education minister and deputy prime minister Julia Gillard started by urging parents' groups to intervene and administer the tests.

Then state Labor governments got industrial court rulings against the boycott, making individual teachers liable for fines of up to \$6600 (about £4000).

The New South Wales government sent government officials to seize the test papers from school principals, and phoned principals to say that their schools' funding, or their own careers, would be at risk if they boycotted.

The teachers' union should not have backed down. But it should also have got much more vocal support from other unions. Gillard's victory is a blow

not only against education but also against trade unionism.

The Australian Labor Party, unlike the British, has a more-or-less recognised "left faction", sustained and in large part organised by "left" unions.

But the leading political figure of that "left" is... Julia Gillard.

As Christine Wallace, author of a biography of Gillard, writes (*The Monthly*, October 2009): "The Labor left is 'the other' of the ALP; historically, it was a refuge for those repelled by the grubby, money-oriented deal-doings of some on the party's right. In recent decades it has been, disproportionately, the place talented women in the party call home.

"The left is not... something Gillard once was and isn't anymore. Rather, it's a place that Gillard... passed through on her way to the top".

The unions and Labor activists need to build a left which is not just a corridor to high office.

## AFTER THE ELECTION

# Make unions and Labour fight this Tory government

**T**he new Tory/Lib Dem coalition government is committed to cut brutally and deeply into the living standards of the working class — into our wages and into social spending.

The Tory commitment to reduce the national debt in the shortest possible time, and to do so while also cutting taxes, implied the most severe cuts. Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg has also promised “bold and savage cuts”.

The Tories as the leading party in government are now in a position to carry out their threats. There will be cuts as savage as the working class will let them get away with. Cuts as in Greece, if they can.

We already face a now-established judges' interpretation of the anti-union laws which means that employers like BA or Network Rail can halt almost any big strike by going to court and saying there has been this or that blemish in the ballot.

We may face new anti-union laws, giving the government power to ban any strike in public services and impose binding arbitration instead. (Such laws are Lib Dem policy, and Vince Cable repeated the message during the election campaign).

The big question of politics in the period ahead is what the labour movement and the working class will do about it. That depends to a serious extent on what the socialists will do.

Even a year ago it looked possible that the Labour Party would become a focus of working-class political and trade-union opposition to Tory government policy once Labour was out of office, and perhaps after some time had passed and the Labour Party leadership had changed.

The surprising thing now is the extent to which, even before the election, Labour could become the political focus for working-class fear of the Tories. Even prime minister Gordon Brown, Tony Blair's Chancellor of the Exchequer for a decade, could articulate that fear and tap into working-class memories of the Thatcher Tories in the 1980s.

Gordon Brown seems to have struck a chord of awareness among traditional Labour working-class voters by beating the alarm drum against what the Tories will do to working-class people given the chance. He could do that even while he was insisting that Labour, if re-elected, would itself make severe cuts.

In any case the Labour vote held up surprisingly well for a party which had been in government for 13 years and which six months or a year ago looked as if it would face meltdown in the general election.

Labour did well in the local government elections held on 6 May. In the parliamentary election, the Tories, who had seemed to be heading for a crushing victory over Labour, failed even to get a majority. Despite briefly rising high in the opinion polls, the Lib Dems did no better than in 2005. The BNP suffered severe losses and the disappointment of its expectations. Smaller left parties all did poorly.

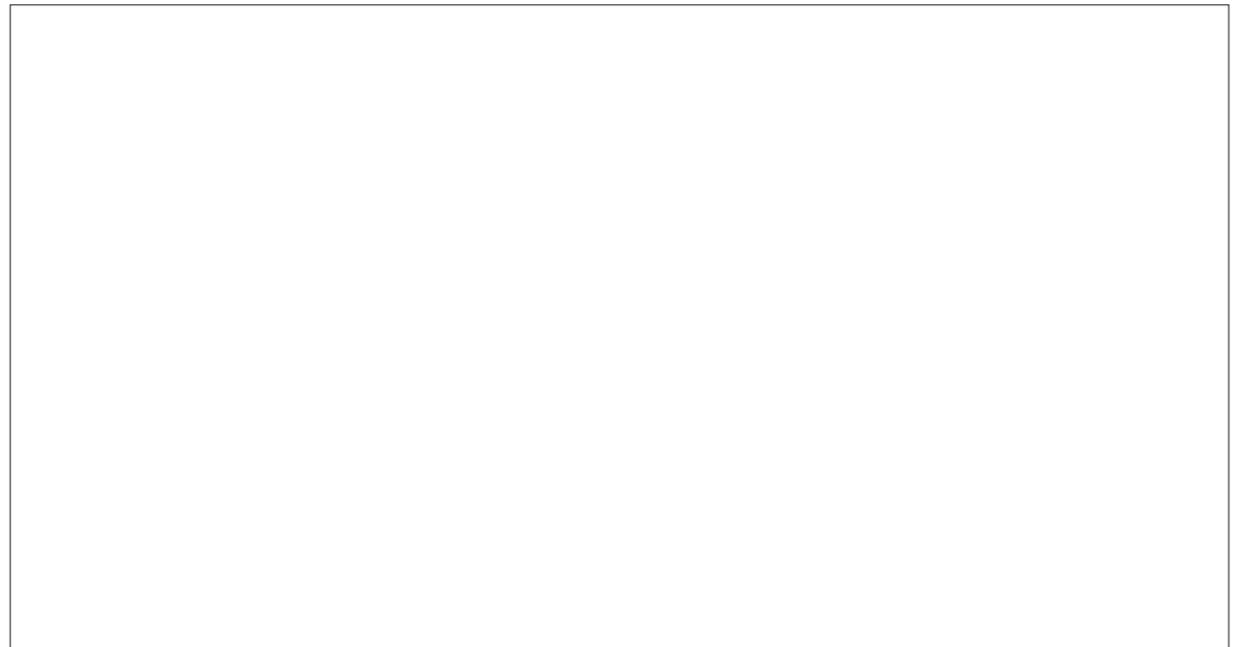
**A**ny coalition government has a built-in fault-line. That said, this government is likely to be a stable government that will last for years and maybe for the duration of this parliament.

Once “bloodied” by their initial wave of cuts, the coalition partners will want to stick together.

We have seen in Greece the social turmoil into which the country has been plunged by a government determined to carry through the will of the international bankers and a labour movement determined to resist.

The British working class too will resist!

The cuts will come in a situation where capitalist profits and revenues are soaring again, and prices may be rising rapidly. If it is not like that, they will be cuts in a “double-dip” recession, and people's patience about “sitting out” the first “dip” will wear thinner by the second “dip”. The prospects for resistance are greater than in the dull semi-boom period of 1992-2007, or the



Now in a position to carry out his threats

stunned financial-collapse period of 2008-9.

When Nick Clegg warned of a Tory government provoking “Greek-style unrest” or “serious social strife”, he was right about what will face the government in which he is now deputy prime minister.

If it were a Labour or Lib/ Lab government attempting to impose cuts, in the interests of placating the bankers, the working class movement would be inhibited and open to the blackmailing Labour government argument: “tolerate what we do, or let the Tories come to power and impose worse”. This Tory/Lib Dem government is more likely to evoke serious resistance.

The unions face a challenge, both industrially and politically. Ten years of “new realism” in the last period of the last Tory government and the early Blair years; another ten years of supposed “awkward-squadism” which produced not much more than occasional protest strikes and demoralised clutching at small concessions from a boomtime, public-spending-increasing New Labour government; and two years of being stunned by the crisis, have left us with a big hill to climb in order to regroup and reorient.

The trade union leaders are only too likely to continue to play a wretched role. But the political context is now changed radically.

The warnings against the Tories from the unlikely, and to a large extent hypocritical, figure of Brown — warnings which did, it seems, rally a lot of working-class Labour support at the end of the election campaign — will still echo in the labour movement and may, whatever Brown intended, help prepare resistance. They struck a keynote of Labour Party and labour movement opposition to what the Tories and Lib Dems will do. It is not our keynote but it is a note of opposition to the new regime.

In the past things which have entered into our history as great rank-and-file explosions, like for example the strike of a quarter of a million workers when five dockers were jailed for illegal picketing in July 1972, were in fact prepared for by the attitudes and gestures of less-than-adequate labour movement leaders.

The 1972 explosion was primed by a three-year campaign by the TUC against first Labour's failed attempt to bring in anti-union laws in 1969, and then the Tory laws that reached the statute books.

The sort of alarm-calling Brown did in the general election can resonate in the working class and the labour movement, irrespective of Brown despite Brown.

**T**he New Labour era has come to an end. But is it the end of New Labour? Not necessarily. Most of the probable candidates for a new leader are mired in New Labourism.

Labour's election performance means the New Labour gang are less discredited than they deserve.

Yet the prospect of a “radical” regroupment of Lib Dems and New Labour has been wrecked by the Lib Dem decision to participate in a Tory-dominated government. The invertebrate liberals of the *Guardian* and *Observer* fondly advocated a Lib Dem vote on the grounds that it would change British politics forever. The Lib Dem support for a Tory-led government shows how off-beam they were.

The Lib Dems are likely to emerge from this coalition government deflated and discredited. There is already talk of an exodus of Lib Dem activists towards Labour. In general, the Tory/Lib Dem coalition is cutting the “moderate” ground from under the feet of the New Labour gang.

Now the labour movement is either going to roll over and take what the Tory/Lib Dem coalition dishes out, or resist what even the New Labour prime minister Brown has described in advance as unjust and destructive cuts.

**M**uch depends on what the union leaders do, and much also depends on what happens within Labour in response to its defeat.

The Blair-Brown gang deliberately gutted the old Labour Party, changing its structures to block off all the channels which allowed working-class voices to be heard in it. In the election campaign, trade unions had to step in to compensate for the consequent weakness of local Labour Parties by sending activists and organisers to key constituencies across the country.

What is necessary, and what thinking labour movement people know is necessary, is fight to revive the Labour Party as, firstly, a real party with an active and power-wielding membership, and secondly, a working-class-based party.

There will calls and initiatives for the Labour Party to move that way in the period of conflict that will now open up. The Labour leaders have already conceded a commitment to restore the right of unions and local Labour Parties to send motions to Labour Party conference. What is needed is a full-scale restoration of Labour Party structures and the old “open valve” between the unions and the Labour Party.

Continued on page 4

# Make unions and Labour fight this Tory government

From page 3

Side by side with trade-union and community resistance to the Tory/Lib Dem government must go the urgent work of restoring a viable Labour Party.

That is difficult. We will start from a very low base. The local Labour Parties are depleted and demoralised. The union leaders are wretched.

Is it possible? Yes it is, if the unions and the socialists organise and fight to make it so.

In the years to come, the New Labour years are likely to come to seem less objectionable than socialists know them to have been, if only because of the general prosperity that lightened them but came to an end with the banking crisis of 2008.

But people will become aware that a critical measure of the New Labour years is the condition in which they leave the labour movement now, faced by the onslaught of the Tory/Lib Dem government.

The conditions demand the creation of a vigorous rank and file campaign for the political renewal of the whole labour movement, a renewal which might restore the working-class parliamentary representation that, in large part, the New Labour gang wiped out.

We can help develop a broad political mobilisation on the big issues of the coming years by building a united-front coalition on a limited platform, essentially:

- Oppose cuts, tax the rich, cut military spending;
  - Repeal the anti-union laws, establish a right to organise, to strike, and to picket;
  - For working-class political representation. For Labour Party conference to be able to make political decisions binding on the Labour leadership.
  - For the right of unions to finance political parties, and against state funding of political parties.
- In 1980 the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory organised for the 1979 general election was able to go forward to pull together a coalition called the Rank and File Mobilising Committee for Labour Democracy which eventually

had affiliation, at least nominally, from every group of the Labour left. Today a united front could be sought of the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists, the Labour Representation Committee, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, some existing union left groups or even one or two small unions, and maybe other groups.

Such a coalition would be especially valuable for organising politically in the unions (and not only Labour-affiliated unions) on a broad scale. The simple task of winning support and sponsorship for it from union branches and committees, and from Trades Councils, would provide great openings for political activity.

## Inside Labour, it's not going to be easy

**P**ete Willsman is secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and a member of the Labour Party National Executive. He spoke to *Solidarity* about his views on the election result.

On the doorstep I always thought that the talk of the Liberal surge was exaggerated. But the Liberals did even worse than I expected.

The Labour Party did slightly worse than I expected. There were definitely more people out working for Labour than the other parties. The unions turned a lot of people out to work for Labour, though after the record of the last 13 years you might expect them not to. I suppose they were scared of the prospect of a Tory government.

Overall, the result was pretty much as I expected, though I expected Labour would come a bit closer to the Tories in seats won.

By going in with the Tories, the Liberals will do themselves a lot of harm in Labour areas, though elsewhere many Lib Dems are just Tories anyway.

The Liberals have given the Tories a lot of power. The Tories may call a snap election when it suits them, and we could then have a Tory majority government.

I'm totally opposed to proportional representation. Everyone was saying that proportional representation would give power to a natural centre-left alliance, but now the Liberals have gone in with the Tories.

With PR, in my view, we'd have constant Tory-Liberal or Labour-Liberal coalition governments. Anyone on the left who supports PR is stupid.

The TV debates have also had a bad effect. In the Labour Party now everyone is obsessed with the TV debates and the need to have a "show pony" to perform in them. It demeans politics. It reduces it to something like politics in America, which is what the Blairites always wanted.

The New Labour agenda is still moving on. The Liberals and Cameron support a lot of the New Labour agenda.

Inside the Labour Party we've got to get more democracy — and find a candidate who both can win and will bring in more democracy and move away from neo-liberalism. It's not going to be easy.

## Back John McDonnell!

**L**ast November, at the Labour Representation Committee conference, left-wing Labour MP John McDonnell told us: "If there is a new Labour leadership election, I will stand again".

As we understand it, he is likely to make a formal announcement soon about entering the contest now opened up by Gordon Brown's resignation.

McDonnell also put himself forward as a candidate in 2007, when Tony Blair resigned. He told us last November: "Last time we were severely limited by minimal resources, but we did take issues out into the affiliated unions.

"We tried to ensure that there was a debate in the constituency parties, too, and that happened to a certain extent. We were killed off by the centralised control of the nomination process.

"What we need to do different this time, I think, is to make the debate much wider, much broader. We have to be much more media-savvy, use the media more effectively, and take the debate into the social movements as well.

"It will be focused around a post-mortem — around what happened to a government that turned on its own supporters."

Ken Livingstone, former mayor of London and even-more-former left-winger, has claimed that the leadership contest will offer "a clear choice between left and right".

In Livingstone's picture, however, "David Miliband will be the candidate of the right and we are not yet clear

whether it will be Ed Balls or Ed Miliband as the candidate of the left".

The media are giving the same story, defining "right" and "left" in the Labour Party by allegiance to a clique round Blair or a clique round Brown.

In fact Labour under Brown was no more left wing than Labour under Blair.

Ed Balls has just been urging school governors to tell head teachers to stay away from school during the SATs tests this month so that the governors can go into the school and break the unions' boycott on SATs. Ed Miliband was the Energy Minister who refused to budge when the Vestas wind turbine blade workers, occupying their factory, demanded nationalisation to save their jobs and green energy production.

Jon Cruddas is also named by the media as a possible "left" candidate. David Miliband is said to have asked Cruddas to run with him as deputy leader, to make a "dream ticket" supposedly combining right and left.

Cruddas talks vaguely about returning Labour to its roots, but is not left-wing. He proposes a cut in the union vote at Labour Party conference from just under 50% to 33%. From 1997-2001 he was a Downing Street aide to Tony Blair. He voted for the Iraq war.

McDonnell will be the clear left candidate in the election. His campaign in 2007 drew big meetings round the country despite the rules making it very difficult for him to get enough nominations to enter the actual vote-out.

## AV? PR? STV?

**T**he Tory-Liberal government say they will hold a referendum on the Alternative Vote system. It retains constituencies and "first past the post", but people cast second, third, fourth, etc, preferences as well as first-preference votes, and the winner gets "past the post" only when transferred preferences take him or her past 50% of the turnout.

Like the current system AV leaves smaller parties (other than those with a very localised base) without representation. But it makes parties' "transfers" — their recommendations as to how the voters who rank them no.1 should use their second, third, etc. preferences — very important.

The Lib Dems, who have long wanted proportional representation, have

accepted AV as a good-enough electoral reform for a coalition deal.

It makes no sense for socialists to be last-ditch defenders (on spurious grounds of "ensuring stable government" or the like) of a "first past the post" system producing obviously distorted results.

But it is not true that electoral reform would be a decisive step forward for the left.

We also have to look at who is pushing PR, and the reasons why they advocate what they do.

The key to political progress would still lie with political mobilisation in the roots of the labour movement, not in electoral technique.

The political system in Britain needs much more than tinkering with the vote-counting system before it will be anything like real democracy.

## Galloway defeated

**O**ne good thing about the 6 May results: it looks as if George Galloway is finally out of British politics.

In 2004 Galloway, expelled from the Labour Party, was offered a troop of activists to sustain him as a political figure by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), who founded the Respect movement with Galloway as figure-head.

The SWP hoped that Respect would enable them to win over Muslim youth brought onto the streets by the marches against the Iraq war, and so agreed to overlook Galloway's record of friendship with leading figures in Saddam Hussein's regime; of taking money from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates for his political enterprises; and of never being particularly left-wing even in Labour Party terms.

By 2007 Galloway and the SWP had fallen out. The SWP hived off, leaving Galloway with a rump. However, Galloway had been elected as MP for Bethnal Green and Bow in 2005, and Respect had won 12 seats on Tower Hamlets council in 2006, so the rump Respect still had hopes as an electoral if not as a grass-roots activist force.

On 6 May Galloway's designated successor, Abjol Miah, finished third in Bethnal Green and Bow. Galloway himself, moving to the neighbouring constituency of Poplar and Limehouse, also finished third.

The twelve Tower Hamlets Respect councillors of 2006 had already been whittled down by defections, and after 6 May only one remains.

Respect still has three council seats in Birmingham. Only one of those was up for contest on 6 May, and Salma Yaqoob defended that successfully. She also did relatively well in the parliamentary election, winning 25% and coming second in Hall Green.

This may be partly because Yaqoob has a more left-wing — and less demagogic! — political profile than Galloway, and, although a religious Muslim herself, is less Muslim-communalist than the Catholic Galloway.

The 1917 Russian revolution: congress of soviets (workers' councils). We urgently need to explain the necessity of a working-class democratic socialist alternative

## AFTER THE ELECTION

# Re-educating the movement

**E**verywhere the financial and economic crisis has brought discredit and odium on capitalism, on capitalists, on bankers, and on their snouts-in-the-trough politicians.

Nowhere, in the election campaign just past, did that truth find any expression. Nowhere at all near the main flow of the contest was there any socialist critique of capitalism.

Nowhere is there a strong movement animated by the conviction that there is a socialist alternative to capitalism, and fighting to win it.

Nowhere is there a strong working-class movement armed with the Marxist view of capitalism's transient place in history of what must be done to replace it with a better, fairer, more democratic, non-exploitative form of economic and social organisation — socialism.

We have seen a Republican administration in the USA and New Labour politicians in Britain use the state to bail out the bankers with public money — that is, recognising the necessity of social regulation of the economy, and bestowing "socialism" on the very rich.

Bosses' governments serve a system in which the gains are private, while the massive losses of the ruling class are socialised.

Yet we do not have any widespread understanding that yes, social regulation of the economy is what is needed, but it should be done by and for the majority of society and not just for the rich.

Capitalism and capitalists are, in a limited sense, discredited. Socialism, for now, is even more discredited. It is marginalised.

And this in a situation in which, in Britain and other countries — in Greece already — we are mostly likely in for years of turmoil and class conflict.

Yet the events of the last two years provide tremendous proof that the basic ideas of Marxist socialism, and our understanding of capitalism, are correct.

• Capital, by its own processes, has concentrated and centralised itself so much that, for instance, the two mortgage companies which the USA nation-

alised in 2008 controlled three-quarters of all new mortgages in that enormous country of 300 million inhabitants.

• The gigantic capitalist enterprises have already to a very great extent been socialised — organised on a society-wide basis. Within states and internationally, they control very large areas of society. But they are "social-ised" by capitalist profiteers and run on their behalf, by their governments. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, it is socialisation of the very rich, by the very rich, for the very rich.

• Government intervention to regulate, administer, and sometimes rescue those gigantic enterprises is necessary if society is not to break down. Even the most right-wing bourgeois government ideologists proclaim this loudly! Even froth-at-the-mouth advocates of big business and "the free market" understood that and acted on it in 2008.

• In so far as governments intervene, they do it as governments of the big bourgeoisie, to preserve this system, run for private profit. Even when they are forced in the interests of the capitalist class as a whole to nationalise enterprises, everything is done for, or mainly for, the big bourgeoisie. These governments rule for the bourgeoisie.

• The working class, and working people in general, need a government of our own, a workers' government that will serve our interests. That government will organise the already-socialised economy in the common interest, not in the bourgeois interest.

It will expropriate the bourgeoisie and substitute proper, continuous, planning for the gyrations of the market. It will organise the economy for human need, and for the preservation of the environment on which humankind depends — not for the greed of those who now run the economy and society in their own private interests. It will socialise the gains.

Society moves spontaneously, in its normal capitalist workings, towards the socialisation of the economy. Frederick Engels called that "the invading socialist society". Like a human pregnancy, this "socialisation" needs to be delivered

from its integument before it is a viable independent organism.

"Socialism" needs to be delivered from the rule, and the highly structured anarchy, of the capitalist profiteers and the governments prepared to loot society on their behalf.

The left is not ready for the situation we are now entering: we must make it ready.

We must muster sufficient forces to seize the chance to explain to our class the craziness of the system under which we live and the possibility of something better. To explain that a working-class democratic socialist alternative is necessary, urgently necessary, and that it can be won. To explain that democracy is more than the very shallow, merely political thing which, at best, it is now, under the bourgeoisie.

That real democracy, democracy worthy of the name, must be democratic control of the economy on which society and humanity depend, as well as a greatly expanded and deepened political democracy. That a socialist revolution of the working class is necessary. And that it is, now as in Russia in 1917, when the working class seized power, possible.

One of the great lessons of the 20th century is that there is no such thing as an insoluble crisis for capitalism. Given time, given the chance to hold on tight, given the lack of a politically coherent alternative to itself, it recovers.

Economic devastations, immensely tragic for vast numbers of people and even for individual capitalists, can, paradoxically, clear the way for capitalist economic revival. The manic-depressive system climbs out of the trough and begins a rise to peaks from which it will again, in time, plunge down. The cycle goes on.

Capitalism will not jump into history's abyss; it has to be knocked on the head and resolutely pushed!

In the first place, now, socialists must not only organise united fronts in class-struggle clashes but also, and urgently, do basic educational work in the labour movement and the working class.

Given the state of the left and would-be left, doing that basic educational

work on a large scale is ruled out without a radical change in attitudes and modus operandi.

The SWP confines itself to often trivial, and almost always limited and reformistic, agitation and demands. The SP limits itself to the same sort of thing, plus an undertone of stodgy and apology-voiced lowest-common-denominator "socialism" and the invocation of a "new workers' party" on undefined politics. Others fantasise about revolution soon.

Yet in principle there is no reason why the Marxist socialist groups, all of whom pay lip-service to the basic Marxist ideas about capitalism and the alternative to it, should not unite to create a socialist educational movement.

There are precedents and parallels. For over half a century, a basic "non-party" Marxist education society did good work in the labour movement. It was known at first as the Plebs League and for decades as the National Council of Labour Colleges. Its existence facilitated socialist cooperation in the class struggle; but it was eventually, in the early 1960s, merged with the TUC education department.

In the mid 1960s, for a while, Marxist socialists cooperated to launch a "Centre for Socialist Education" which did limited but good work.

The fundamental advantage of such a body is that it could probably exercise in the labour movement an influence on the level of basic Marxist socialist education that would be far greater than the sum of the work of its components acting separately. It could also stimulate real discussion on wider issues among its socialist component parts.

Comrades who have the welfare of the labour movement at heart and who feel the urgent need for socialists to act in the crisis of the capitalist system will see the enormous advantages of such a socialist united front for education. We ask them to think about.

We appeal to Marxist socialists to discuss with us how this proposal might be realised, and we commit ourselves to do as much as we can in this direction, however many or few allies we can get.

## FASCISM

# BNP set back, but far from finished

By CHARLIE SALMON

**T**he BNP's drubbing in Barking, where they lost all their previous 12 council seats to Labour, and elsewhere is very good news indeed.

Some will see the BNP's defeat as a proof that bland "don't vote Nazi" messages and music festivals work.

But the Hope not Hate campaign in Barking, though formally "non-partisan", was in fact very closely tied to Labour, and must have been seen by local voters as such. Labour MP Margaret Hodge's majority increased as a result of the extra campaigning. In the grand scheme, and as compared to the alternative of the BNP gaining ground, this is all good.

We should be happy about these BNP results in Barking — and the fact that they fared no better in their Stoke-on-Trent target seats. However the BNP got steady percentages elsewhere — 10.4% in Rotherham, 8.9% in Barnsley Central, 8.6% in Barnsley East and 7.7% in Rother Valley. In Dagenham and Rainham their share of the vote rose from 4.4% to 11.2%.

And if the "government question" remains unresolved over some time, with a possibly unstable coalition, then the BNP will adapt.

The conditions that have allowed for the BNP's organisational growth and previous electoral victories remain and are likely to intensify in the short-term. Another general election in a short time provide new opportunities.

## No room for complacency

Dave Malbon, Secretary of Barking, Dagenham & Havering Together, spoke to Solidarity.

**T**he BNP's spectacularly poor results in Barking and Dagenham, and elsewhere in east London, are obviously very heartening.

There were some elements of luck involved — the emergence of a video of a local BNP candidate attacking Asian youths on the streets damaged them. Having the council elections take place at the same time as a general election was also important; we knew that the BNP didn't want a high turnout.

But the campaigning that was done in the area particularly by Hope not Hate and UAF was also absolutely vital to wiping the BNP out of Barking and Dagenham council. The targeted campaigning was most effective; we worked to target particular groups of voters and particular areas, with material specifically tailored around the issues that mattered in each ward.

It's no coincidence that the BNP's losses were Labour's gains. In Havering, the BNP's electoral base isn't traditionally Labour, but in Barking and Dagenham it's very much ex-Labour-supporting white working-class people who've gone over to the BNP. Even though Hope Not Hate and UAF ran "non-partisan" campaigns, it was inevitable that if



**Nick Griffin. His party suffered a crucial setback but they are not defeated.**

Depending on how things pan out, the BNP or any successor organisations (the party is currently an explosive mix, and we can expect to see some ramifications for the defeats) could easily turn to EDL-type activity, i.e. a return to previous patterns of street fascism.

If the economic situation gets worse and as cuts make an impact, the working class and working-class organisations are not, as yet, in a position to counter the nationalist and racist sentiments that could emerge as easy "answers".

The BNP are not "defeated". We should continue to propagandise for and where possible organise working-class

people in Barking and Dagenham were going to be mobilised to vote against the BNP they were going to vote for Labour. I think the non-partisan approach is right, though; anti-fascists have got to mobilise whichever group of voters is most likely to keep the BNP out.

There's no room for complacency now. The BNP have been wiped out as a force in official politics in this area but that could create the potential for a turn towards the "street-level" type of organising we saw from the far-right in the 1970s and which we've been seeing recently from the EDL. The anti-fascist movement has to guard against that; we've got to win hearts and minds and keep distributing literature that keeps making the arguments.

Crucially, the movement needs to put a lot of pressure on Labour to make sure there is action on the issues, like housing, that the BNP were able to exploit in the first place. The Labour councillors and MPs have to deliver.

Trade unions are even more central now, as they're the organisations that can really put pressure on Labour in power. Barking, Dagenham and Havering Together came out of the local Trades Council, and we'll be looking to embed ourselves further in the local trade union movement after the election and look at how we can carry on campaigning on the key issues.

# The unions in and after the election

By MARTIN THOMAS

**U**nite put a lot of effort into the general election campaign. In practical terms, it was valuable, for example in helping to push back the BNP in Barking.

But it was accompanied by no effort at all to push a distinctive political message, even on issues where Unite has clear union policy. Mailings to Unite members appealed to them to vote Labour on such grounds as trusting in the "experience" of the government as against the untried Tories.

On 11 May Unite joint general secretaries Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson put out a statement supporting a Labour/Lib Dem coalition. If that had come off — and it now looks as if it was never really on the cards — it would have meant giving the New Labour right wing a huge counterweight to union and working-class demands in the shape of Lib Dem coalition partners whose policies include new legislation to allow the government to ban strikes in public services.

Unison was more dignified, implicitly criticising the coalition talks, saying that the election result did not mean a popular mandate for cuts, and promising that the union will organise to fight those cuts.

The record of the Unison leadership, however, makes that promise untrustworthy — unless left-wing challenger Paul Holmes can oust sitting general secretary Dave Prentis in the current Unison leadership election.

GMB supported Labour in the election campaign, but quietly, except in support for the anti-fascist campaign Hope Not Hate. It has made no statement since 6 May.

The post and telecom union CWU was also quiet, putting out an edition of its union newspaper in early May which said... nothing about the election. It has made no comment since 6 May, though the Tory/Lib Dem government is sure to go for privatising Royal Mail.

The rail union RMT contributed actively to winning re-election for left Labour MP John McDonnell, but said almost nothing about the election on its website.

The lecturers' union UCU has already felt the sharp edge of cuts in further and higher education, and struck in several London colleges on 5 May. But its general secretary Sally Hunt responded to the election like this: "The new government has a unique opportunity to build a national consensus that puts education at the heart of our recovery".

As well say that the election of Joseph Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI gave the new pontiff a unique chance to promote atheism, if he should wish to. Hunt justified her optimism by claiming that the "public expects Lib Dems to deliver" on their policy to abolish university tuition fees.

The civil service workers' union PCS put out a statement on 7 May which quoted general secretary Mark Serwotka presenting his chief concern after the election as... pushing for proportional representation! As if Nick Clegg needed

**Tony Woodley supported the idea of a Labour/Lib Dem coalition**

more boosting...

Presumably drafted or approved by the Socialist Party, which has a controlling influence in PCS, the statement claimed, surreally, that the "outcome [of the election] shows the public have rejected the main Westminster parties".

Unison had commented, accurately, that the 6 May result could not be taken as showing any popular mandate for cuts. PCS "improved" that comment into the idiotic claim: "Election result is a rejection of cuts agenda".

It went on, fatuously, to propose as the PCS alternative to cuts... stricter tax collection.

"The public have rejected the main parties"? The three biggest parties got 88.1% of the vote. That share was down 1.4% on 2005. UKIP and the BNP increased their share by 2.1% (mostly by standing more candidates than in 2005).

Votes for parties that could even arguably be reckoned to the left of the three biggest parties went down, not up.

TUSC, the electoral front run by the SP (with some participation from SWP), got 0.04% of the vote.

For socialists to use elections as a sounding-board even when they can win only a small vote may make sense. For them to claim that their 0.04% of the vote shows that the public has rallied to them and rejected the parties that got 88.1% of the vote is stupid.

Evidently the big majority of working-class people who want a fight against cuts voted Labour. That will not have been because they trusted Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling to stop cuts — they are not stupid — but because they thought they would have more leverage against cuts with a Labour government than with a Tory or Tory-led government.

Activists in the unions need to organise now to use that potential for leverage which comes from Labour's links with the unions. More: we need to organise to make the anti-cuts majority shown by opinion polls into an effective industrial and political force.

The unions should map out a programme of agitation, rallies, demonstrations, and escalating industrial action now, rather than "waiting and seeing". And they should intervene to reclaim a working-class voice in the Labour Party, and to turn the Labour Party — or at least sections of it — into a political force for the anti-cuts fight.

## UNISON GENERAL SECRETARY ELECTION

# Why we support Paul Holmes

By **MIKE FENWICK**

**A**s public sector workers face unprecedented cuts in jobs and conditions, having to pay the cost for the bank crisis, Unison, the biggest public sector union, should be at the front of the battle to defend jobs and services.

How well it can do that may depend on the outcome of an election for general secretary due to begin on 15 May.

The current general secretary Dave Prentis, who is standing for re-election, has a terrible record — his style has been to make occasional left wing speeches at conferences, threatening a fight but never following up with action. He has done everything possible to hold back strike action by Unison members, so as to not “rock the boat” with the Labour government. Union militants who want-

## SINGLE STATUS

Single Status Agreements are agreements between unions and local government bosses which were meant to set up a systems to guarantee “equal pay” (or equitable pay) between male and female workers. However negotiated at a local level such agreements have been patchy and many women workers have felt they have been sold short in the collective agreements.

ed to fight have either been frustrated by bureaucratic blocks or victimised by disciplinary action.

The strength of union organisation has withered at the branch level while the full time bureaucracy at regional and national level has been strengthened. Membership has grown but not in line with the massive growth in the public sector.

Union density — the proportion of workers who are union members — is falling in many areas. To compensate for this Prentis has led the union into “partnership deals” with most of the major employers. At its worst this has meant the active participation of Unison branches in identifying where cuts can be made and jobs can be lost. The new government will care little for such cooperation and will seek to destroy the remaining strength of the union as it cuts jobs and services.

Prentis and his allies will have no answers to these attacks. That is why Prentis has used his position to call an election earlier than he was required to (he could have stayed in post until 2013). He wants to avoid growing anger in the union as the cuts bite. He wants to avoid being held to account.

## PAUL HOLMES

**B**ut one candidate in this election could, if elected, change the rotten culture in the union.

Paul Holmes is a member of the National Executive Council and long-time secretary of Kirklees local government branch. It’s an exceptionally well organised branch with a very high density and a network of hundreds of effective stewards and reps.

The strength of organisation was seen in a successful deal on “single status” (wage rates that are equitable). During that campaign the branch had to hire a local football stadium for branch meetings of thousands.

Paul sees his election as the starting point of a campaign to rebuild the union in the branches and workplaces.

He’s also prepared to lead in national struggles. In the last round of government pension reform Paul led the call for a special conference to allow members a say on how to fight for a better deal.

He’s also been outspoken on the witchunts and lack of democracy inside the union. He wants to see the currently unelected posts of Deputy General Secretary, Regional Secretaries and the Heads of the Services Groups, being elected.

Paul believes there should be change to the union’s link with the Labour Party so that the union’s policies are pursued in the party and not vice-versa. He supports a wide-ranging, unrestricted debate at Unison National Delegate Conference on the Political Fund and a members’ ballot on affiliation, with a recommendation from the National Delegate Conference.

The other main left candidate, Roger Bannister, has made immediate disaffiliation from the Labour Party the central point of his platform. In doing so he made the possibility of a single left candidate impossible. Whilst the link exists it should be used — even in its current limited form. With Labour in opposition, and a likely leadership election ahead, to give up the influence we have here to shape the political fight against the cuts would be short sighted in the extreme.

Moreover Bannister’s disaffiliation call is based on narrow “sectarian” interests. It is linked to support for the Socialist Party’s idea of a new workers party and advocacy of the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition in the election. The fact that TUSC was not much more than a badge of convenience for the Socialist Party and the relative resilience of Labour’s support demonstrates there is a long way to go until ordinary workers are ready to give up on the Labour Party despite their anger at its record.

In the same way the current leadership of Unison has failed to use industrial action and embraced “partnership” rather than led a fight against the bosses, their failure to use the Labour link is a problem of rotten politics rather than structures.

Workers’ Liberty is supporting Paul Holmes in this election and call on others who want a fighting and democratic Unison to support his campaign and start building the rank and file movement we need.

## “Organise to prepare for the cuts”

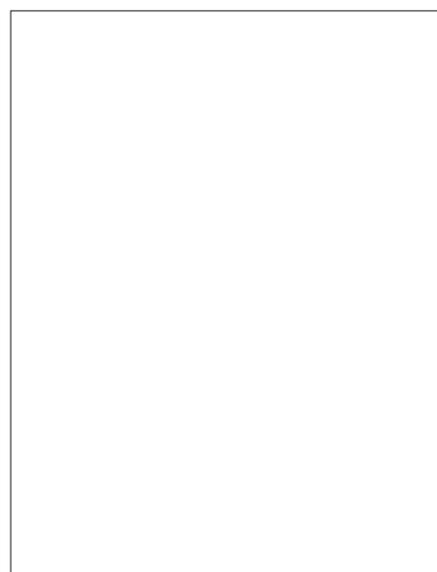
Alliance for Workers’ Liberty members and Unison activists Mike Fenwick and Ali Brown spoke to Paul Holmes about his campaign.

**WL:** You’re standing for General Secretary against the current leadership, Dave Prentis. How do you think Unison has fared in recent years?

**Paul Holmes:** I think the issue now is what is coming after the General Election. Have we in the last five or six years prepared ourselves for what’s coming? I think the answer is no. That’s why I’m making organisation the theme of my campaign. All the old lessons are going to have to be relearned. Because there is no doubt even if you look at what the Institute for Fiscal Affairs said recently that the coming cuts are *more* than any party is thinking about or at least will be publicly saying.

**WL:** In your publicity you’ve emphasised the strength of your own branch. What has that strength delivered for members?

**PH:** It’s delivered a really good set of terms and conditions, probably the best in Yorkshire at this moment, certainly in Local Government. We haven’t been the victims of Single Status that many branches have. And we’ve had a very successful Equal Pay campaign where members got in excess of £20,000 net. But even in Kirklees we could be under threat from Single Status. And there is no doubt that what happened in the banks last year is affecting all branches, and Kirklees won’t be excluded from that.



**WL:** What do you think it would take for other branches to achieve what you’ve achieved in Kirklees?

**PH:** You’ve got to inspire people. When I joined the movement in 1979, two things inspired me to fight — the election of Thatcher and the activists in the movement. I think we need to rebuild that movement, to build organisation inside the union. It’s not just a question of leaders it’s about building in the rank and file.

**WL:** Democracy is a problem inside the union and would be a problem for the rank and file organisation of members you’ve just described. The

witchunts against the left seem just part of the broader democratic deficit inside the union. What’s your programme for democracy inside the union?

**PH:** I think it’s in four parts. One is that in an economic crisis the union only has two choices — to represent its members or attack its members. It can represent them and organise them to fight the bosses, or end up doing the bosses’ work.

Then the programme for democracy in the union has to include the election of all the major officials. It’s a disgrace that we are only electing the General Secretary now. The heads of service groups, regional secretaries and virtually all full time officials should be elected.

Equally important, given what’s happened in politics over the last few years, there has to be the right to recall. The right to replace people.

And the third thing as far as I’m concerned we’ve got to reignite the branches and we can only do that by delivering resources to the branches. Branch activists are getting fried and they need that support.

**WL:** The other main left candidate, Roger Bannister, has made disaffiliation from the Labour Party the main point of his campaign. You are a Labour Party member. Are you happy with the way the Labour Link works? If not how would you like to see it changed?

**PH:** I think it links into the question of democracy. I think most people inside the union would see the Labour Link as far too closed, far too secretive and

removed from the rank and file. 400,000 members pay into the link and they should be involved in it. They’ve got to be involved in selecting MPs. They’ve got to be involved in where the money goes. They’ve got to be involved in who the leader of the Labour party is when they’re elected.

I don’t think the issue of the link is as crucial as some of my opponents think it is. But if we are going to have the link it has to be democratised and open. And if it isn’t going to be democratised and open then the members have got to have the right to get rid of the link.

**WL:** The AWL is in favour of a rank and file movement, similar to the kind of movement you’ve described. But a lot of the rest of the left, although divided amongst themselves, see taking positions as the way to change the union. Clearly you’ve got a different vision of what the union could become. How do you think we can move forward with the left to achieve that kind of goal?

**PH:** There are no prescriptive answers. Undoubtedly no successful union has existed in history without a successful rank and file movement. The election of a leader is just one step. The election of a leader is a means whereby you activate people who are thinking about getting involved. That is the crucial point as far as I’m concerned. Replacing one leader with another does nothing in and of itself.

Continued on page 8

## General election: Scotland, Derry

The 2010 election in Scotland was a re-run of 2005. In both elections Labour won 41 seats (regaining two it had lost in by-elections), the Liberal Democrats 11, the SNP six, and the Tories just one.

In terms of the popular vote, Labour scored 42% (an increase of 2.5%), the SNP 19.9% (up 2.3%), the Liberal Democrats 18.9% (down 3.7%) and the Tories 16.7% (up by just 0.9%).

At an all-Scottish level there was a swing of 0.1% from the SNP to Labour. But this masks a large number of swings from Labour to the SNP in individual constituencies.

Labour's election campaign in Scotland, as in the rest of the country, was based on the theme of, "it's a two-horse race — a Labour government or a Tory government." Even though the outcome of the general election was never going to be decided in Scotland — given the absence of any Labour-Tory marginals — Labour's tactics paid off, both in terms of seats and its share of the popular vote.

The SNP's campaign was silent on independence for Scotland. Instead, it campaigned on the basis of its record as the minority government at Holyrood and its claim that it was the party best suited to defend Scotland from an incoming Tory government. It urged the electorate to elect "local champions" for Scotland.

Despite its good electoral performance, the Labour Party "on the ground" in Scotland remains in a withered state, with a collapsed membership and little by way of active political life.

In many areas local Labour Parties were struggling to find members and supporters to help in the campaign.

It would therefore be a bad mistake to conclude that Labour's good performance in the elections was the expression of any revival of political life in the Labour Party in Scotland.

Such a revival in future cannot be excluded. But the election results were certainly not evidence of any such a revival to date.

Stan Crooke

• More on Scottish results:  
www.workersliberty.org/node/14174

**A**lmost the only non-Labour socialist candidate in the election to do positively well was Eamonn McCann in Derry.

He got 7.7% of the poll in the Foyle constituency, more than double the 3.6% he won on a similar platform in 2005.

McCann has been a socialist activist in Derry since the 1960s, for most of that time loosely associated with the British SWP. In the election, standing under the banner "People before Profit", he declared: "We stand for the interests of the working class, the marginalised and oppressed.

"We believe that it is through organising in communities, workplaces and colleges that we can best advance...

"We go beyond Orange versus Green to speak for the common interests of all who feel left behind by the peace process".

In Northern Ireland, where every political party is more or less explicitly communal, Catholic or Protestant — except arguably the very bourgeois Alliance party — this increased vote for some sort of working-class unity is

## PCS CONFERENCE

# Leaders must practice what they preach

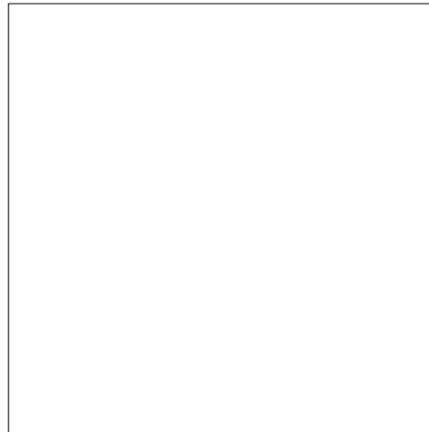
BY A CIVIL SERVANT

**U**nder a Lib Dem-Tory coalition, we know that members of the Public and Commercial Services Union will be attacked even more viciously than we were under New Labour; indeed the whole of the public sector will be.

It is against this background that the PCS will hold its national conference between 17 and 19 May.

In our view the union must put itself on a war footing to meet the threats ahead. This means constant agitation amongst members, explaining what will happen and the need for industrial action; it means vigorous recruiting of non-members; it means working out how best to hurt the employer (through the use of national, selective and other actions); it means addressing the organisational weakness in parts of the union; and it means collecting a levy to fund action.

All these actions are those that the union can take itself; what is needed in addition is the building of an alliance of public sector unions so that a united front can be presented to the new gov-



On £75K+: PCS's Mark Serwotka

ernment. Ironically a Con-Lib government may "liberate" Labour-supporting leaderships of Unison and Unite and allow them to join in with such an alliance.

Clearly these external threats will dominate the national conference, but one other issue that will hopefully spark real debate in this supposedly most left-wing of unions, and that is full time officer pay.

The Socialist Party (SP) dominates the

union through its control of Left Unity (which is the main activist grouping in the union). Many SP members now work for the Union. This number is growing — indeed it is becoming a recognised career path within PCS that to get on, you join the SP and become a full time officer. The SP's formal position is that union officials should be on a worker's wage; in reality the SP in PCS do not hold to this commitment.

Although formally the union is committed to bringing full time official wages more closely in line with that of the members, it has not carried out this policy. A motion that such action must be taken will be heard at conference. It will be interesting to hear how the SP square their formal political position with their real desire to keep the dosh.

Space is too limited here to rehearse the reasons why full time officers should be on a worker's wages, but the arguments are well known to SP comrades; it is a pity that they cannot practise what they preach.

As the class enemy gears up for massive attacks on us, that is a good rule for PCS in general: empty rhetoric needs to be replaced by a real commitment and willingness to struggle.

## Paul Holmes

(Continued from page 7)

**WL:** After the General Election result cuts are on their way. Unison has never acted, as yet, with all its strength across all the different parts of the public sector. How would you open up the ability of branches to work together and in Public Sector Alliances?

**PH:** The natural inclination of workers is to be united. If you get involved in any dispute the first thing any member will say to you is "what's this union doing" or "what's that union doing?" And they get demoralised if this union or that union aren't doing the same thing as us. I think the saddest thing about Unison, over the last 10 years, is that we are always going to do some united action the year after next. Whether it's in the Health Service, whether its Local Government, whether it's about pensions, whether it's about pay. And I think we have to do it on the ground and do it now.

Over the previous period individual workers in the public sector have been left to fight alone and you alone. And there's no doubt that you die alone.

After the general election the magnitude of the cuts, which will frighten the leadership of all the unions, will mean that either we will unite or we will fall. And I believe we will unite around a leader that's prepared to help build a rank and file organisation.

**WL:** If you win you will be surrounded by a right wing NEC and a hostile full-time bureaucracy that's going to be hostile to you. How will you survive?

**PH:** Well I think the first thing to say is I will be the most senior elected official inside the union. Now, I'm used to being elected. I've been elected now for 36 years. And that's what I'll be promoting inside the union. I will have a mandate from the members to promote that at every opportunity inside the union and all parts of this union will have to respect that decision. I think it will respect it at conference and in future elections. I'm not an individual, I would represent a mood. If I win this election I'll carry that mood forward.

## CWU CONFERENCE

# Are we ready?

BY A DELEGATE

**A**t this year's Communication Workers' Union conference (23-27 May) the bureaucracy will attempt to introduce a biennial conference and biennial elections for the CWU national executive.

The General Secretary, Billy Hayes, and the Senior Deputy General Secretary, Tony Kearns, have argued that the current democratic structure is not affordable. There are financial problems due to a reduction in membership caused by job losses in Royal Mail and BT, two of the main employers with CWU representation, but no significant cutbacks are proposed in officers' or HQ pay and associated costs.

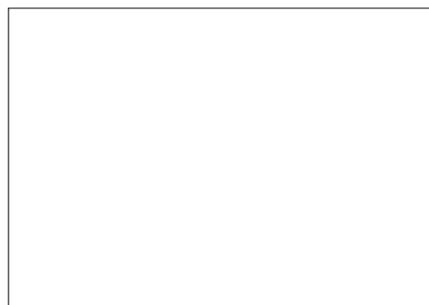
The lay representation within the union will bear the brunt of the cuts. It is clear that there is much expenditure within the union that is unjustifiable, but rather than attack that — and the vested interests and patronage of many national officers — the democratic rights of the ordinary activist and members are to be curtailed, unless we stop it.

Whilst biennial elections are popular with some activists, a biennial conference may not be.

Also on the General Conference agenda for discussion are propositions on Proportional Representation and on changing the Political Funding structure. A proposal to split the CWU Political Fund between affiliated and non-affiliated funds, similar to in UNISON, has already been opposed by left members of the NEC.

The regular calls for disaffiliation from the Labour Party and support for smaller socialist projects are also on the agenda. The context of the debate will be different this year of course with the new coalition government.

The outstanding issue of lack of government support for the Post Office Pension Fund (which led the CWU



Billy Hayes thinks one conference a year is too many

nationally to issue no political information or recommendation on voting to members during the General Election campaign) continues, but could soon be less significant if the new government enacts policy to privatise the Royal Mail in the near future.

There are several motions on the policy sections of the agenda demanding support for the defence of welfare and public services, an increased minimum wage, the abolition of differential rates for young people, and more rights for agency workers.

A motion from Mount Pleasant branch calls on the CWU to support broad based initiatives against public spending cuts, job losses and attacks on pensions, and calls on the TUC to organise demonstrations and rallies on this basis.

The postal delegates will be discussing industrial strategy in the context of a two to one vote in favour of the compromise deal on the future of Royal Mail. The current issues on the industrial agenda for the Telecoms activists include BT's refusal to come up with a decent pay offer and their refusal to link this with pensionable pay. Issues around performance management and stress at work also feature on the agenda.

With a Tory-Lib Dem government, the union and its members will be facing stepped-up attacks. Are we ready to fight them?

MIDDLESEX OCCUPATION

# Students occupy to save Philosophy

By Vicki Morris

**T**he management at Middlesex University have decided to axe the world-renowned philosophy department, but are meeting more resistance than they expected.

While the department is very successful — philosophy is the highest researched subject in the university — it just doesn't make quite as much money as other departments. The staff and students were told the shocking news on 26 April.

The staff and students set up an online petition, which you can sign at [www.gopetition.com/petitions/save-middlesex-philosophy.html](http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/save-middlesex-philosophy.html)

The students were due to have a meeting with Arts Dean Edward Esche on Tuesday 4 May in the morning, and assembled in the boardroom. He did not turn up. Angry at this, the students occupied the boardroom and resolved to wait for him. He did not come. The students settled in for an occupation of the boardroom and have now taken over the entire admin block at the Trent Park campus. Esche did meet a student dele-

gation on Thursday 6 May but was adamant that he would not reconsider his opinion.

The students have issued an open letter to staff and other students at the university. It ends:

"Our protest and occupation is peaceful. The administration has called the police out to Trent Park twice; both times they left within a half hour, having decided that no laws were being broken

and their presence was not necessary. The occupation has not interrupted the studies of any students and we encourage you, whether you are officially tied to Middlesex or not, to join or visit us here. This is an open, safe space and everyone will be warmly welcomed. We are organising various cultural, political and academic events over the weekend. You are all invited to participate. Information about this can be found at: [savemdxphil.com](http://savemdxphil.com)

"Universities are not businesses, and education is not a commodity — it is a human right and a public service. Education did not cause this crisis, and must not be sacrificed to pay for it. Anonymous messages of support continue to come in from staff and we stand united against management's program of slash and burn."

The occupation is continuing and the students are inviting people to visit them. They are organising a programme of events including talks on philosophy, film showings, etc.

Support the occupation and defend education!

<http://savemdxphil.com>  
**"It's overwhelming"**

Johann, one of the occupiers, spoke to Ed Maltby:

"We are still in occupation because management haven't met our demands yet. We want the decision reversed and management haven't indicated they're willing to do that."

"We're inviting people to come up, we're running our own seminars, we're writing our coursework essays, and working hard on the campaign, updating the blogs and trying to get support wherever we can."

"It's overwhelming to see all these letters of support from people like Badiou and Zizek and Chomsky and people you study. It means something to be getting letters from people you really respect."

"Management haven't said much to us, but I imagine they are feeling the pressure. There is a lot of attention in the press and we know they're getting the same letters as we get."

"There's a group working on making links with the trade unions."

## London lecturers fight jobs cuts

By a UCU Activist

**L**ecturers at 11 London colleges and four universities struck against job cuts on 5 May; well-attended picket lines across the city fed into a thousand-strong rally in central London.

Now, more and more colleges will be sucked into the dispute: another 13 have announced redundancies. The problem is that different colleges are at very different stages of struggle: none of those 13 have yet moved to a ballot, while at others momentum is already difficult to maintain. On 18 May only four colleges — College of North East London, Tower Hamlets, Lambeth and Hackney — will strike. At some other colleges, compulsory redundancies have been withdrawn (but voluntary redundancies will still mean job losses and increased workload for those who remain); other others, members did not feel confident enough to strike again so soon. Coordination is becoming increasingly difficult — a major problem, since coordinated action helps build confidence.

This highlights what's wrong with the "strategy" being advanced by the SWP, who are strong in London UCU: at the 11 May regional activists' meeting, they were advocating the TUC call a one-day general strike, and that at the very least colleges should consider going all out! This despite the fact that only eight of 40 or so colleges in London were represented, and many of those present reported that their members were not feeling over-confident.

We need to build up the regional meetings so they are more effective and representative, and as far as possible fight to keep action coordinated between as many colleges as possible — though this doesn't mean those whose disputes are more advanced should be held back.

### SOME REPORTS FROM THE PICKET LINES, FROM THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST FEES & CUTS

Jade Baker, Vice President Education-elect of *University of Westminster Students' Union*, says: about a dozen students joined 25 lecturers on the picket lines at the Regents Street campus; the number of workers picketing was a big increase from the last strike at Westminster. There was also a picket line at Titchfield Street. I think the support we've given lecturers in the anti-cuts struggles and during our recent SU election campaign has been a boost. A lot of students had exams so went in, but generally sympathetic; we also had a lot of discussions with members of the public and our effigy of our VC Geoff "Job Slasher" Petts got on ITV!

Rowan Rheingans of Newcastle Free Education Network writes: Students joined UCU members at *Newcastle University* today for a day of action against planned cuts, including stalls on campus. (We also work regularly with the university Unison branch.)

We got a lot of interest, particularly because management has just proposed cutting combined honours degrees and replacing with them with more joint honours. 100 students do combined honours every year; 600 apply! The university has not consulted anyone.

UCU activist Colin Waugh reports from *College of North West London*: All three sites (Willesden, Wembley and Kilburn) were successfully picketed and there seems to have been little sign of anyone other than the usual people crossing picket lines.

The branch banner was taken on the central London demonstration, and the branch secretary, Indro Sen, spoke at the rally, explaining the struggles in which the branch is involved, which include against compulsory redundancies and management's attempts to impose a worse contract, plus the scheduled mothballing of the (virtually new) Kilburn building from 1 August.

Stuart Jordan: *Hackney College* had a lively picket of around 40-50 people this morning. Picketing was slow to get going, but really picked up. Lots of students decided not to go in and said they'd like to keep in touch with the NCAFC.

There is a certain amount of frustration about Unison, but also an understanding that the problem is not Unison members but Unison leaders.

A lot of people spoke about being on zero-hour contracts, where you're totally casualised and not guaranteed any hours. I thought if you'd been employed for a year you were entitled to the same rights as other staff, but apparently both management and the UCU lawyers say it's two years.

Ruth Cashman, Lambeth Unison assistant branch secretary, reports from *Lambeth College's Clapham Centre*: The college is cutting 26 posts, which will mean 47 people losing their jobs. Overall at Lambeth College, across all three sites, the strike was really strong, with only a small number crossing picket lines.

There were about 70 people on the Clapham picket line from 7am. Later they were joined by pickets from the other sites (Vauxhall and Brixton), and a hundred or so people marched through Clapham before leaving for the demo in central London.

UCU and UNISON have been holding joint meetings at the college and producing joint propaganda in the run up to the strike. Some UNISON members did not go into work despite the union's failure to ballot members to go out themselves.

UNISON activists at the college are frustrated at the London Region dragging their feet on organising coordinated action with UCU and want their own strike ballot as soon as possible.

Both unions are, to some extent, pursuing a policy of avoiding compulsory redundancies without challenging cuts — moving people into vacant posts, forcing people to retire, voluntary redundancy, hours cuts etc. This pushes the unions to make the bosses' arguments — "We need to make cuts..." — for them, and ignores the effect on staff of increased workload and on students as they lose teaching time, nursery facilities and other important services.

Sacha Ismail: About a dozen UCU members were picketing *Lambeth College's Brixton Centre*. Brixton is the college's smallest site.

Brixton Centre UCU convenor Dave Esterson told me:

"The college are planning 3.5 million in cuts, and 47 redundancies. Yet our principal is on £170,000 a year, our top managers all get private healthcare and they've just created a new senior management post on more than £100,000."

"More broadly, staff here do not see why workers should pay for this economic crisis. We know about the billions given to the banks, and the fact that the super-rich have increased their wealth by £77 billion this year. We need a united campaign by the public sector unions against cuts."

"A fair few managers used to be in the union, but in recent years the college has replaced "course managers" who were also teachers with managers whose only job is to police the workforce. They weeded out any managers who didn't want to do this role, and gave those who remained financial incentives to separate them out."

"After today, we'll be pushing for another round of coordinated action by the eleven colleges and four universities that are on strike in London today — and the others that are currently balloting or preparing to ballot."

# Eurozone crisis: for a workers' Europe!

By COLIN FOSTER

**A** general strike on 5 May against planned cuts stopped Greece, and brought onto the streets of Athens the biggest demonstration there since the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974.

Although Greece's big union federations are closely tied to the governing party, Pasok, they plan further strikes. There is protest within Pasok. On 6 May three MPs were expelled from the Pasok parliamentary group for voting against the cuts.

Panicked by the growing Greek crisis, on 10 May the eurozone governments, with the IMF, put together a 750 billion euro (about £650 billion) rescue plan not just for Greece but for other eurozone states facing financial crisis: Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Spain.

The European Central Bank will break its previous rules and start buying up the bonds (interest-bearing IOU notes) of eurozone governments.

The move is analogous to the vast "bail-out" operations (buy-outs, loans, guarantees) carried out by governments in late 2008, except that this time it is governments bailing out other governments rather than governments bailing out banks.

The "bail-out" of the banks succeeded, on the level that it stopped a cascade of big banks going bust one after the other.

This new "bail-out" may succeed, on its own level, or it may not: the financial problems of Greece, or some other government, may prove just too big to solve by doling out extra loans. In the last resort governments could just take over banks; the European Central Bank cannot take over the administration of Greece.

The 2008 "bail-outs" shifted the sharp point of the capitalist crisis from banks to governments. This "bail-out" partly shifts the sharp point of a crisis from the Greek government to the eurozone as a

whole. "The euro is the fall guy", said a banker quoted in the *Financial Times* (12 May). "If there was not a euro-crisis before the weekend bail-out plan, there is now".

A study of the eurozone crisis written by Marxist economist Costas Lapavistas and others shows that it is rooted in unresolved imbalances and contradictions of the eurozone project.

As Martin Wolf of the *Financial Times* also points out (FT 12 May), since its start in 2002 "the story of the eurozone economy has been one of divergence, not convergence".

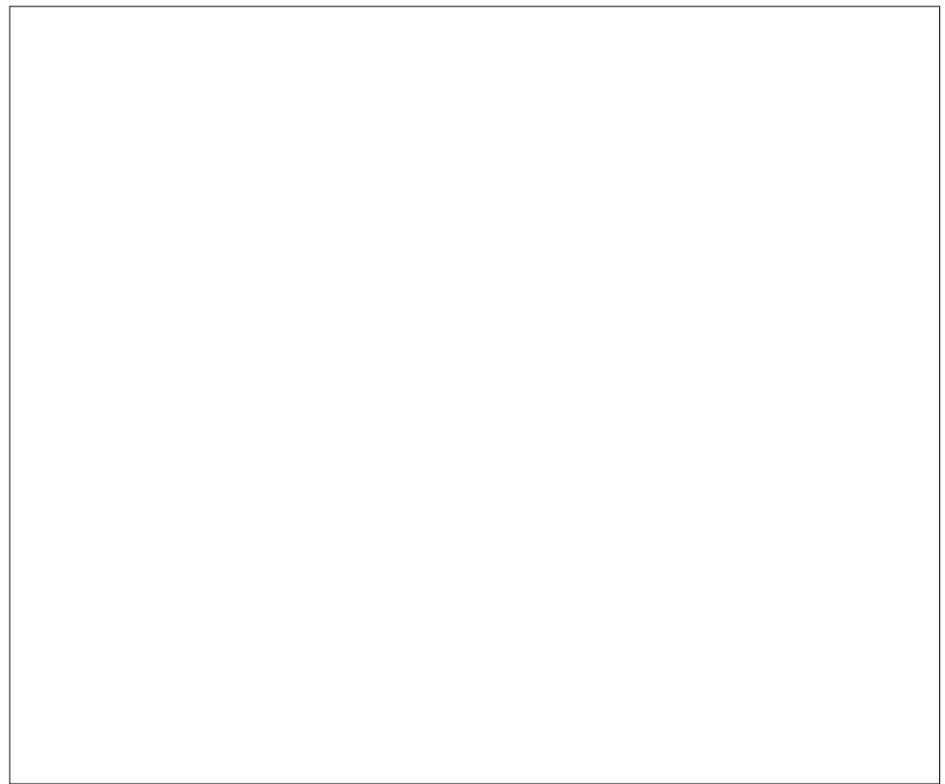
Germany has squeezed wages and social spending, and so kept down its export costs. It has exported much more to the Mediterranean eurozone countries than it has imported. (In the case of Greece, a good chunk of the exports it has taken in from Germany and other richer eurozone countries has been weaponry. Greece's military spending is almost twice as high, relative to the size of its economy, as any other European country's).

If each country had its own money, then probably the drachma, the lira, the peseta and so on would have lost value relative to the deutschmark. That would bring its own problems, but by more gradual adjustment.

Why didn't Greece and other countries simply run out of euros? Because there were vast flows of lending from German and other banks to the Mediterranean countries.

With the credit crunch, from 2008 those flows of lending dried up. At the same time, the general world slump depressed the Greek government's income.

There is now talk from both right and left of Greece quitting the euro. For sure a workers' government in Greece could not respect the rules of the eurozone, and would have to impose controls on the movement of large sums of money. It would have to find another way of link-



ing up economically with other countries.

But if a workers' government would lead to a break with the euro, it does not at all follow that a break with the euro would lead to a workers' government. Greece would still have huge debts to be repaid in euros, and meanwhile would suffer a huge collapse in the relative value of a reintroduced drachma. It would face bigger cuts, not smaller ones.

A full break-up of the eurozone? As Martin Wolf points out: "This would cause the financial system to implode, since the relations between assets and liabilities now in euros would become so uncertain. There would be massive capital flight into the banks of those countries deemed safe" (FT, 12 May).

The eurozone faces a compulsion

either to integrate social and economic policy right across Europe, or to collapse. It may "muddle through" this crisis without either sharp choice, but if so, only by postponing the dilemma.

The socialist answer has to be to unite workers of different countries to fight for a workers' united Europe, with "convergence" through social levelling-up.

In Greece, much now depends on the ability of the socialist groups to help the workers who have struck and demonstrated to organise a political alternative. The stresses within Pasok and the Pasok-aligned unions have to be worked on, aiming towards a political regroupment with a socialist programme.

• Lapavistas report  
<http://bit.ly/geuro>

## Greek debt and the arms industry

By RICHARD MINNS AND NICHOLAS XENAKIS

**G**reek debt needs a little more thought. We all know about the caricature of over-indulgent civil servants, early retirement generosity by the state, the fiddling of EU money.

Many countries are immersed in corruption, bribery, expenses scandals, jaw-dropping bonuses for making losses, so what is the real geopolitical issue causing all the fuss about Greece?

The issue is about weapons and war.

The German President may say that Germany sympathises. The *Bild-Zeitung* may say that Germans get up earlier than Greeks and work longer in terms of hours and years.

But we ask these politicians and pundits:

Who has bought German, US, Israeli weapons and had to pay for it as a central part of NATO, amounting to the fifth

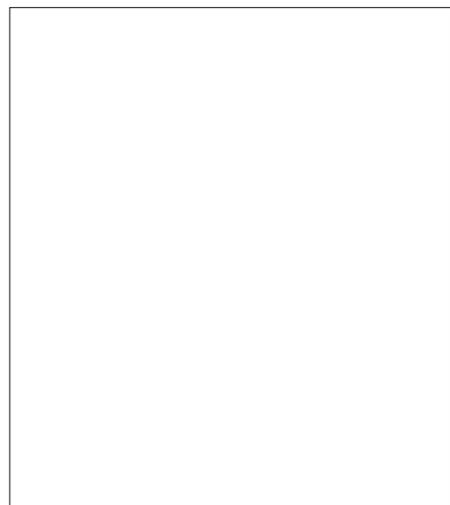
largest arms purchaser in the world (relative to state GDP), thus helping Germans to get up earlier?

Defence spending in Greece in 2007 was \$1.3 billion and Greece buys 31% of its weapons from Germany, 24% from the US, 24% from France. These purchases provide investment and jobs in the exporting states, dividends for shareholders, including pension funds, while Greeks now have to consider lay-offs and pension cuts to pay for jobs and pensions elsewhere.

### GOOD FOR GERMANY, BAD FOR GREECE

**I**n the current structure of international trade, finance and war, there is basically a cycle of weapons production, debt and then cuts in social provision to pay for it.

Weapons produce nothing as a commercial product, so the money to buy them has



The Greek bosses' army

to come from elsewhere, in this case debt. Some even dare suggest that arms producers' sales loans are conditional on the

"other" state loans made.

The cycle of death and debt has applied to South America principally, but now we see the awesome consequences for Europe.

Where do we think that strikes and arguments for protection of rights and incomes come from? The fact that Greece has benefits that we all envy, if true, is not the issue. If it is so wonderful, why haven't the impoverished bankers and others from the rest of the "West" moved there?

The central issue is about milking Greece with arms sales, credits and cuts in living standards — and the power of the arms industry.

The debt we owe Greece is preserving the arms industry without which, it seems, we would all be bust, as Tony Blair has often officially reminded us on the local employment implications of Margaret Thatcher's Al Yamamah deal.

# “We need united workers’ action across the continent”

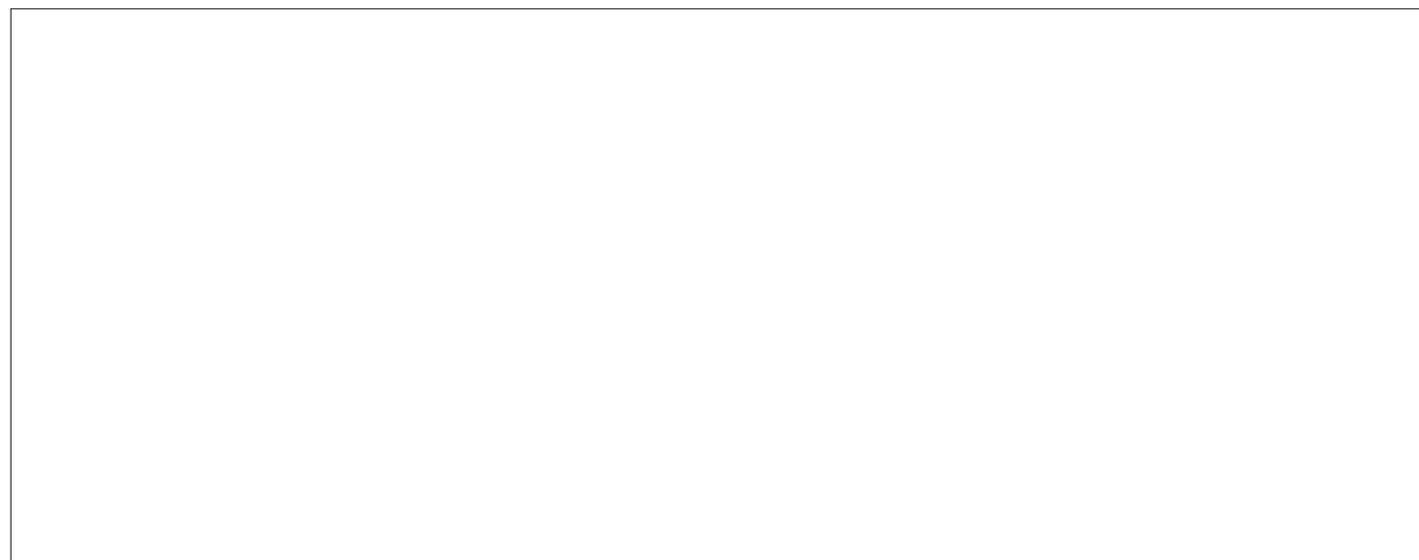
From back page

Stavros, a militant in the Trotskyist OKDE, spoke to *Solidarity*.

The union federations may be obliged to call more strikes under pressure from below, but it's a quirk of the political and social structures in Greece that historically it's been more common for big explosions of class struggle to be expressed through more directly political structures like parties rather than through the trade unions.

There have been significant social upheavals in which the unions have played a small role. Even on the 5 May general strike, the unions didn't control that, even though they called it. It's clear though that there is a growing pressure for further and ongoing mobilisation. The question is how that pressure can be organised.

There are some trade unions where rank-and-file militants have a relative degree of autonomy to coordinate action, so the tasks go further than simply raising the united front perspective or trying to push the bureaucracy to move. Some trade unions are linked to PASOK, but there is very little possibility of using those links to assert direct pressure on the government. The IMF, rather than the



Greek government, is really in charge now. Besides which, PASOK has an essentially Bonapartist relationship to its social base in the union.

Many people are raising the demand for withdrawal from the Euro-zone and the EU. We think they're right to do so. We must be absolutely clear on this; the EU is not a union of European workers. It is a capitalist and imperialist organisation. Yes, it tries to regulate rivalry between European powers but ultimately

its role is to attack the historic gains of the European working class.

We should fight for the dissolution of the EU through revolutionary workers' struggle. It's not about defending isolated national capitalisms against integrated capitalism across the continent, but the EU and its directives have had a concretely anti-worker role.

The best act of solidarity that workers elsewhere could provide would be to generalise and spread the struggle. We need

links not simply between workers in Greece and workers in, say, Britain, but working-class unity across the continent from Eastern Europe to other southern European states. One demand that workers in Germany could usefully raise would be to demand that the German banks abolish the Greek debt. As the crisis deepens, we need to develop more creative forms of internationalism and prepare for united working-class action across the continent.

## Greece into the darkness?

By YANNIS ALMPANIS (NETWORK FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RIGHTS)

On May 5 the biggest workers' demonstration since 1976 took place in Athens. All the avenues of the city center were flooded by hundreds of thousands of workers who were protesting against the IMF-EU-Greek government austerity plan.

It is impossible to make an accurate calculation of the crowd's number. There are estimations which start from 150,000 and end up to 500,000 people. No matter the exact number of the protesters, there is no doubt that this was an unbelievable show of the working people's force.

At the same time, in cities all around Greece we had extremely massive mobilisations.

But this was not just a huge demonstration. It was also the angriest expression of popular resentment for decades. Thousands of people were not just protesting. The demonstration was turning into a real popular explosion against the IMF plan, against the lies of the authorities, against the assassination of the future of an entire nation.

For many hours demonstrators were clashing with the police in front of the parliament. And this time it was not just the black block or the radical left. As you can in the video here these demonstrators are not wearing masks and are not organized at all. The police was attacking for many hours with tear gas, but they couldn't disperse the demonstration.

And suddenly the crowd got silent. A real tragedy had happened. Three bank employees were killed in the Marfin's

bank building at Stadiou avenue.

A black block group threw petrol bombs to burn the bank branch at the ground floor, and the fire got out of control. Although it was revealed by the bank employees' federation that the people were locked in a building with no fire exit, there can be no excuse for those who set the fire. It is a criminal attitude to set fire to a building where there are obviously people in it.

The government and mass media tried to take advantage of the blood and to manipulate public opinion. They tried to play the card of collective responsibility. At the same time, repression reached its highest point.

People were arrested without any reason, some for just sitting at a "suspicious cafe".

Special police also stormed in our Immigrants' Space Social Centre in a totally illegal and brutal operation that called to mind the invasion of the Diaz school in Genoa. Special beaten and injured our comrades. They destroyed our offices and

took some red flags as "war loot".

I have to note that there was no order for such an operation. The policemen just acted like a gang. A few minutes later special police evacuated without violence an anarchist squat, also at Exarheia.

On Thursday May 6 there was a new call for mobilisation by the trade unions and the Left. Despite the political atmosphere created by the tragedy, some 25,000 demonstrated peacefully in front of the Parliament. Later in the evening evening the police attacked and dispersed some 1,500 who were still in front of the Parliament, although there was no violent action by the demonstrators.

But on Thursday the real news was inside the Parliament. Three socialist parliamentarians refused to vote in favour of the IMF-EU austerity plan. They were immediately kicked out of the socialist parliamentary group. The plan was finally voted through by PASOK (socialists), LAOS (racist extreme right) and Ntora Bacoyanni, the former right-wing foreign affairs minister and rival of Antonis

Samaras for the presidency of New Democracy (ND, the right-wing opposition). Samaras, a populist nationalist politician who decided to vote against the plan, immediately kicked Bacoyanni out of the party.

There is no doubt that the political system will not be the same after the implementation of the austerity plan. It seems that Bacoyanni wants to create a new political party that can cooperate both with PASOK and ND to build a government. The model seems to be the German Liberals.

As the time goes by, more and more people realize that the IMF-EU-Greek government plan is not only catastrophic for working people, but will also lead the country to an impasse. Public sector employees are losing about 30% of their income. Pensioners (both of public and private sector) are losing 15% to 30% of their income. Young workers will be paid less money (about 580 euros) than the minimum wage.

And at the end of the day, in 2014, if everything goes as planned, the debt will be 150% of national income (it is currently 115%), and the GNP will be 5% lower than in 2009.

As you well know, reality is always worse than plans (especially of those of IMF). The economy is falling into deep recession, shrinking at least 4% this year. It is obvious that with such a low GNP, the whole public debt cannot be paid.

Sooner or later, the debt will be renegotiated and some private creditors will lose a part of their profits. This perspective, which is getting more and more clear, is making markets extremely insecure.

Argentina is in front of us.

7.5.10

# Campaigning across the country

By MARTIN THOMAS

**T**he Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists strove to create a socialist voice and presence within the Labour election campaign.

The campaign's leaflets criticised the New Labour record unsparingly. They called for labour-movement resistance to the cuts and other pro-capitalist policies promised if New Labour won the election. They agitated for the unions to campaign within the Labour Party to regain a democratic voice there and replace its policy and leadership by working-class alternatives.

On the ground, we organised street stalls to distribute our leaflets, attract attention, and make contact.

Like the Labour Representation Committee, we organised volunteers to go to constituencies where left Labour candidates were standing, like John McDonnell in Hayes and Harlington and Katy Clark in North Ayrshire and Arran. SCSTF volunteers came to help in the campaigning, but also to distribute our own leaflets.

We produced a special anti-BNP leaflet. It was the only leaflet in circulation during the election campaign, as far as we know, that argued against the BNP by offering working-class answers on the social issues on which the BNP feeds.

It was also the only one, as far as we know, to tackle head-on the anti-immigrant demagoguery which was pushed in the election not only by the BNP but also by papers like the *Mail*, the *Express*, and the *Sun*.

The demagoguery got a wide hearing — as we know from countless arguments on street-stalls — and all the major parties, including Labour, pandered to it.

We took that leaflet everywhere, but especially to BNP target constituencies like Barking in East London and Sheffield Brightside.

Even if the campaign had done nothing but produce and distribute that leaflet, that alone, in our view, would have made it worthwhile.

In fact it did much more. In Islington, north London, for example, SCSTF organised nine street stalls or leafleting sessions, in the few weeks before 6 May,

some on its own and one in collaboration with a group of local Climate Camp activists who had independently decided to go onto the streets with an SCSTF-type message.

We had not only SCSTF's basic broadsheet and the anti-BNP leaflet, but much other material. We had a poster, used to decorate and draw attention to the stalls; six other SCSTF leaflets, on other big issues; and the anti-cuts petition initiated by the National Pensioners' Convention and endorsed by many trade unions.

At many of the stalls, there was an almost constant flow of people stopping to talk.

With that material, we had hundreds of conversations, and collected contact details from dozens of people interested in socialist ideas for campaigning after 6 May.

Workers' Liberty activists on those stalls also sold the *Solidarity*, just as the Climate Camp activists in Islington also put out their own literature, and other socialist groups supporting the stalls would have been welcome to do.

Sales were higher than usual. At one regular patch in Islington, for example, *Solidarity* sellers broke a record for sales at the site previously set at the height of the miners' strike in 1984.

In addition to organising the street stalls, SCSTF volunteers also mailed, phoned, and buttonholed labour movement activists to urge them to endorse the SCSTF statement and take a few copies to put around in their workplace, union branch, or constituency.

Some of those whom we asked refused: they wanted something more "Labour-loyal". Some fobbed us off — "I'll think about it". A large proportion said yes.

In those ways we discharged the basic duty of socialists — to agitate, to educate, to organise, for socialist ideas — in the best way available.

The campaign filled a political space which would otherwise have been left empty, or almost empty. Since politics knows no vacuums, that space would otherwise have been filled by grin-and-bear-it Labour loyalty or passive resignation ("it's all rubbish, nothing to be done about it").

The Labour Representation Committee made a useful effort to organise volunteers for left Labour candidates, but had no real autonomous presence in the campaign for the LRC as such, other than a little pamphlet unfortunately entitled not "A Workers' Agenda", or "A Socialist Agenda", but "A People's Agenda".

Some socialists merged into the Labour campaign with only private reservations to distinguish them politically.

Some focused on their own separate candidacies to the extent of making their main message at election time the call (effectively) to make their minority vote in a few constituencies 2% rather than 1% or 0.5%. They shouted about that to the exclusion of saying anything much (or, in some cases, anything at all) about the governmental alternatives and about what to do in the vast majority of constituencies, where they weren't standing.

Some socialists reckoned that a "protest vote" for Greens or Respect was the best option. Some talked of voting Lib-Dem as the only hope for any change at all, and presumably some voted that way, though not as many as once looked possible.

SCSTF did something that none of those efforts attempted — taking a socialist message direct to working-class voters and activists in every area where there were volunteers available to do it.

To compare SCSTF with the Socialist Campaign for Labour Victory in 1978-9 is of limited value, since the political situations are so different.

In 1978-9 there was a relatively lively Labour left, about to erupt into full-scale rebellion after the 1979 election. That gave the SCLV a resonance unavailable to SCSTF.

SCLV had much longer to prepare that SCSTF — almost a year of campaigning before the general election.

Still, in cold fact even the work of the 1978-9 SCLV was largely symbolic. Just four constituency Labour Parties backed it and took its literature, and most of those four used the SCLV leaflets only marginally.

But the symbol set a marker. The SCSTF has done that too.

## Gains and limits in Peckham

South London AWL members assess the campaign we ran for Jill Mountford as an Alliance for Workers' Liberty candidate challenging Harriet Harman in Camberwell and Peckham

**W**orking-class socialists are as yet a small minority. Our ideas get a sympathetic hearing among wide circles of working-class people, but as yet it is a tentative, sceptical hearing.

It is a hearing made tentative because of people's scepticism, shaped by successive setbacks, about the labour movement being able to mobilise to change society, and because of their disappointments about successive left-sounding political promises.

To establish our name, "Alliance for Workers' Liberty", previously absent from elections, as something solid and reliable enough to vote for in this general election was always going to be difficult.

In this election, our candidate got a poor result: 75 votes, 0.2%. (To put that in context, the 2001 general election, standing as part of the Socialist Alliance, our candidates in Nottingham and Islington received 3.8% and 2.9%.) That does not at all mean that the election campaign was wasted effort. We explained basic socialist ideas to thousands of people; made new contacts and sympathisers; educated and trained ourselves in doorstep and street-stall discussions.

Unlike almost all other candidates, we argued the case head-on against the anti-immigration demagoguery which filled papers like the *Mail*, the *Express*, and the *Sun* in the weeks before the election, and which the main parties all pandered to.

In short, we did a lot of the basic work of socialists: taking socialist ideas to working-class people. Whether people who sympathised with those ideas would vote for us this time was always going to be open to doubt.

Camberwell and Peckham was always going to be a difficult constituency to get a good left-wing vote in.

**Cheque-cashing shops boom in Peckham — poverty mars people's lives**

Even in 2001, the Socialist Alliance did not do well in Camberwell and Peckham (1.9%), despite a campaign in the constituency much more energetic than in most.

We chose the constituency for a "demonstration candidate" despite that, because of other advantages — a good local candidate, a central location, a heavily working-class constituency, a New Labour figurehead to oppose.

There was a radical shift in political conditions between our decision to stand an AWL candidate — in 2007, in conditions of strong working-class alienation from the Labour Party and little political differentiation between Labour and the Tories — and the Labour/Tory electoral polarisation which took place in the weeks before this general election. That limited us.

Beyond that, the result shows that we just did not have enough people on the doorsteps and on the streets, often enough, to establish a new political identity, lacking any national publicity, with the electorate.

Also, we focused our efforts on making political contacts, selling papers, and so on. That gives us a lot of contacts to be followed up by paper-sales and visiting in the coming months. But it had the flipside of making the campaign less ruthlessly focused on identifying, securing, and mobilising votes. In elections, that matters!

So we did poorly in "electoral" terms. However we will be continuing our stepped up activity in the constituency. Starting this weekend, we will be back out and about on the streets, on the doorsteps and in the workplaces of Camberwell and Peckham, advocating socialist ideas and seeking to create and organise new socialist activists. We will be organising regular open discussion forums and film nights to draw those who supported or showed interest in our campaign into regular debate and activity.

Contact us if you want to get involved.

## LESSONS FROM CANADA'S CUTS FIGHT

# Politics are central

BY GREG ALBO

Greg Albo is a member of the Socialist Project group in Canada, a professor of political economy at York University in Toronto, and a co-editor of the *Socialist Register*. He spoke to *Solidarity* about the "Canadian model" of cuts seen in Lib-Dem and Tory circles as a model of how to deal with government financial problems.

**The Liberal government of Jean Chrétien elected in Canada in 1993 made big cuts. That they were costless is a myth now being put around in discussions among the OECD and G20 governments.**

The social cost was huge. A big chunk of federal spending in Canada is intertwined with spending at other levels of government, particularly the provinces, through income transfers. The federal government cut a lot of its obligations to fund the welfare state, notably around health, higher education and welfare, and dumped more of the expenses onto the provinces. This, in turn, set off another series of cuts and offloads of expenses and responsibilities onto municipalities. In other words, the deficit cutting was far from painless, but displaced from one level of government to another, and from there onto the poor and workers.

Another strategy was to radically restrict unemployment insurance. The taxes to pay for unemployment insurance were kept at the same level, but benefits to laid-off workers were cut, moving Canada toward one of the least generous schemes in the OECD. So, a huge amount of government revenue was maintained while now only one-half of unemployed workers get benefits.

Third, the Liberals also completely eliminated any ambitions they had about further social spending. They had pledged from the late 1980s on to fund a national child care system. On coming into government, they eliminated those plans, so Canada today still has no national child care programme.

Finally, the economic recovery through the late 1990s, and particularly the so-called Clinton boom, raised growth levels and government revenues. Strikingly, many economists think the economic recovery and the lowering of interest rates alone would have eliminated the deficit. The cuts and the austerity were much more about power and neoliberalism than economic necessity.

Other dimensions of the Liberal deficit strategy also need to be noted. For example, the Liberals focused on eliminating the budget deficit by expenditure cuts and not by raising taxes. In fact, they cut taxes at the same time, and they did so in a way that shifted the tax burden onto average working-class people.

They cut corporate taxes. They shifted away from progressive income taxes and moved towards value-added taxes and taxes on payrolls.

Overall, wages were held back. In particular, public sector wages had a decade of austerity from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s.

With the tax shifts, the cuts in transfers, and the holding back of wages, income inequalities increased a lot. Notably, the incomes of the top 20 percent of earners went up, especially the top one percent earning income from capitalist enterprises, and the bottom 80 percent went down, especially the bottom 20 percent dependent on income transfers from governments.

With the federal government cutting back fiscal transfers to the provinces, a whole set of programmes were hit by restraint — notably, welfare rates, funds for higher education and support for hospitals and healthcare.

The provinces then dumped expenditures and responsibilities onto the cities. So cities in Canada have now been in a spiral of major fiscal problems for the last two decades. For example, there is now a shortfall of the order of \$200 billion in spending on infrastructure maintenance in Canada at the city level. Much of the road, sewer, school and other public infrastructure is crumbling.

With the off-load of responsibilities, almost all building of public housing has stopped, with backlogs of tens of thousands waiting for public housing.

With the shifting of the deficit onto the provinces, a lot of the conflicts over the austerity packages ended

up being concentrated at that level. But there were a lot of differences in what the cuts programme meant at the provincial level.

The Atlantic provinces, for example, get a lot of "equalisation payments" from the federal government, and those were relatively maintained, so those provinces went through less of a fiscal crisis and only modest cutbacks.

The Prairie provinces were going through a commodities boom, particularly following the developments in the oil market, so there revenues remained relatively flush and they could handle the fiscal cuts too.

The impact was concentrated in British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario. All three provinces saw major public sector turmoil and strikes, in different ways.

In BC the action was concentrated in the hospitals, later joined by wider walk-outs in the public sector.

In Quebec there was major strike action. The provincial government there compensated for the federal cutbacks by going further into debt, and keeping tax rates at higher levels than other provinces.

The major political conflict was in Ontario, the largest province population-wise and economically. It was also where unemployment and poverty were shooting up as Ontario was suffering from some of the same decline in manufacturing as the north-east US states.

In 1995, two years after the cuts began at federal level, Ontario elected a Thatcherite provincial government under the leadership of the Conservative Mike Harris, after a failed "Third Way" social democratic government.

Harris perfected the idea of meeting the fiscal problems that were being offloaded into the provinces by dumping a huge number of obligations onto the cities.

Cities had to assume responsibility for transit, airport, libraries, policing, water and sewage — a whole range of things. They had to increase municipal taxes or cut back on what was provided.

Second, Harris also cut welfare rates by over 20% and then froze the rates so that effectively there was annual erosion of the payments through inflation.

Third, Harris introduced a range of anti-union legislation.

That set up major conflicts with the trade union movement in the province. An alliance was formed between private and public sector unions in fighting the cuts, building on an axis of dissent to the prior attempt of the social democratic government to roll back public sector contracts.

## ONTARIO DAYS OF ACTION

**The labour movement moved towards a series of one-day local general strikes and a range of other labour turmoil for about three years. The local general strikes shut down city after city.**

They were extremely successful on a city-by-city basis, in every way, politically, industrially, culturally. Effectively, the strikes were community-labour actions, as each city built a huge network of community groups behind the walkout. The question was then whether you could build on that.

Over those three years, the Ontario government just kept saying no, and aggressively pushed ahead with its neoliberal agenda and waging "class struggle from above". The labour movement faced a decision whether or not to deepen the strike movement and move to the next political level. And at that point the unions lost momentum. The provincial government sustained its course.

This was partly because, at the political level, there was no support for deepening the general strikes from the social democrats [the New Democratic Party, the union-affiliated party in Canada]. The strike movement suffered political isolation at the level of parliamentary representation.

Then slowly, one by one, a range of the NGOs and social movements which had supported the strikes peeled off. The private-sector industrial unions were riding the wave of a relative boom in the late 1990s, and had better bargaining conditions for themselves, and slowly retracted support for the general strike

movement.

The movement was narrowed down to the public sector unions, and they were then divided among themselves, the blue-collar component against the white-collar component.

The last of the local general strikes was the biggest one, in Toronto. But that is when the unions were faced with the choice of deepening the movement or pulling back. They pulled back.

The NDP gave nominal support to the strikes, but didn't really mobilise, and didn't try to take a leadership role. The NDP had been in power in Ontario in 1990-5, and had already tried to legislate public-sector cutbacks.

## THE UNIONS AND POLITICS

**The whole experience further sharpened the differences between some of the unions and the NDP. That happened especially with the auto workers.**

The auto workers were critically important for the alliance between private and public sector unions, and at that time they were probably the most progressive union in the province, alongside the postal workers.

The auto workers started distancing themselves more and more from the NDP on specific issues, and eventually, in 2006, they split from the NDP altogether.

In the mid-2000s, Canadian Auto Workers president Buzz Hargrove gave tactical support to the Liberal Party in elections, and then eventually, once Hargrove was kicked out of the NDP, he gave full CAW support to Ontario's Liberal government in the elections three years ago.

The experience also shifted some of the teachers' unions. Through long internal battles they had been pushed away from business unionism and were becoming more and more active as part of the left of the broader union movement. They were critically important in some of the days of action in the 1990s. Afterwards they moved back towards the Liberals and towards business unionism.

The differences between the levels of government in Canada, federal and provincial, complicate how the party question plays out. But essentially the political defeat which came when the unions decided not to push the days of action further amounted to the complete consolidation of neo-liberalism in Canada.

The Liberals did stop the reign of cuts in Ontario when they won the provincial election there in 2003, but still, it was the Liberals who initiated the cuts at the federal level, and they did nothing to reverse the previous cuts.

Clearly in Britain you are going to face a very determined ruling class swinging behind a fiscal-cuts approach to deal with the deficit. They will try to avoid reversing any of the tax cuts imposed by neo-liberalism, and they will maintain full support for the financialisation and internationalisation of capital.

Of course the centre and right support that policy. What was striking in Canada was the social democratic party did not attempt to break from neo-liberalism.

The Labour Party will face the same dilemma, and it's hard to see on what basis the Labour Party will lead a movement to oppose the neo-liberal strategy now.

You're then left with the unions and other movements attempting to defeat the austerity drive. From the Canadian experience, three levels seem critical.

One is to find a way to hold together an alliance between private-sector and public-sector unions. Private-sector unions have to come in behind defence of the public sector.

Secondly, there will have to be huge mobilisations of wide alliances at the local level between unions and all kinds of community groups.

Thirdly, it is very hard to see how this can be sustained from specific action to a longer-term strategy without developing some political strategy that isn't limited to either the broad alliances or the unions.

That was the critical thing that was absent in Canada. There was no political leadership independent of social democracy, or independent of the union leaders, that could keep pushing for political action and provide a political analysis.

## JOB CUTS

# London Underground workers resist jobs massacre

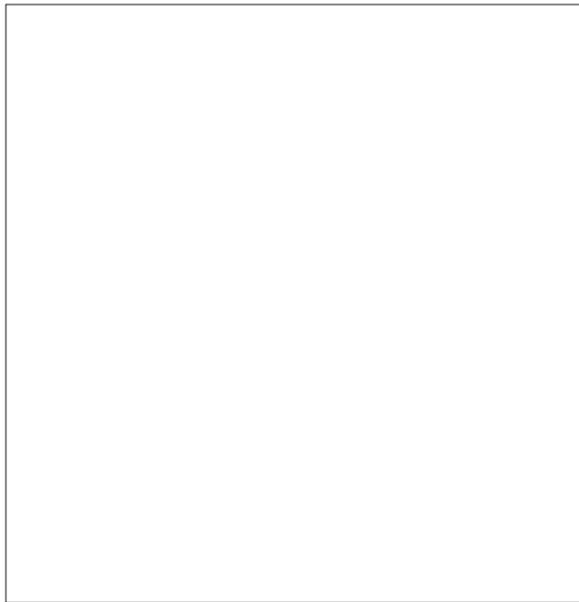
**I**n February, London Underground announced 800 front-line stations staff job cuts: 450 ticket sellers, around 200 station assistants, and a handful of managers.

Facing a slick campaign from London Underground, RMT activists are campaigning hard, and are now waiting for a fighting response from the top of the union.

Latest figures show that every station will lose a significant number of staff, when we have too few already! Even current numbers leave some stations regularly understaffed. There are never enough to deal with incidents. When a short delay leads to overcrowding on platforms, staff need to control the flow of people into the station. If someone falls on an escalator, or activates a passenger alarm on a train, or finds a suspicious package, staff are needed to keep the service running and safe. Workers genuinely fear that they will not be able to run stations safely if these proposals go through.

Customer service will go out of the window. Boris Johnson, elected on the pledge to save ticket offices, will close them in all but name, restricting opening hours to as little as an hour a day.

RMT activists have kicked off the "S.O.S. — Staff Our Stations" campaign. We have gone to the press



and are doing regular public leafleting, tapping into sympathy on customer service and safety issues.

But we are facing a new breed of London

Underground management, who are fighting hard and strategically. A document that recently fell out of management into union hands revealed their plan to prepare for and provoke a strike.

They will not give in easily. They rode out a very effective two day strike last year. They are also playing different grades against each other by leaving station supervisors and drivers out of these attacks, convincing some that these cuts "won't affect them". Drivers' union ASLEF is feeding this division by recruiting drivers who don't want to strike for station staff.

We need a concerted, united fight. Sustained action, not one or two day strikes, uniting all grades.

RMT's leadership are not treating this battle with any urgency. They are in dispute, alongside the smaller, more conservative stations union, TSSA, but not yet preparing a ballot.

The court injunction that prevented the Network Rail strike has been a perfect pretext for sluggishness, illustrating why union leaders secretly love the anti-union laws they publicly decry. Workers' Liberty activists have been at the forefront of building this fight. We will continue public campaigning, building unity across the grades and putting pressure on our union leadership to take the fight up seriously, as it deserves.

## Marxists and "new technology"

**O**ne of London Underground's pretexts for cutting jobs and slashing ticket office opening times is that new technology, in the form of the 'Oyster' smartcard ticketing system, has significantly reduced purchases at ticket office windows. There are several reasons why this 'reason' is disingenuous:

- \* The number of transactions at the ticket office window has not reduced simply because of Oyster, but because of a deliberate policy by London Underground to drive business away. LU has, for example, imposed a £5 minimum Oyster top-up only at the ticket office window; has advertised alternative outlets such as newsagents; and enticed people to buy online by offering free iTunes!

- LU claims that transactions at the ticket office window have fallen by 28%, but measures this from early 2006, when it cut ticket office opening hours!

- It plans to cut ticket office opening hours by 35%.
- It has changed the measure by which it decides whether a ticket office is open in any particular hour from 15 minutes of ticket-selling activity to 30 minutes.

- The Oyster system has many problems and difficulties, and many passengers, for example occasional, foreign, disabled or elderly ones, may find it hard to use alternative outlets such as machines and prefer a personal service.

But beyond these immediate and specific issues, there are deeper issues about charging for public transport and about new technology.

If socialists ran public transport, we would make it free. So there would be no ticket offices or ticket-selling jobs. But we would not cut jobs overall; we would more staff in other areas of the station; we would build new lines and extensions which would need staff; and we would cut working hours.

But London Underground is not scrapping or even cutting fares. It continues to charge the highest fares of any European capital city, but is just making it harder to pay them at the station! The new Oyster system could have been used to reduce queues and improve the service; instead, it is being used as a pretext to cut it.

Transport companies often target new technology into ticketing, even while they leave safety and operational systems in the 19th century.

Improved technology should be able to make our life at work easier, perhaps reducing our working hours or lightening our workload. But the employers usually see it as an excuse to get rid of us, or attack us, instead.

So if new technology comes with attacks on our working conditions, should we oppose it?

Rail workers can hardly be against new technology as such, or we'd be demanding our own abolition in order to save the jobs of horse-drawn carriage drivers! In the Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx saw the "new technology" of railways as highly progressive. "The real fruit of [class] battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever — expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication..."

"That union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarians [wage-workers], thanks to railways, achieve in a few years".

And we'd rather work on new trains, in newly-rebuilt stations, with modern kit, than under old conditions. New technologies create new possibilities and make old things faster, more reliable, and often easier.

But in a capitalist, profit-driven society, new technologies are introduced in order to improve profits. What is introduced, and how, is decided by profitability — by how new technologies can help capital in its eternal quest to squeeze more work from us, and to increase management control.

Marx analysed this for the new technology of the 19th century — mostly steam-powered factory production. On the face of it, the new machinery eased labour, but it had actually helped the bosses to increase work rates.

The increased productivity of new technologies meant that the capitalist class could produce commodities with less labour-time. They needed less of the workers' time to produce the goods to pay the workers' wages. They could have cut working hours.

But instead, they kept people on the same hours and kept the money from the extra products for themselves. Less of your working day would be spent producing value to pay your wages, and more producing value to make profit for your boss. Capitalist new technology has an inbuilt drive to increase inequality. It also has an inbuilt drive to produce surges of unemployment. If new technology makes production faster, the bosses sack "surplus" workers.

Further, wrote Marx, "machinery... is the most powerful weapon for repressing strikes, those periodical revolts of the working class against the autocracy of capital". It does that by making labour more easily replaceable.

But while doing all this, new technology builds up

both the technical and the human basis for socialism. It means that when the working class takes control of society, we will have the resources available to meet human need and to abolish poverty. As Marx said, new technology "provides, along with the elements for the formation of a new society, the forces for exploding the old one".

So? New technology — yes; but we have to fight for control over the terms and conditions under which it is introduced; for shorter hours and easier work conditions rather than job cuts and increased managerial control.

## PPP is dead!

**L**ittle-noticed by a media focusing on one bunch of scoundrels trying to form a government with another bunch of scoundrels, it seems that the despised and discredited London Underground Public-Private Partnership (PPP) is dead.

TfL is to buy Tube Lines from its shareholders Bechtel and Ferrovial, which, following Metronet's inglorious return a couple of years ago, means that all maintenance is now back inhouse. Hurrah.

The cloud to this silver lining, though, is that they very people who warned against the PPP all along — i.e. the workforce — may be made to pay the price. TfL is to pay Bechtel and Ferrovial £310 million for the Infraco, an extraordinary reward for their failures. The public sector should simply have taken it back, with no payment.

BoJo has given assurances that farepayers, taxpayers and the government will not have to stump up any money for this move. But *someone* will have to pay. We strongly suspect that it will be Underground workers, both infrastructure and operation, as our employer tries to refill its coffers at the expense of our jobs, wages and conditions.

Moreover, while welcoming the demise of the dreadful PPP, we wonder what plans our Tory mayor and probable Tory-led government will have for the Underground. When PPP was first devised, the Tory alternative was wholesale privatisation.

## Do bosses “have to” make cuts?

**L**ondon Underground tells us that it “has to” cut stations jobs because of the economic crisis. But a look at London Underground’s history shows that this is not just untrue — it is the opposite of the truth.

London Underground began in 1863, when private companies starting opening lines. By the 1920s, the Underground had expanded into a web of lines beneath London, run by several different private companies.

There was a recession during the 1920s, and the government gave a public subsidy to the private owners, explicitly both to improve the Tube and to create jobs at a time of high unemployment.

London Underground came into public ownership in 1933, under the new London Transport Passenger Board (LPTB).

The economy was again in recession, but public ownership led to investment, improvements and extensions on a large scale, with the added bonus of again creating jobs during another period of high unemployment. With the LPTB’s New Works Programme announced in 1934, the Underground saw extensions to the Central, Northern, Piccadilly and Bakerloo Lines, electrification of the Metropolitan line north of Rickmansworth, and new tunnels, stations and escalators. Despite improvements slowing during the war, by 1947 the average speed of the train service had increased by 18% since 1933.

Cutting jobs during recession simply increases unemployment and worsens public services: it does not help economic recovery, and certainly does not help workers or service users. Instead, the government should give extra funding to London Underground to improve its services, increase its staffing levels, bring forward its upgrades, make its stations more accessible, and build extensions and new lines. And it should bring the engineering functions back into an integrated, publicly owned London Underground, without compensating the private owners who have sucked so much out of the system.

London Underground and Tube Lines may be using the recession as a pretext for attacking jobs and conditions — but they are actually doing the opposite of what needs to be done. The government can pay people benefits to be out of work; or it can pay them wages to carry out socially-useful work. It’s obvious which is better, isn’t it?!

## What you can do

1. Add your name to our petition, which can be found at <http://bitly/tubesos>
2. If you have a question about LUL’s job cuts or the RMT’s campaign against them, drop an email to Janine Booth at [janine@rmtlondoncalling.org.uk](mailto:janine@rmtlondoncalling.org.uk). We will answer your question, and compile the most popular and relevant questions into a “Frequently Asked Questions” leaflet.
3. If you work on London Underground, make sure that you are a member of RMT, and that the union has your up-to-date details (address, grade, location).
4. Encourage any of your workmates who are not yet members to join RMT.
5. Regularly check the London Transport RMT website: [www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk](http://www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk), and our special ‘SOS: Staff Our Stations’ webpage ([www.rmtplatform.org.uk/sos](http://www.rmtplatform.org.uk/sos)) for updates.
6. Email Janine or text 07910 202 225 to order campaign materials, including leaflets for the public and our “SOS: staff our stations” stickers. Give leaflets to your friends, family and neighbours. The campaign organises regular leafleting; get in touch to find out when/where.

### FRONTLINE REPORTS

## “The fightback is now”

CactusMan is an RMT rep and activist.

**“I**’ve been active in the campaign through leafleting and petitioning stations. I’m also going to be addressing a Unite meeting; we have to spread the message to other unions.

“Unite has members on London Underground and they’ll be in dispute soon too. Generally though this is going to be a slow-burning, long-running campaign. A strike still seems a little way off.

“We’ve been producing station-specific leaflets, so we can tell passengers exactly what cuts are threatened at the stations they use every day. We’ve also been getting in touch with other relevant parties such as disability rights groups; disabled people are among those who’ll be worst hit by staffing cuts.

“So far we’ve mainly leafleting members of the public. We’ve had a pretty good response from those who actually take a leaflet, but it’s sometimes hard to snap people out of the semi-comatose state you have to get into in order to commute to and from work every day!

“I think this sort of activity and engagement with the public could definitely help counter the anti-union, anti-strike media hysteria that will inevitably accompany any industrial action that comes out of this campaign. If people take a leaflet from you or talk to you at the station they can see you’re not a raving lunatic! It’s also about getting people to connect with LU workers on a human level. When I leafleted my own station, people who commute through my station who I sell tickets to every day didn’t recognise me out of my uniform! Building up that human contact between workers and our passengers could help build support if we launch a strike.

“I work in the ticket office at Loughton, which is at the far eastern end of the Central Line. The farther out from central London you go the worse the cuts are. My ticket office is facing 66% cuts, meaning we’ll be open for one third of the time we currently open for. Boris Johnson is trying to keep his promise to not close any offices by slashing opening hours. If the cuts go through, some offices will only be open for one hour during the day.

“One of the most important things now is to involve more workers in the campaign. It’s only when workers take ownership of a campaign like this that it becomes effective. Direct involvement and control by large numbers of workers is vital if this campaign is going to succeed.”

OutCast is an RMT activist.

**“T**he campaign itself is a testament to the commitment of activists on London Underground fighting for both the workers’ right to work and the public’s right to have a safe transport environment. We’re fighting against a situation whereby the working class are being made to pay for the incompetence of the bankers and excesses of the government.

“So far there have been numerous days of action, with activists standing outside stations getting petitions signed and handing out leaflets to the public. We’ve collected hundreds of signatures. There are leaflets for specific stations being printed, and staff are spending their own time handing these out and explaining the problems these cuts will cause to the public. It’s the working class yet again suffering so the rich don’t have to. It’s time to stand up and be counted; the time to fight back is now.”

Clare Reilly is an activist and rep in RMT East Ham branch.

**“T**here is absolutely no doubt that station staff are under direct attack from the bosses to save money and I for one don’t plan on going without a fight.

“If TFL want to save money then I suggest they start at the top where all the real money is being paid out, and get rid of some of the deadwood up there instead of targeting the lowest-paid workers who work bloody hard trying to keep an ageing system moving with staffing levels that are already at a bare minimum.

“We all need to get on board with the SOS campaign and dedicate whatever spare time we have. Making the general public aware of what is happening on their Underground is a very important part of this. With the upcoming ballot for strike action, we need to make sure we don’t let the national press attack the RMT without the general public having the facts of why we’re striking.

“The more public support we have the stronger our campaign will be. Nobody wants to see staffless stations, increased crime and a soulless, staffless transport network that we see in many other cities all over the world. I urge everyone who hasn’t already signed the SOS petition to do so. Come and join us on one of our days of action where we speak to the public outside stations, hand out leaflets and get names on the petition. I do not want to look back in five years time and think that I sat back and did nothing.”

Peter is a driver on London Underground and an RMT activist.

**“I**t’s vital for safety reasons to have the numbers of staff that we currently have — as a minimum — so that safety issues on stations are identified and dealt with professionally and as quickly as possible.

“There are many scenarios that a driver is faced with such as faulty equipment where station assistance is needed to safely overcome the issue, or customer issues on board trains which could be a customer being taken ill where they need assistance straight away, or a customer being violent towards a driver working alone who would need assistance straight away. Of course with station staff working alone (as is already happening now anyway), the risk of assault to station staff would increase.

“Then there is the issue of senior LU managers being paid, in some cases, hundreds of thousands of pounds, whilst front line staff who actually do the job and provide the railway service take pay cuts and face losing their jobs. The team charged with finding cuts is made up of senior managers who were all seconded from their day jobs so they could look for “waste.” If they can be seconded to such a role with no adverse affect on the service, why not just get rid of them instead?

“Besides anything else, if an all-grades union like the RMT can’t fight together to protect 800 jobs, and demonstrate to members why they need to stand together, then we might as well give up. If these jobs go, the next step will be LU permanently de-staffing more and more stations, then other grades will come under attack until there’ll be nobody employed on the front line at LU or so few that we’ll have no way of defending our pay and conditions as we’ll all be standing alone.

“We need a real fightback on this; I’m looking forward to receiving an announcement of a ballot for strike action in the post!”

PHYLLIS JACOBSON

# A defector from the consensus

American comrade Barry Finger looks at the political life of Phyllis Jacobson, who co-founded and for a long period edited the US socialist journal *New Politics*.

**P**hyllis Jacobson, who died after a protracted illness on 2 March, just shy of her 88th birthday, was the dynamic force behind a remarkable political and intellectual partnership of shared passion that left an indelible imprint on three generations of twentieth century American radicalism.

Phyllis, much like her future husband Julie, came to revolutionary socialism in her early teens, through the Trotskyist faction within the Socialist Party. When the Trotskyists split from the SP to form the Fourth International, the SP's Young People's Socialist League went with them.

There they, like so many of their radical comrades, many of whom — as they defected from their earlier commitments — became known as the New York Intellectuals, obtained a gruelling political education in struggle with not only with the much more influential Stalinists who dominated the left landscape, but also the mainstream Trotskyist faction who offered critical support to the Soviet Union long after the revolution was interred.

Phyllis would later recall, with mixed pride and irony, that it was she who recruited her childhood friend, and future neo-conservative historian, Gertrude Himmelfarb, to the movement. Phyllis, like Julie, clearly shared with the New York intellectuals an ability to express herself eloquently and accessibly — without a hint of leftist cant — through a broad sweep of domestic and international political affairs, but differed from them in one crucial detail.

They utterly lacked the requisite yearning for peer respectability.

They accommodated their views to fit no political fashion; to curry favor neither with academia nor with any left mainstream. They fought against the war in Vietnam, without succumbing to illusions about Ho Chi Minh and the NLF; they struggled against American intervention in Nicaragua, without closing their eyes to the Sandinistas' infringements on democracy; they fought against CIA-inspired overthrow attempts of Castro, while exposing the Castro regime's repressive anti-democratic nature. They engaged the struggle for democratic unions, while condemning racism both in the ranks and in leadership policies of the labour movement. And they saw no contradiction in fighting for both at once.

They did more than most to save the good name of anti-Stalinism from the clutches of intellectual conciliators, apologists and outright propagandists of capitalism and reaction who were to emerge ever more dominant both on the liberal left as well as the neo-con right.

If later radicalizing generations were to sentimentally embrace the memory of naively idealistic Communists fighting the good fight as premature antifascists, Phyllis was an early and persistent defector from that consensus. She retained bitter memories of these "sweet Stalinist grandmothers" who ripped Trotskyist leaflets from her and her comrades, shoved her to the ground and denounced them all as "Trotskyite" whores and fascist agents. She remembered too how Julie's Stalinist relatives once demanded of them an accounting as to how the "Trotskyites" could justify their poisoning of Maxim Gorky.

She relentlessly reminded later generations, innocently inclined to forgive, what they never knew to forget. Writing about Lillian Hellman, Phyllis remonstrated that Hellman and her Stalinist compatriots may not have actually engaged in much more than verbal violence. If they were free of the actual physical crimes of Stalinism, and that more an accident of opportunity than of scruple, they nevertheless colluded in the larger political and intellectual cover-up.

By promoting a totalitarian movement in the name of socialism, Hellman and her friends had done enormous harm. They had impeded the development of an authentic socialist movement by distorting the basic concepts of socialism, promulgating the idea that a society based on the destruction of working class inde-

pendence, on terror and the liquidation of millions was socialist. They not only distorted history but made a mockery of the American radical tradition.

Their violence was a lasting assault on the very soul of the modern emancipatory impulse that she and Julie dedicated their lives to repair.

It was in the Workers' Party — the Third Camp tendency, sometimes simplistically and misleadingly known as the Shachtmanites — that Phyllis and Julie first came to know one another. One from the far reaches of the Northern Bronx, the other from the hinterlands of Brooklyn, the sheer geography posed a difficult challenge in sustaining a relationship. Two hours each way on the subway, Herb Hill once recalled, was the death of more than one movement romance.

The Workers' Party, later the Independent Socialist League, was a dissident milieu that the two were quite rightly exceedingly proud of having experienced. It shaped their talents, honed their political perspectives, and provided a richness of revolutionary activity that "stood in stark contrast to the crippling and suffocating airlessness of the Stalinist movement."

When the Independent Socialist League dissolved itself in the late 1950s and merged with the Socialist Party, Phyllis briefly became the SP's Manhattan organiser. Julie joined so briefly, that many years later, he actually had no memory whatsoever of having ever belonged. Phyllis's membership ended rather early as she grasped that the vaunted regroupment strategy that Shachtman sold as the basis for unification — to prepare a neutral ground to pick up the remnants of the disintegrating Communist Party after the Khrushchev revelations and the invasion of Hungary — was fast becoming a cover for abandoning socialist politics.

When, a few years later, she returned to the SP office, now little more than a George Meany patronage machine, to reclaim bound volumes of the *New Internationalist* (the WP/ISL theoretical journal), she was met with unexpected resistance by the few "old, young men" — as she put it — who ran the office. Brooking no argument, she proceeded to spirit away the entire stock, stating firmly that it was the intellectual and financial contributions of her movement — not theirs — that gave her the moral right to do so.

When asked why she and Julie never joined any subsequent grouping, Phyllis responded simply that they had participated in the most stimulating sect that they could ever imagine, but that they had no further interest in entrapping themselves into another sectarian shell. These, in her opinion, bred a self-destructive "lack of civility among comrades and friends" and a self-isolating sense of misplaced moral superiority.

## NEW POLITICS

**New Politics was envisioned as a way to break out of that shell, to create an arena for cross pollinating the wealth of political experience and insight that the WP/ISL had fostered with broader activist movements for change among other healthy radical traditions, among labour movement insurgents, the militant wing of the civil rights movement of the early 1960s and the emerging new left.**

The journal continues its long tradition of encouraging wide-ranging debate, with writers having extensive freedom to express views the editors disagree with.

Of the two Jacobsons, Phyllis was clearly the more outgoing. Intellectually, they were joined at the hip. They struggled together over every phrase, every nuance and tone of each other's writings.

Julie freely admitted — and without a hint of patronisation — that Phyllis was a very real co-author with him, his indispensable editor, and his critical eye. And one can easily see this in their writing styles, as close as two different individuals might conceivably be.

It was Phyllis who handled the day-to-day work of the journal. She cajoled authors and financial contributors to meet deadlines. She had the unique tact to convince often thin-skinned writers to accept editorial suggestions, and when rarely necessary, editorial fiats. She maintained and meticulously updated the vast rolodex of contacts, donors, and subscribers. She coordinated the layout, printing and distribution. And she,

unlike Julie, was the real schmoozer, with a rollicking laugh so infectious that rare indeed were those who could resist joining her. Phyllis enjoyed relating, as few political obsessives can, to a range of cultural and epicurean topics that permitted her to engage simply and naturally both to the radical and to the political bystander alike. Phyllis truly was — in that much abused phrase — the life of the party.

This did not mean that she lacked a temper, nor an unyielding sense of political propriety. She, unlike Julie, never forgave Irving Howe and Lewis Coser from colluding with the publisher in demoting Julie to "an assistant" in the publication of the 1962 history *The American Communist Party*. Julie had done remarkable research for this volume. But they had academic ladders to climb — Julie was only a machinist — and the publisher in any case would only list two authors. So Julie was listed as a "co-author in all but name."

Forty years later, Phyllis still declared this episode a "disgrace." And "disgrace" remained the ultimate denunciation.

Phyllis memorably upbraided a prominent left scholar from the audience, who qualified his defense of affirmative action in a circumstantial cloud, by declaring quite audibly that his utterances were "simply disgraceful." An act of political chiropractics was instantaneously performed, a spine was straightened, and the equivocation forthrightly and apologetically retracted. That was symptomatic of the authority Phyllis could wield.

Remarkably, however, this diminutive powerhouse did not formally join the editorial board until the summer 1968 issue — and then not as the co-editor. Her inclusion was made without prior announcement and with no fanfare; her name simply posted in alphabetical order on the list of board members. In fact, up until that point, there were no women either on the editorial board or on its sponsors' list!

Phyllis argued in defence of the feminist movement against former comrades such as Irving Howe, whose "schmaltzy" defence of immigrant Jewish patriarchy — a microcosm of his larger evasion — left her particularly disgusted. She was quite conscious of coming out of a milieu, the neo-Trotskyist movement, which was, as she said, "far from generous to its women." Yet, in a very real sense, it was the rising tide of the women's movement that liberated Phyllis within the *New Politics* milieu. Even then, Phyllis only became a co-editor with the second series of the journal.

It is a sad footnote that when the first series of *New Politics* ended in 1976, there were still no other women on the editorial board and only two women listed as sponsors, one of whom — Joanne Landy — had closely participated in *New Politics* since its inception. Still, the ongoing division of labour within the Jacobson family deprived the journal of the volume of literary output she should have otherwise produced.

What we have of Phyllis's writings constitute only a handful of articles, but memorable contributions all, and amongst the highest literary and political quality that the journal ever produced. Her writings on Stalinism, the American Communist Party and the Popular Front alone remain a unique source of political education for those who seek a concrete understanding of the nature of totalitarianism and the relationship of socialism to democracy.

Phyllis — with Julie's active participation to be sure — worked hard to see that the lack of women's voices was not duplicated when the journal was resurrected a decade later. She campaigned for a properly consistent policy of gender, racial and generational diversity in the solicitation of contributors and in the choice of subject matter. And she never ceased to register her disappointment when these standards were not met.

The last years of Phyllis's life were heartbreaking to witness, a debilitating series of strokes that left her a shell of her former self — an ever cheerful and radiant political provocateur silenced, dependent and immobilised. Phyllis was visibly uncomfortable with sentimentality and it would be difficult to end on a note that violated her spirit. Her passing leaves a void of consistent polemical grace and unbounded political energies in the small, hard-pressed socialist movement of today that cannot easily be duplicated. She is missed.

• [www.newpol.org](http://www.newpol.org)

FILM

# If Virginia Woolf wrote movies...

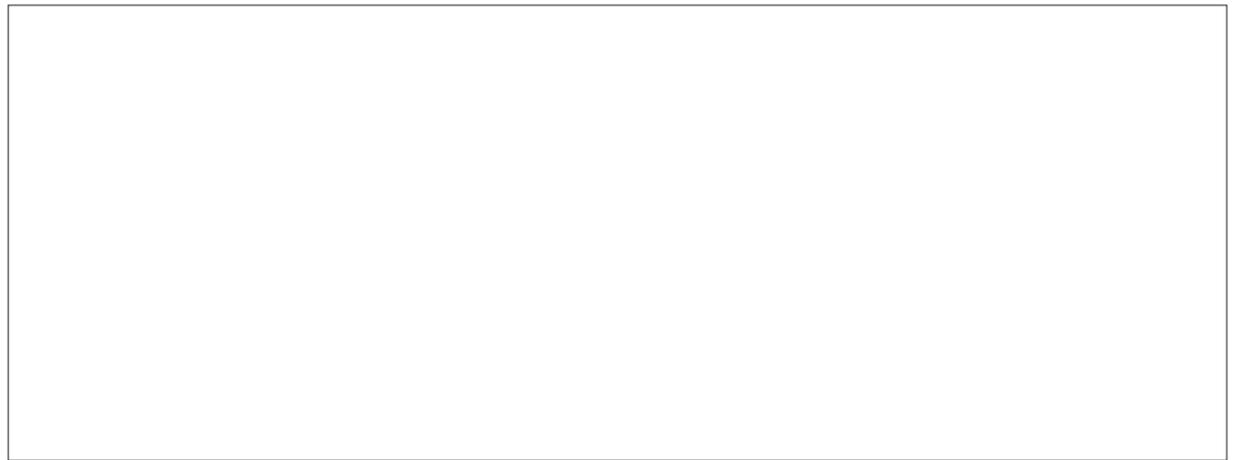
BY JORDAN SAVAGE

**L**uca Guadagnino's *I Am Love* defies expectations. British ice-queen Tilda Swinton shows unprecedented emotional range as Emma Recchi, a working-class Russian woman, married to an Italian entrepreneur.

Perhaps it is a game of stereotypes: there is a strong expectation that the orthodox, Catholic Italian family would be unable to accept their daughter's homosexuality (the daughter, played by Alba Rohrwacher is herself a stereotype: an Electrelane-listening short-haired art student) but the oppressed, passionate Russian is able to break this model, and loves her daughter unconditionally.

This playing off of stereotype against stereotype, however, is not hollow. Guadagnino's film treads the same territory as Virginia Woolf's work: actions informed by emotional torment are played out with no interrogation of intention. Hollywood's usual modus operandi is to have somebody feel ashamed or betrayed say out loud, "I feel betrayed"; in *I Am Love*, we see only the symptoms of these feelings. Rather than being spoon-fed, the spectator instead watches a series of half-explained actions, that force themselves to crisis when Emma Recchi's affair with her son's friend is discovered.

This absence of emotional dialogue is reflected in the photography. Often when the camera switches to Emma's perspective, traditional vaseline-lensed flashback techniques are used — particularly if she has just mentioned her upbringing in Russia. However, instead of cutting to the past, we see only the plants around



her as she makes love in a field, or the faces of her family at the dinner table. The overwhelming result of these cutaways is that the film speaks only in the present tense, divorced from its past, just as "Emma", renamed by her Italian husband, has been forced to deny her Russian past.

And so the same effect as Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* is achieved: polite society denies the sacrifices and oppressions that protect it, and we are reminded of the necessity of gender politics across classes. To play the entitled, ruling class mother in twenty-first century Italy, Emma Recchi has to deny her transgressive sexual desire and to lie to her husband about her total acceptance of, and dedication to, her children. Her son, Edoardo, who is heir to the fam-

ily fortune, is killed by the realisation of his mother's affair with his contemporary, the point at which she steps out of the expected social conventions of a woman of her class — a class into which she has been forced, by a total disengagement from her own history.

It is a beautiful film; aesthetically perfect framed, played out by beautiful people — the coutured businessmen, the rugged peasant-chef who eventually wins the passionate Russian woman away to their own new, Italian Dachau. Marketed to English audiences as a comedy of manners, this film is a reminder of everything that Woolf said for the women's movement: even today, there are sections of society in which women are still cut off from economic freedom and, fundamentally, from desire.

BOOK

# On human fear

Cathy Nugent reviews *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, by Philip Pullman.

**C**hristian belief in Jesus relies on the idea that Jesus existed and he was a very special man. That he worked miracles — e.g. whether he cured the sick. That he was the son of God, born to a virgin. If Jesus was not as unique as Christianity tells us he was, then Christianity loses its reason-to-be.

Philip Pullman's retelling of the Jesus story shows, hypothetically, how the all-important miracles in the Bible could have been invented. Pullman creates situations to "explain" how the events in Jesus's life could have happened.

Pullman, like many other people before him, has also done a lot of research into the Biblical text which, apparently, has revealed the possible origins of the Jesus myths. He said he wants people to compare texts, his and that of the Bible, in order to show up the inconsistency of the Bible.

In Pullman's story Jesus has a twin brother called Christ. Christ is the weaker brother, but his mother's favourite.

Christ is also the more human, fallible character. Self-righteous when young, made arrogant by his mother's singular love. Cowardly and jealous of his brother when older, Later regretful and more self-aware.

Christ is got by a mysterious stranger to betray Jesus. So he is also the Judas character of the Bible. The mysterious stranger Christ believes to be an angel. But the stranger also represents a political force, perhaps a conspiracy to create an ongoing church around Jesus. Not Jesus as he is in Pullman's story — pious, annoying, but also full of doubt — but a mythical made-up person.

In Pullman's story no virgin gives birth. Mary is seduced by a man claiming to be an angel. Loaves and fishes are not conjured up by Jesus but produced with the ingenuity and solidarity of human beings. Other miracles are products of rumour and hearsay which, when written down as if it were truth, became... the Gospels!

Incendiary stuff then? Indeed Pullman has been threatened by some more troubled fundamentalists. But for my money this is a subtle and sympathetic retelling of the Jesus story.

It's not difficult to write a diatribe against the endurance of belief in miracles. You only have to walk down the road in any poorer London borough, look at all the evangelical churches, many of them African churches promising poor people money and disabled and dying people cures. Go home, get on a computer and have a rant: nothing simpler. More difficult is evoking and thereby unmasking the emotions that attract human beings to religion and drive them to "reinvent" god.

As ever with Pullman there is plenty of ambiguity and mystery in *The Good Man...* The reader is left to guess at what is really going on. The unsettling thing reading this book, is what you find yourself thinking about, what emotional memories are evoked.

Around the age of eight or nine I decided to stop believing in god. This wasn't on the basis of some great philosophical theory! It was because I found god and his son Jesus scary.

They were supernatural beings and like ghosts and poltergeists etc (popular in the 70s) were just too weird to think about. There was even an actual ghost, a Holy Ghost, in there somewhere. And Jesus, with his overwhelmingly perfect personality, was also creepy.

That is a feeling that has never left me and hasn't been helped by things such as the impossibly blue eyes of Robert Powell's Jesus in the TV series *Jesus of Nazareth* (well it was the 70s, and there wasn't much on!)

Of course I've always told myself that my actual fear of god as a child was a path to wisdom. Because as I grew older I began to realise that belief in god is based on human fear. But the unsettling thing is to find, reading the story of Jesus as told by Pullman, is that I still have this emotional fear, it is still operational.

Pullman's story is about the need to exaggerate, and to dismiss, to believe in something and to disbelieve in something, to make choices and express these choices as truth while in reality we are trying to escape our own fear. It's a prickly view of human life, but it does give us an insight into how ignorance and stupidity.

## Will you help the socialist alternative?

**I**n the 2010 General Election the Alliance for Workers' Liberty raised the banner of a socialist alternative — to give clear political answers to both the Tories and New Labour.

We now need to step up our work to create a socialist voice against the cuts and privatisation agenda of David Cameron and Nick Clegg!

We still need money to get across our message — yet we have no rich donors or "captains of industry" to finance our work. We want to raise £25,000 in the course of this year

### CAN YOU HELP US?

- Could you take a few copies of our paper to circulate at work or college (contact our office for details);
- Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).
- Donate directly, online — go to [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org) and press the donate button
- Send cheques made payable to "AWL" to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, or make a donation directly through internet banking with your bank, to directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number as above);
- Contact us to discuss joining the AWL.

### THANKS

In the last two weeks we have received £300 from J, £65 from M and £45 from South London branch. Our fighting fund running total now stands at £8668.50.

## IRAN

# Stop these executions!

BY ROSALIND ROBSON

**O**n Sunday May 9, Farzad Kamangar, a teacher trade union activist from the Kurdish region of Iran, who has been the subject of an international solidarity campaign, was executed.

Four other political prisoners were executed at the same time. The executions took place without families and lawyers being informed. By such an outrageous "out of the blue" state killing of a high profile political prisoner, the clerical-fascist regime attempted to terrorise the labour and opposition movements in Iran.

Farzad Kamangar was sentenced to death in February 2008. He was a member of the Kurdistan Teachers trade union. Farzad had already spent three years in prison on the charges of being affiliated with PJAK, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) counterpart in Iranian Kurdistan. He denied the charge, but in any case, for the thousands of people who supported him worldwide in the campaign for his release, the point was he was being imprisoned for being a political, trade union person from a minority area of Iran.

Three of the other prisoners executed alongside Farzad Kamangar — Ali Heidarian, Farhad Vakili and Shirin Alamhouli — were also political prisoners from Kurdish Iran.

All had been tortured in prison. Shirin Alamhouli said of her treatment, "The poundings on my head during the tortures have caused injuries to my head. Some days, I have severe headaches so harsh that I cannot pay attention to what goes on around me and get nose bleeds." The other person executed was Mehdi Eslamian.

A few days before the executions, on May Day, there were small demonstrations in Iranian cities. Reportedly some May Day protests were connected with the "Green" opposition, but at least one, in Qazvin, was motivated by demands for unpaid wages.

In the last few months many thousands of workers have lost their jobs in Iran — the result of competition from imports, privatisations and sell-offs of enterprises to companies owned by the Revolutionary Guards. Official reports of unemployment levels have been suppressed, but the trend is likely to continue.

Before May Day trade union and labour movement organisations in Iran came together to produce a statement which outlined the situation facing Iranian workers and their tasks, calling for the right "to strike, protest, march, assemble and speak freely" (see [www.workersliberty.org/node/14096](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14096)). Working-class organisations internationally need to act on their commitment to solidarity with Iranian workers.

• We can begin by protesting about these executions. For a model protest letter and addresses to send it to: [www.workersliberty.org/node/14173](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14173)

## US ANTI-MIGRANT LAW

# Razing Arizona

BY BARRY FINGER

**M**ay Day in the US was marked by defiant nationwide protests against the recently enacted Arizona law, which made it a crime to be present in the state without legal immigration status and authorised police to question people about their status based on "reasonable" suspicion.

Tens of thousands gathered in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Milwaukee, San Francisco and Washington DC in outrage at a law now providing a blueprint for similar racist proposals in Utah, Texas, Ohio, Missouri, Maryland and elsewhere, targeting Hispanics and making suspects out of people based on the color of their skins.

Originally planned in March before the Arizona law was enacted, the protests were called by immigrant advocates who had set 1 May as a deadline for the overhaul of existing immigration law aiming to grant legal status to millions of illegal immigrants. The Arizona law was seen as a watershed event lending immediate urgency to the situation.

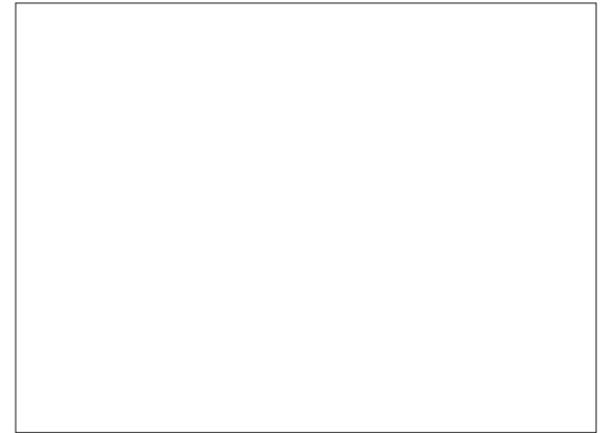
Anti-(Hispanic) immigration sentiment, previously called the "culture war", has long been a staple of the American right. It is of a piece with the "Take Back America" crusade, the "birther" conspiracy theory and the Tea Party movement that has attended the rise of Barack Obama and the demographic shift that this administration represents. The Arizona law even contains a rider demanding that future presidential candidates present their "birth certificates" before their names are placed on the ballot.

Advocates of the law claim it is necessary to fight crime. They argue that drug cartel activity has spilled over from the lawless Mexican border towns. But Arizona also has a protracted history of rightwing racist politics, including a 1950s and 1960s Republican-organized drive, led by future Chief Justice William Rehnquist, to stop Blacks and Latinos voting.

Arizona led by far the most intense and politically fractious battle against the Martin Luther King birthday holiday and has a long history of anti-immigrant policies and practices, including violent Minuteman nativist vigilantes, which predate the recent intensification of drug cartel violence.

This assertion is similarly belied by FBI crime statistics that clearly indicate violent crime on the Arizona side of the border has remained flat for the past decade even as drug cartel violence has spiraled out of control in Mexico. Statewide crime rates are also down. Equally important is the fact that fighting drug cartel violence desperately requires the cooperation of the Hispanic community with police officials.

This law drives a giant wedge between that community and law enforcement. Not only does it discourage police cooperation, but it diverts resources from actual crime fighting to immigration enforcement, rendering the law, in effect, an anti-crime fighting bill. This is undoubtedly know to the law makers who drafted legislation that targets Hispanics but cloaked it under a "law and order" fig leaf to conceal its racist intent



under a more appealing guise.

The Arizona law has strongly shifted the emphasis from immigration reform to border enforcement. But the drive to enforce borders cannot undo the underlying dynamic that drives immigration — both legal and illegal — in the US. More than half of this activity can be attributed to the economic aftermath of NAFTA. It is an arrangement designed to keep workers powerless and Mexicans desperate.

Millions of Mexican farmers were evicted from their lands, unable to compete with the cheap US agricultural produce that flooded the market. And they fared little better in the maquiladora towns that were designed as anti-union havens to provide cheap labour for American manufacturing. Mexican industry was unable to absorb the rural surplus population, and wages were driven ever further down, pressured not only by rural surpluses, but by competition with cheap Chinese labour that largely shuttered the maquiladoras altogether.

The immigration "problem", indeed the descent of huge swathes of Mexico into narco violence, is a problem of economic fugitives, outlaws and refugees that capitalism itself created and now finds itself unable to control.

As American socialists, we see immigrant workers — both legal and illegal — as a potential source for revitalising the labour movement. The Democrats and their allies in the mainstream immigrant rights groups differ from genuine grassroots immigration groups by their refusal to seek immediate legalisation for all immigrants now working in the United States.

If the counter-momentum for comprehensive progressive reform is contained by Democrats, a far more conservative compromise bill acceptable to moderate Republicans will pass. And far-seeing Republicans who see the writing on the wall are eager to find common cause with Democrats lest the racist wing of their party consign it to long-term demographic oblivion.

This compromise will undoubtedly continue to deny illegal immigrants the right to employment. It will maintain the emphasis on biometric identifications and workplace raids that drive illegal immigrants into underground markets where they are deprived not only of union representation, but also of all existing workplace rights.

## WHERE WE STAND

**T**oday one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

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

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

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

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

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

**We stand for:**

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.

- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.

- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

MY LIFE AT WORK

# Overspent or underfunded?

Amanda McKenzie works as a social worker in London.

**Tell us a little bit about the work you do.**

I'm a social worker for an inner-city London borough. I currently work in a team working with adults with learning disabilities. My specific job involves working with people with learning disabilities who also have mental health problems, and I also work with learning-disabled parents. A lot of the services related to this type of work, such as care home provision, have been privatised but my work is still directly run by the local council.

**Do you and your workmates get the pay and conditions you deserve?**

Conditions are much more of an issue than pay. The biggest issue is workload. There's no control over how manageable your workload is. Because our work is effectively emotional labour, and because we're working with very vulnerable people, there's a lot of pressure. You know that if you don't pick up cases then there could be seriously bad consequences.

There are other problems with conditions, too. Where I work management sold off a lot of buildings which meant we had no office space for a long time. We're now "hot-desking", which brings its own stresses, and we had to move into our current building before it was finished.

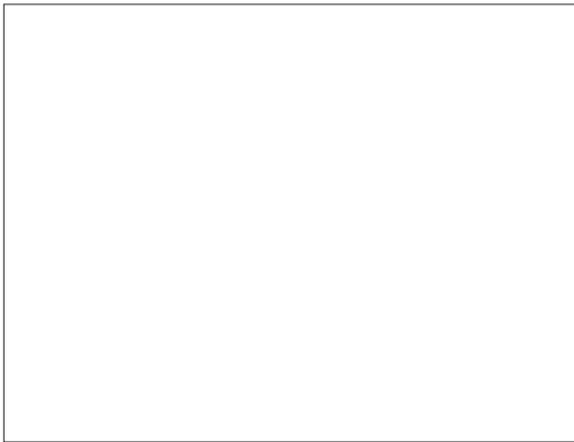
**Has the economic crisis affected your work? Has it affected the way workers think about their jobs?**

It's affected people a lot. The media is constantly full of talk about how good public sector workers have got it, and that makes people feel insecure. People's feelings about it develop in complex ways; some people feel that they do have it pretty good so feel quite lucky, but there's also a lot of anger at the media portrayal of the public sector as a paradise for workers and a recognition that it's not really like that.

A saying that you hear a lot is that "there's no slack in the system". Management is often looking to cut temps and agency staff, and the union's not been particularly good at defending them as it prefers to defend the permanent jobs where its members are.

But if those temps and agency workers get cut, who's going to do their jobs? The economic crisis has also affected us in subtler ways; the crisis has been used as a cover to slash benefits, which has big impact on many of our service users who're on benefits. We're dealing with more poverty and hardship in the lives of people we work with.

Management are now proposing £6 million worth of



Caring, and exploited

cuts across adult social services in the area. They're saying that we have to take the cuts because health services are protected. They're playing one public service off against another.

**What do people talk about in your workplace? How easy is it to "talk politics on the job"?**

I'm lucky because my immediate workplace is quite small and very well unionised. There's quite a high level of political culture, and even when people are just grumbling about making ends meet they understand that as political.

There's the usual sense of powerlessness you find with a lot of working-class people, but my workmates are quite engaged so I find it easy to talk about politics in my workplace. The nature of our work also affects people's political consciousness. Because of what we do, social workers tend to have a sense of the inequality that's out there in society and some level of opposition to it. You don't get many Tory social workers!

But because of the fact that we're providing vital services to vulnerable people, there's also a real fear about taking action like strikes in order to defend and extend our own rights.

**Do you enjoy your work?**

My job is a real mixture of the rewarding and the frustrating. My workplace and my colleagues make it rewarding but management and cuts make it frustrating! I see within my job a real potential to support people and help them achieve what they want to in life, but we don't always have the resources to give them the support they need.

You can quickly get sick of shitty decisions that

you're asked to carry out. There's a proud history of social workers simply refusing to implement policies from management that they knew would negatively affect service users, but that's much less common now. The training we're given is all about "competency" rather than values. To rebuild that kind of culture we need to look at rebuilding basic organisation and collective structures.

**What are your bosses like?**

It's a mix. Some of them are ex-workers who've been on the frontline, but some of them are just capitalist administrators and bureaucrats. In recent years there's been a move away from managers doing actual case-work so they can be disconnected from what workers are actually facing on the ground, but the better ones are genuinely concerned about their staff.

There's also a gender divide; most social workers are women but the higher up management you go the more men you'll find.

I think there's been a certain naivety from ex-workers who've gone into management jobs. Some people became managers years ago thinking they could change management practice and policies, but instead have ended up changing themselves. No matter how much a manager might care about their staff or the people we're working with, at the end of the day they've got a specific role to fulfil.

**Is there a union in your workplace, and does it do a good job?**

I'm a member of Unison. My workplace has nearly 100% density, but some of that is down to the hard work of a particular steward who's been in the workplace for a long time. There's a decent union culture; we get together once a fortnight to have a "shop meeting" and people expect to maintain communication with the union. They want to get reports of what's gone on at branch or conference. Little things like keeping the union noticeboard updated are important.

**If you could change one thing about your workplace, what would it be?**

Change the targets culture. Our job should be about helping people, not about meeting management targets. Beyond that, it would be something around spending policy. There's a constant alarmism about money, with managers constantly running around telling everyone we've overspent. I always make the obvious point that actually, we're underfunded. I want to see us properly funded so we're able to spend whatever's necessary to fully provide the services the people we work with need.

**IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2010:**  
**TROTSKYISM AND THE CAPITALIST CRISIS**

A weekend of socialist discussion and debate hosted by Workers' Liberty

10-11 July 2010 (film showing on the evening of Friday 9 July)  
 Highgate Newtown Community Centre, North London

After the 1929 crash, it was several years before working-class movements regrouped and started a militant fight back. How should the labour movement fight now?

Many of the ideas and arguments of Leon Trotsky, killed by a Stalinist agent 70 years ago, are acquiring fresh relevance:

- How do we fight fascism? "Maximum unity" or working-class united front?
- How do we develop independent working-class politics as a "Third Camp", opposed to both capitalism and the dead end "anti-capitalism" represented in the world of 1940 by Stalinism and today by Islamist clerical fascism?
- How do small Marxist groups relate to mass workers' movements which are politically tied to capitalism
- How do we build links between the workers' movement and other struggles against exploitation and oppression?
- Do we need a revolutionary party, or are loose coalitions a better answer?

Invited speakers include

- "Red Tory" Philip Blond on community and capitalism
- The Socialist Party, on whether Labour is dead for working-class politics
- Israeli socialist Moshe Machover on boycotting Israel
- Neal Lawson of Compass on the rise of the Lib Dems
- Bob Crow and John McDonnell on the way forward for the left of the labour movement

Other sessions will include

- 2009: the year of workers' occupations
- Why should revolutionaries bother with elections?
- Being a revolutionary at work
- Forum on the state of the unions with BA, rail, Unison and other activists
- Socialist feminism today
- Women and women's liberation in the Bolshevik party
- \* The politics of inequality

We will also be running an "Introduction to Marxism" series with a focus on Trotsky's contributions to Marxism:

- Trotsky on the Russian revolution and the defeat of revolutions in Europe
- Trotsky on what fascism is and how to fight it
- Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution"
- "One, two, many Trotskyisms"? How is the AWL different?
- The workers or "the people"?

Creche, accommodation and cheap food provided.

Weekend tickets bought before the end of May are £18 waged, £10 low-waged/student and £6 unwaged/school students. Day tickets also available: £10, £6, £4.

Book online at [www.workersliberty.org/ideas](http://www.workersliberty.org/ideas)  
 For more information email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) or ring 020 7207 0706.

# WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

## BA STRIKES

# Keeping up the pressure on bullying bosses

Following two rounds of industrial action in March, British Airways cabin crew workers have rejected a deal offered by BA management and announced a further 20 days of strikes. An activist from BASSA, the section of Unite that represents BA workers, spoke to *Solidarity*.

**T**he deal that BA management offered us was bad; it contained a degree of protection for existing members' terms and conditions but it was still entirely based on the introduction of New Fleet and the move to a two-tier workforce.

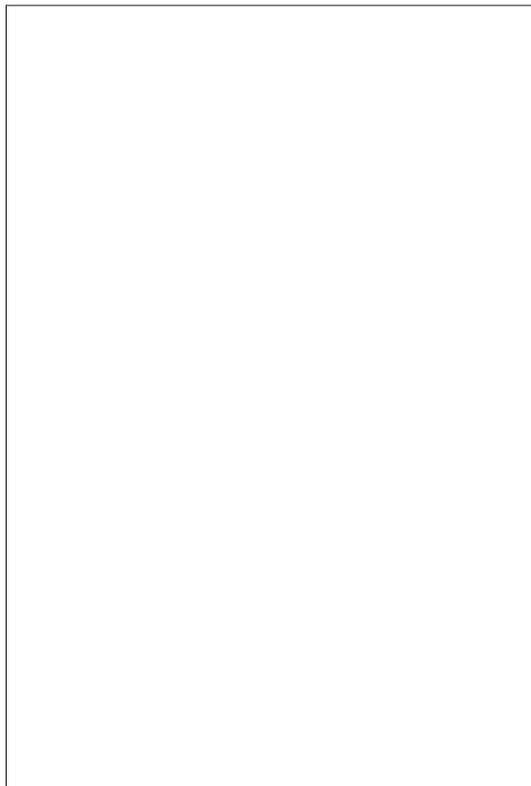
But if there's one main reason for the rejection it was the bosses' refusal to reinstate staff travel allowance.

People don't understand how important this is for BA workers. It's not just about getting free holidays; workers need it to come to work. One worker, who's based in Ireland, is having to pay £300 per go to get to work. She had her roster changed twice because of the ash cloud, and couldn't get a refund on the tickets she'd booked so she had to pay again. She couldn't even get to work to make that money back. People are literally having to pay to not work! There are hundreds of people in that position.

Management has not made any concessions or taken any account of the way it behaved during the last round of strikes. People are still being victimised and some, including people who've got exemplary records, are being sacked. One workers was suspended on a bullying charge because she asked a member of groundstaff whether they planned to fly as volunteer cabin crew. Then, on their way back to Terminal 5, they ended up behind a manager in traffic and that manager has added the claim that the worker was "following him" to the case!

That kind of victimisation culture is making everybody afraid. Willie Walsh is conducting utterly hysterical scaremongering and telling people the strike is illegal. There's a constant barrage of anti-strike and anti-union propaganda from management.

BASSA is taking a lead in reassuring people that the strike is legal and trying to maintain people's



confidence. Some workers now feel like they have nothing to lose, but other people are very much feeling the financial pinch.

Our view is that we've now offered a deal that BA could accept and Walsh is still intransigent. In an ideal world we'd like to oppose BA's plans, including New Fleet, outright but there are some doubts over how long we can hold out for.

The tide is beginning to turn, though; people are now realising that this is about Willie Walsh's ego and not the future of British Airways. It's clear that this dispute is hurting the company — combined with the effects of the ash cloud, bookings and general income have taken a huge hit. If we can continue to put that kind of pressure on management where it hurts them the most, we can force concessions.

## GREECE

# "We need united working-class action across the continent"

Stavros, from the Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece (OKDE), spoke to *Solidarity*.

**T**he general strike on 5 May was a huge success. It showed very clearly that there are many tens of thousands of people who are thinking seriously about politics and prepared to take militant action.

The strike on the ground actually went beyond trade union and economic demands; it looked more like a political strike. If it had continued, the government would have fallen. The trade union bureaucracy undermined this and has held back from calling further strikes. So far it's only called for an afternoon of demonstrations.

We're fighting for another, escalated general strike. We've put forward the slogan of a political general strike. Obviously, that slogan implies some sort of perspective around a workers' government but we formulate things more generally. We're saying that we need a socialist way out of the crisis; within that, we'd obviously raise ideas like the workers' government.

The movement as a whole currently has a quite serious problem. The trade union leaderships don't want to unite. The Stalinists who control some of the unions are just looking for ways to translate the movement into electoral advantages for themselves. But the far-left is not currently able to offer a viable, visible alternative pole that could provide leadership.

*Continued on page 11*

Individuals: £20 per year (22 issues) waged, £10 unwaged.

Organisations: £50 large, £22 smaller (5 copies).

European rate: £20 or 32 euros in cash.

Send to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques payable to "Solidarity". Or subscribe online at [workersliberty.org/solidarity](http://workersliberty.org/solidarity)

Name .....

Address.....

Organisation .....

**WORKERSLIBERTY.ORG**

**SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY**