

# Solidarity

## & Workers' Liberty



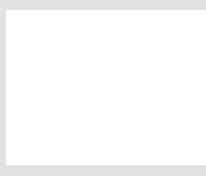
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For a workers' government

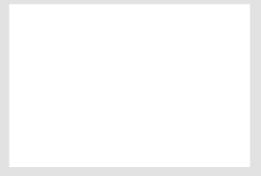
**Labour's "new"  
political colours**  
page 2



**Voices from Arab  
revolt** pages 6-8



**Defending the  
Easter Rising**  
page 9



# New battles for students and education workers

# UNI CUTS

See pages  
3 and 5

# HUNDREDS

# OF COURSES

## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay 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.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

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## The dead end of "dissident republicanism"

By Liam McNulty

**The murder of Constable Ronan Kerr in Omagh by dissident republicans at the beginning of April was just the latest deadly instalment in their increasingly dangerous campaign.**

The Continuity IRA, with roots in a 1986 split in the Provisional movement, was the first major group to challenge Sinn Féin's gradual abandonment of armed struggle. The most "traditional" of the armed groups, it claims the direct lineage of the Provisional Government of 1916. In the past it has dabbled with pan-Celtic nationalism and "third way" distributist theories derived from Catholic social teachings.

However, by all accounts it is newer groups spearheading the latest upsurge in violence.

The Real IRA emerged in the months leading up to the Good Friday Agreement, and although it was once debilitated by arrests and informers, it claimed the Massereene Barracks shootings (March 2009) and is believed to be behind a spate of disruptive car bombs in Derry.

Since 2009 a group called Óglaigh na hÉireann, a splinter from the RIRA, has been responsible for critically injuring

another Catholic police officer and the scale of its operations indicate a level of expertise probably attributable to the presence of former Provisional IRA members in its ranks.

The Kerr murder was claimed by a "new" IRA also believed to be comprised of former Provisionals.

These defections and regroupings reflect a growing awareness that the Sinn Féin political strategy is unlikely to lead to a United Ireland.

In the last decade, Sinn Féin has subtly managed to shift its emphasis from "Brits Out" to the more reformist demand of equality for Catholics within Northern Ireland.

Although the flagrant civil injustices of the old Stormont state have been redressed and, as Sinn Féin spokespersons are keen to point out, the "Orange State" is gone, the pursuit of the civil rights agenda was never really what motivated the Provisional IRA or its volunteers. A shift in emphasis poses little or no problem for Sinn Féin in terms of building electoral support. Indeed, in abandoning many republican ideological positions (especially regarding the police) in pursuit of the equality agenda, Sinn Féin has reaped electoral dividends. But it has also led to defec-

tions to rival groups advocating armed struggle.

Although Martin McGuinness can point to the large trade union demonstrations against the latest murder as evidence that the dissidents have little mass support, he is well aware that physical force republicanism has never sought a democratic mandate. It derives its legitimacy from elsewhere — from a particular reading of the 1916 Easter Rising and a one-sided narrative of Irish history. Talk of democratic mandates or mass support misses the point when we are dealing with what amounts to a modern-day carbonarism.

Despite some political nuances, the dissident groups all share a fetishism of physical force and stale mid-70s Provisional rhetoric. As such, their similarities outweigh their differences and geographical rather than ideological factors are probably

more important in distinguishing them.

They are characterised either by ideological eclecticism or an almost apolitical militarism.

When in the summer of 2010 the RIRA opportunistically adopted a radical posture on the Irish financial crisis, their solution — damaging a branch of Ulster Bank in Derry — was indicative of a lack of any wider political perspective.

It is probably true to say you can fill the vessel of physical force republicanism with any social programme, and even radical or "socialist" proposals are conceived as instruments to build support for the national struggle rather than using elements of the national struggle to build for socialism.

**Nevertheless, these groups are dangerous and they show little sign of abandoning their futile campaign.**

## Something old, something borrowed, something Blue...

By Dave Kirk

**According to the Observer (24 April), Labour leader Ed Miliband "is set to make two speeches informed by the ideas of Blue Labour over the summer, although insiders insist he is also listening to contributors to a soon-to-be-published Purple Book".**

The Times (19 April) reports that the "Purple Book" will be diehard-Blairite — "Purple was the colour of new Labour. It's what you get if you combine red and blue. It symbolises the need to stay on the centre ground" — and will come out about the time of Labour Party conference in September.

So Miliband is "listening to" ... two strands of very right-wing Labour thought. The 50,000 new members who have joined the Labour Party to fight the Tories and Lib Dems, and the old Labour loyalists who stuck it out through the Blair years, need to organise fast to make some "red" Labour audible.

Blue Labour is an ostentatiously conservative (small c) counter to "Red

Toryism", the scheme by writer Philip Blond to reposition the Tories as a party of communities rather than just of markets. Blue Labour's chief champion, Maurice Glasman, describes it as "a completely agitational idea to provoke a conversation about what went wrong with the Blair project". His critique of New Labour is both very limited and reactionary.

He says Labour needs "to build a party that brokers a common good, that involves those people who support the EDL [the racist, Muslim-hating, street-fighting English Defence League] within our party. Not dominant in the party, not setting the tone of the party, but just a reconnection with those people that we can represent a better life for them, because that's what they want".

He would "involve" those people not by pointing a better way — working-class struggle — for them to defend and improve living standards damaged in the Blair-Brown years, but by moving Labour in the direction of the EDL.

He says immigration and multiculturalism

which has become "the big monster that we don't like to talk about". Mass immigration under Labour, he believes, served to "act as an unofficial wages policy". He said Labour occupied a "weird space where we thought that a real assault on the wage levels of English workers was a positive good".

He blames the "real assault" on migrant workers, not on rapacious capitalists and New Labour's decision to keep the crippling Tory anti-union laws.

Glasman champions "Family, Faith, and the Flag". (Just which "faith" he has in mind is not clear. Some of his ideas resemble old fashioned Catholic social teaching, but he is of Jewish background and still described by the *Jewish Chronicle* as Jewish).

To Glasman, New Labour's problem was that it forgot about the centrality of community, family and the working-class traditionalism. He advocates a greater regulation of the banks, encouraging co-operatives, and a corporatist capitalism.

He sees trade unions as having a key role, not as combat organisations of workers in the class struggle but as an expression of

working-class tradition, cohesion and solidarity.

He argues unions should pursue coalitions across class lines with faith groups and "community organisations". The campaign against the privatisation of forests, which involved unions with Tory squires, NGOs, and environmentalists, would be his model for political unionism.

Jon Cruddas, who tried to position himself as a more pro-union and slightly leftist figure under the Blair and Brown regimes but backed David Miliband for leader, and former hard-Blairite minister James Purnell, are reported as key supporters of Glasman.

The Labour Party is in the middle of a period of flux when a genuine working class socialist voice is needed against cuts and the assault of the right. Unfortunately the left in the party is not yet in a state to take the field, let alone win the battle of ideas.

**Workers' Liberty will continue to fight inside the party and without to organise the left around the fight for a workers' government.**

## London Met cuts: attack on working-class students

### Cut from 577 courses to 160

By Ed Maltby

The management of London Metropolitan University has announced a massive wave of course closures.

The proposals will see courses cut down to 160 from 557. The main targets of these cuts will be Philosophy, History, Modern Languages and Performing Arts. The only degree programme in Caribbean studies in the UK will also be shut down.

The university has been facing a major deficit after a crisis in 2009 saw it lose £36 million of government money (which it had falsely claimed from HEFCE after providing inflated figures for student numbers).

One member of the LMU Save Humanities Campaign told *Solidarity*, "My feeling about these cuts is that it is ideological attack. They haven't given any justification, they are reluctant to release the actual figures that have led them to these conclusions. They have said that they haven't calculated how much money they will save from the redundancies yet. Nothing official has been released, there has been no consultation – it seems they have just decided they don't really need these courses..."

**"It seems that senior management are trying to strip the university of academic subjects and the humanities, and I think they're trying to turn LMU into a business school."**

By Claire Locke, London Met SU president (personal capacity)

**The people who will be affected by these cuts are students from working-class backgrounds, parents, people who wouldn't have had the opportunity to come to university if it wasn't for London Met.**

London Met management is dictating to working-class people what they should be allowed to study, and that is completely obscene. This university changes lives.

They are cutting support services too, like the Learner Development Unit. We've had students

from other universities request to use this support service because it's so good. The Dyslexia and Disability Unit is being axed: they're going after the most vulnerable groups. People who need support most are having it taken away. The Writing Centre, where students mentor other students and get paid for doing so, is being cut – management are removing support for students studying, and the paid mentors will now have to find other ways of paying for their studies. It's students who have to work extra jobs in order to sustain their studies who are being hit by these cuts.

Why is the university making these cuts? Well, let's start by saying that the Vice Chancellor has created a post, the Executive Officer for the Vice Chancellor, the current holder of which is a former researcher for David Willets. The ideology of the government is being inflicted on London Met. And what's happening at

London Met – vulnerable groups being attacked, people only being allowed to study subjects that management deems to be of value – is a representation of all the bad things happening in wider society. A class division is being created.

They want education for working-class people to be commercialised, controlled by industries and large corporations. So, for example, rather than making services function and sustain themselves, instead they're selling them off in bits and pieces to make private providers rich.

What's happening at London Met is definitely of national significance. Look across the whole sector – they're doing it to A-levels too, reducing the range of A-levels that can be provided. People in working-class areas can only get a certain service, but people who live in more affluent areas get a first-class service, access to libraries and so on. Couple this with the fact that

working-class people are being cleared out of certain areas due to cutbacks in benefits, it's almost class cleansing.

The campaign is going to lobby the people who make decisions at the university. This isn't just London Met, so we're going to lobby the government. We're composing a letter that's going to be sent out to state our position, saying we will take action and the unions will take industrial action. Students will take direct action. We will do whatever is necessary to stop this attack on our society.

This isn't just an attack on our education, it's not just about London Met, it's about everybody. Everybody needs to stand up because together we can make a difference.

**Having bursts of action around the country is good, but united action can help, united action all together can make a difference. I suppose what I'm saying is, we need solidarity!**

## Universities set maximum fees

By Darren Bedford

Nearly 75% of universities who have declared their fees for 2012 have opted to charge the maximum £9,000.

The government had previously indicated that £6,000 would be the effective benchmark, and that universities would be allowed to charge £9,000 only in "exceptional circumstances". As recently as March 2011, Nick Clegg stated that universities "can't charge £9,000 unless they're given permission to do so" However, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), tasked with scrutinising universities over their fees regimes and expected by some to intervene to stop some institutions from charging the maximum figure, has said it does not expect to exercise its power to prevent universities from charging over £6,000 without a detailed plan to increase intake of poorer students.

There is no correlation between established performance indicators and fee levels, with both the University of Cambridge and the University of East London (from opposite "ends" of the spectrum in terms of government-approved measures for measuring university performance) charging £9,000 across the board. Some universities, such as London Metropolitan, will charge varying fees for different courses, ranging between £4,500 and £9,000.

In a further kick in the teeth for students, newly-elected NUS president Liam Burns – expected by some to make a break from the approach of his predecessor, Aaron Porter, which was widely viewed as capitulatory and spineless – has already declared that "the debate on how to fund education is sadly largely irrelevant."

A big cut in government funding for universities means that, as well as massively increasing fees,

many institutions will be making extremely deep cuts. Figures released by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in late March show that some universities face reductions of up to around 15% in their recurrent government grants. Some, like the University of London (the umbrella institution administering many of London's smaller and specialist higher education colleges), face a cut of over 60%. The cuts in grants disproportionately affect poorer universities – Cambridge faces cuts of just 0.8%, while Oxford and LSE will actually see an increase of 0.8 and 1.4% respectively.

Funding cuts are already translating into plans to do away with courses, modules or indeed entire departments at many universities. University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) provoked anger from students and Welsh Assembly members as it announced plans to abolish its modern history and politics programme as its Vice Chancellor pocketed a wage increase of over 7%.

**The University of Glasgow plans to axe several modern language course, merge its history, archaeology and classics courses, and scrap its Centre of Drugs Misuse Research.**

## Newcastle: round one to workers and students

By a Newcastle College student

Students and workers at Newcastle College have won at least a postponement of cuts. At the beginning of 2011 the college announced plans to cut 171 frontline jobs, 17% of the workforce. Students set up SOS (Save Our Staff) to support lecturers.

We began with a banner drop at one of the college's open evenings to raise the profile.

Management tried scare tactics to prevent us taking other action. But we still managed to organise a successful walkout.

Newcastle College UCU barred from meeting on site

On 24 March the lecturers' union UCU organised a march from the college to the university, and yet again there was a great turnout of students.

On 12 April the UCU went on official strike.

The management refused to give permission to the UCU to have a meeting on college grounds. But

the meeting was simply moved to the grass just off the campus site.

**The meeting took two votes of no confidence in the senior management and the announcement that all the campaign had pushed back the cuts that were originally planned to happen in May to the end of July.**

## Save philosophy at Greenwich!

By Ellese Elliot, Save Greenwich Philosophy

The Save Greenwich Philosophy Campaign could reach its peak on Thursday 5 May when the academic planning committee meeting takes place.

One of the campaign demands is to allow a representative to voice our arguments on May 5, but so far such requests have been denied.

At this point the Save Greenwich Philosophy Campaign has received no consistent line of argument concerning the decision to

cut single honours philosophy at Greenwich. Arguments have ranged from the supposed lack of applicants to the claim that a combined course will draw in more students.

So far, the campaign has held two occupations, gathered over 2000 signatures from the likes of A.C. Grayling and Noam Chomsky, and held a "speakers' corner" at the university.

Various local and national papers, radio stations and others have followed our campaign and seen it as part of a wider movement against the cuts.

Campaigners are ab-

solutely infuriated that this decision took place at the end of term, when people are busy with exams and haven't had a chance to build support and inform the wider student body. We see this as a tactic on by the University to undermine opposition. Further action will take place after the bank holiday in a last attempt to save philosophy before the academic planning meeting puts its stamp on management's decision.

**Support our campaign by joining the Facebook group "Save Greenwich Philosophy" and following us on Twitter: @savephilosophy.**

### Ian Tomlinson "unlawfully" killed

An inquest into the death of newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson, who died after an encounter with police officers at the G20 protests, has found that his killing was "unlawful". A jury ruled that the baton strike and push to Tomlinson by PC Simon Harwood were "unreasonable" and that Tomlinson "posed no threat" at the time he was attacked. It remains unclear whether Harwood will face any punishment, but the verdict will be a huge boost to Ian Tomlinson's family and their quest for justice.

## AWL expands on London Underground



AWL news

By Becky Crocker, RMT rep and AWL member

At the start of this year, Workers' Liberty member Janine Booth was elected to represent London transport workers on RMT's Executive. Workers' Liberty members on the Tube decided to set up our own separate AWL branch, become more organised, and prioritise recruiting new AWL members.

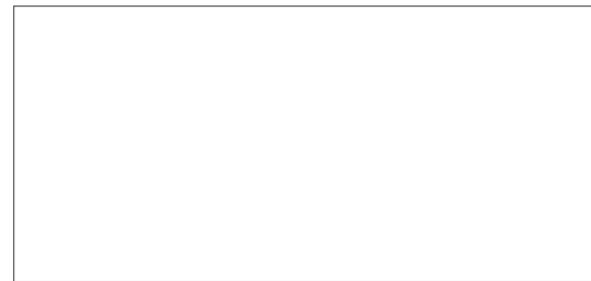
We were already in a good position to recruit. Over years, we have built up a group of activists around our rank-and-file bulletin, *Tubeworker*, which celebrates its 20th birthday this year. While other left groups had been preaching left-

sounding slogans, or cosying up to the union leadership to advance themselves, Workers' Liberty have been listening to and discussing political ideas with serious rank and file militants.

We began our branch with five members. We soon recruited a sixth, a young woman whose energy, commitment and skills were an instant asset. By March we had recruited an excellent RMT rep, who last week convinced another excellent RMT rep to join us and we hope to recruit more people in the coming weeks.

Our branch meets weekly. With the responsibility of having a Workers' Liberty member on our union executive, it is important that we discuss collectively what to argue for within the union. We are now more confident in arguing our position at union meetings.

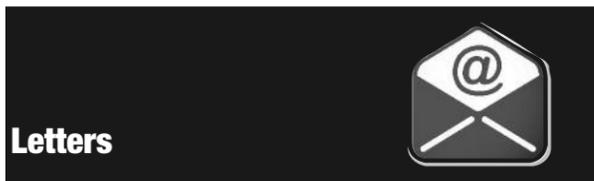
Our political intervention has also become more effective. We have prioritised political discussion in the branch, increasing our confidence to sell the paper to more and more people. Together, we discussed, wrote and moved an amendment on Libya to last month's regional meeting. Al-



though we lost the vote, we impressed some people by articulating clear, distinctive and thought-out views.

On winning the Executive election, Janine Booth summed up the reasons for the campaign's success: hard work, good organisation and stating clearly what we stand for. These qualities have characterised our work on the Tube for years, which is now bearing fruit. If we continue in this vein, I am confident we will attract more members and intervene more effectively in our important area of class struggle.

## Anarchism is the direct-action, class-struggle way



Letters

**"A riot is the language of the unheard" (Martin Luther King)... Currently "direct action" seems to be used mechanically for any action outside the once standard, ignored, tedious and silent marches. There is an important differentiation between vandalism and violence — neither of which ought necessarily be condemned — but the argument differs slightly.**

On the question of direct action — occupations, strikes, civil disobedience and yes, sometimes property damage — I find it difficult to comprehend the arguments against this method to stop cuts that will rocket up child poverty, homelessness, unemployment and severely threaten many students' access to education.

Many, and rightly so, are furious about the coalition's plans and in actuality, who suffers the greater cost? The multi-billionaire capitalist who needs to replace his window, or the 15 year old who has lost all their EMA and is expected to pay £27,000 plus for a degree?

### VIOLENT

**Who is the violent perpetrator? The student who refuses to be bullied and stands shoulder to shoulder with everyone fighting for the same cause; or the armoured policeman who clubs children and hospitalises people refusing to accept injustice?**

Who is the threat? The masked student, or the police; hard hats, shields, batons, cuffs?

Those who retaliate "policemen are just workers in uniform" or "they're just doing their job": contemplate this... Ian Tomlinson. Smiley Culture. Jean Charles de Menezes. Kingsley Brown.

The police have proven time and time again, they do not protect us. They protect the richest, whitest politicians of the world and breed murderers rarely brought to trial. Do not swallow the lies of the papers declaring the police to be innocently containing a violent mob.

If you don't believe us, join us on a demonstration and when you find yourself nose to nose with a baton; you may stop condemning us.

One need only look closer at those who condemn us. Careerist, Labour wannabes who slip through the crowds whilst we are hit, and drink tea with MPs and negotiate their futures.

Really though, we can be the threat. Direct actions requires mass participation to be truly effective. Ultimately we are the majority, and working together, we can become ungovern-

able. We didn't even vote for this despicable Government. When we are imprisoned, beaten and continuously oppressed by a state clearly against us — we must fight back. Direct action is a key way to do this.

Most groups are not focused on smashing windows. The smashing usually occurs after police provocation or as a result of other methods. For example, Millbank windows were initially smashed as a part of the occupation.

Occupations are important as they empower individuals and groups to reclaim the spaces that belong to us. Money is the only language capitalists understand; so when we occupy their department stores (Fortnum & Masons, Vodafone etc), we shut down their business, and they lose profit. We also bring solidarity between groups and enable communication and conversation between those to be hit by the cuts.

When the workers strike, they stop production, and stop the work the government continuously exploits. To build a successful movement we must stand in absolute solidarity with these workers. Some forms of industrial action such as wildcat strikes, go-slows etc workers can engage in without relying on official union approval.

Yet again, the most underrepresented, oppressed communities of our society are hardest hurt by the cuts — black and LGBT communities, and women. We would not condemn the direct action of the suffragettes who often ran with the motto of "deeds, not words" and were regularly imprisoned and slandered. Fighting the cuts is a question of liberation. Liberation from capitalist exploitation; and for this goal and emancipation, spraying "Fight Sexism" on Anne Summers is a tiny part of a wider movement, and justified.

However many bureaucrats, who supposedly represent us, concentrate far too much on pen pushing and pointless negotiation rather than allowing us to self organise and make decisions amongst ourselves. Strikes for example are often at the expense of leaders agreeing to it. Whilst many socialists call for a general strike, they do not seem to understand that this is only possible by overpowering the so-called representative structures, including in their much loved unions. As Emma Goldman said; "Organisation, as we understand it, however, is a different thing. It is based, primarily, on freedom. It is a natural and voluntary grouping of energies to secure results beneficial to humanity."

### UNIONS

**Unions are often based in an HQ distant from the actual workplace. Their leaders are paid a significant wage, and they are often hijacked by careerists or patronising academics who think they have an authority to speak on behalf of their members.**

Actually, they are probably on sabbatical and no longer do the same work as everybody else, and spend more time in meetings negotiating with managements, than on the ground empowering the workers. To cite the current unions as the only way for the movement is simplistic and not viable.

For AWL to publish such incorrect articles such as "Open letter to a direct-action militant" (*Solidarity* 3-200), is insulting but also laughable. To talk of anarchists (and let's be clear, the article is clearly aimed at anarchists), as elite, unhelpful and merely symbolic is concerning.

"Smashing up some ostentatious symbols of capitalist excess certainly makes a more immediate impact than plugging away within most trade union branches to democratise and radicalise them."

Firstly, the author has clearly failed to read SolFed's open letter to UK Uncut, <http://bit.ly/hSp3Jp>. This article directly

states that we must go further in our direct action, whilst not condemning action taken.

Secondly, whilst many anarchists openly criticise the roles and structures of the union, socialists are often merely reformist. Reformism is inevitably going to fail as Emma Goldman clearly puts it; "Good men, if such there be, would either remain true to their political faith and lose their economic support, or they would cling to their economic master and be utterly unable to do the slightest good". This is applicable to overtaking any institutions currently failing to support us.

Further, anarchists recognise the limitations of unions, the bureaucracy and in-fighting that is detrimental to the organisation and action of its membership. Indeed, any dictating is oppressive, whether well intentioned or not.

The author of the AWL piece even recognises this; "The labour movement is frequently a politically dull and conservative place to spend your time." So why not use that time to create a labour movement of accessible, transparent and self-organised groupings, to enable us to respond to these cuts as effectively as possible and in genuine solidarity. "But, conversely, you 'need' the labour movement. Your revolutionary anti-capitalist instincts cannot become a political reality without an agency capable of giving them meaningful content. That agency is the working class." What anarcho-syndicalist is dismissive of the working class? This does not make any sense and is highly patronising.

The working class is not the same as Leninist tactics. If anything, it is anarchism that militantly supports a mass movement of the working class and reclaims the power.

"You should become — or, if you are already, more consistently see yourself as — a labour-movement activist". This too is utterly dismissive of the fact that most anarchists are labour activists, whose priorities lay differently to the repetitive aim of moving through elected positions.

**Direct action is a necessary tactic that enables individuals to be at the forefront of their own movement, to make mass decisions in a safe space without being dictated to by a political party of any persuasion, and to ultimately, fight back against a cutting coalition government which exploits us, cheats us and lies to us. Anarchism is a tool to do this, despite the slanderous propaganda of most, on all sides.**

*Bobi Pasquale, east London*

### Democracy is key

**The AWL is right to demand "democracy at every level" of society. It's important (Solidarity 200), because as well as opposing cuts, we should be demanding a more greater say in how our workplaces and communities are run.**

If there was more genuine democracy in the UK, then maybe the credit crunch might not have happened. The financial system has revealed itself as accountable to nobody. A deregulated system meant that the banks operated like gambling casinos. Governments have been too timid in monitoring and controlling the system. And we're paying the price in lost jobs.

We need a banking system that puts ordinary bank workers and customers in control. We need workers and the ordinary people who use banks being given more power over what banks do. That would quickly end the outrageous bank bonus payments in the City.

Socialism must mean more democracy.

*Graeme Kemp, Shropshire*

### A fighter for Celtic fans?

In his first electoral outing after being expelled from the Labour Party (Respect, 2004) George Galoway promoted himself as "a fighter for Muslims". Trying again in Scotland on 5 May, he now pitches himself as the champion of... Celtic fans. Shamefully, some of the Scottish left are backing him. <http://bit.ly/meNOTA>

## A big new wave of uni cuts

**From the Tory-Liberal government's huge cut in government money for university teaching budgets will follow, for all universities unable to compete in the £9000-fee top end of the market, big cuts in courses; and for all universities, a re-gearing to market criteria.**

London Metropolitan University is leading the way by cutting down from 577 courses to 160. Vice Chancellor Malcolm Gillies says that his cuts package is aimed at making the university "lean", "competitive" and "tightly organised". The university is being re-invented as a profit-gouging business, whose portfolio of courses will lurch around with the market.

Across the board, spending cuts will be applied strategically, not to trim, but to re-shape universities. In the Tory-Liberal vision, the university will sell itself as offering "good returns" on the "investment" that students make when they take on tens of thousands of pounds of debt, much of it commercial, in order to buy a degree. The new "lean" university will operate like any other cutting-edge capitalist company by busting unions and over-riding "inefficient" practices like internal democracy. University College London is leading the way here, outsourcing cleaning and security jobs in order to smash up the University's Unison branch.

Students have to re-organise and re-group to win this con-

tinuing fight. There has been a lull in activity in recent months after the battles of the winter. Some students have been demoralised by the movement's failure to stop the abolition of EMA (the small payment made to 16-19 year old students from badly-off families in schools and further education) and the increase in university fees.

But the movement of the winter did win concessions: the limited student support scheme that will replace EMA has been made much more extensive than was originally intended. That movement has activated and politically educated many thousands of school, further education, and university students; it has left behind new student anti-cuts groups in many towns. Those students and groups need to step their activity up a gear and get ready for the battles to come.

### NETWORK

**The national network that brought together local anti-cuts groups, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), has suffered from the lull. It needs to be re-invigorated and re-launched as a campaign with firm democratic structures.**

It must become accessible to student activist groups from all over the UK. A "loose network" is not good enough.

When students return from the summer, probably to find management in the process of making cuts and redundancies, our movement needs to hit the ground running. We need a national demonstration. The leadership of the National Union of Students was able to win a vote at NUS conference against holding a national demonstration in the first term, but that vote did not reflect student opinion. Student activists in the NCAFC have launched a campaign to force the NUS leadership to organise a first-term demonstration, and to organise one ourselves if the NUS won't.

Direct action from students — occupations, sit-ins, demonstrations and more — is needed to win this fight. But students cannot win it alone. The government's programme for higher education is an attack on trade unions; and it is a component of the overall attack on public services. Trade unionists and students must fight hand-in-hand against the government, Vice Chancellors and education sector vulture-capitalists.

**We must structure our campaigns in ways that mutually support one another, we must act in solidarity to defend one another. That means communication and unity between activists on the ground, rather than subordinating student campaigns to the timetables of slow-moving trade union bureaucracies.**

## 30 June and after

**Teachers, civil servants, and other workers are set to strike on 30 June against the coalition government's increases in pension contributions, cuts in pension provision, and raising of the pension age.**

At Easter (22-26 April) the National Union of Teachers conference voted to ballot union members for a series of strikes. Other big public service union conferences are coming up soon. The civil service union PCS meets in Brighton on 16-20 May. Its Executive has already decided to ballot members on strike action, soon enough for them to join NUT on 30 June.

The lecturers' union UCU, which meets in Harrogate on 28-30 May, is also expect to join in on 30 June. Unison, the biggest union in local government and health, meets in Manchester on 19-24 June. Its health sector conference was on 4-6 April.

GMB, a general union with a lot of members in the public sector, meets in Brighton on 5-9 June. Unite, the other big general union, has no policy conference this year, only a rules-revision conference.

Activists will seek to use the union conferences to put pressure on the leaders and to rally members who are pushing for a fight.

They will demand support for the 30 June action, which Unison leaders have already shown they don't want to give. They will press for 30 June to be followed up quickly by further strikes, including rolling and selective strikes, on a rising tempo — rather than being a sporadic protest, to be followed only by possible further sporadic protest days many months later.

In PCS, they will argue against the union leaders tucking away the huge job cuts in the civil service as a side-issue figuring on the prospectus of the 30 June strike, as an add-on to the protest on pensions, but not as something on which

the union has definite plans for action to win even limited concessions.

Though the 26 March anti-cuts demonstration was big, it didn't show a large body of workers, yet, confidently and insistently pressing the union leaders to organise rapid and coordinated action against the cuts.

That is no surprise given the defeats of recent decades, the corrosive impact of the New Labour regime of 1997-2010, and the training that union leaders (including avowedly-left ones) have given to the working class in seeing industrial action as chiefly a means of occasional protest.

It means that anti-cuts action is more likely, for now, to take the form of gradually-brewing, and fluctuating, ferment. It weighs against the possibility of a rapid explosion, but does not exclude it. Confidence will grow in action.

The contradiction between, on the one hand, the scale of the cuts and the threat they pose to the very fabric of the labour movement, and, on the other, the stance of the union leaders, sharpens the case for a rank-and-file movement in the unions. The cumulative impact of years of union setbacks creates difficulties for building new rank and file networks; but activists will look for openings.

The local anti-cuts committees are for now the main place where we can build the necessary cross-union rank-and-file links.

**They must support and promote all the rearguard action that will take place in local government services as the cuts work through, but also reach out to agitate on the welfare benefit cuts and join the gradually-swelling protest over the cuts and marketisation in health. We must resist any drift for the anti-cuts committees, after council budget-setting, to shrivel into caucuses of left-group activists.**

More: [www.workersliberty.org/pointers](http://www.workersliberty.org/pointers)

## Tunisia: we should push for a workers' government

By Ahlem Belhadj, a feminist activist in Tunisia and a leader of the LGO (Ligue de la gauche ouvrière, Left Workers' League)

On 24 February there was the movement that we call here "Casbah 2" — more than 300,000 people demanding that Ghannouchi go. On 27 February Ghannouchi and the other Rally for Constitutional Democracy (RCD) ministers resigned.

Everybody demanded a "technocratic" government to lead the country "administratively". But in my opinion the far left committed an error in demanding a "technocratic" government. The January 14th Front [a coalition of left groups] made the mistake of not advancing the demand for a workers' and popular government.

The new government has come to satisfy the popular demand for a Constituent Assembly which breaks with the old regime. It has dissolved the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD, the former ruling party). At the same time, it is a government completely in continuity on the economic and social levels, even more than continuity, because it is even more linked than its predecessors to US and French imperialism.

The government has also announced the dissolution of the security service, Ben Ali's political police. They first announced that this service consisted of 200 persons! Then they understood that this wouldn't stand, so they came up with other figures. The known figures indicate that the body of the police comprised 120,000 officers, today they tell us it was 50,000. What is it that has been dissolved? What remains? We don't know!

At the same time there is the emergence of revolutionary councils in the regions and in the different localities. There are many things being done at the level of self-organisation because the municipalities have been dissolved and the councils, self proclaimed by the people, are in the position of managing local affairs.

At the central level, to counteract the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Revolution [created on 11 February], there has been the creation of the "Higher Committee for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, for Political Reform and Democratic Transition" [ISPLROR, on 17 March]. On this "Higher Committee" 71 persons have been nominated, of which 17 represent associations and 12 political parties, while 42 are individuals.

There are very few representatives of these local committees in it. Some people on it are from the left or far left. The parties which make up the January 14th Front did not go collectively — as the Front — to discuss this proposal. Some groups, factions or parties agreed to be there independently of others and three parties are represented there officially.

The creation of the "Higher Committee" came as a response to the request of the National Council which wanted to be recognised by the president and to have the prerogatives of legislating — by agreement with the central leadership of the UGTT, which did not consult the unions on this question.

For the moment forms of workers' control are not really developing in the factories. In some enterprises belonging to families linked to Ben Ali, the workers have found themselves without any management — they have fled — and have taken responsibility for the management of these enterprises. There have also been quite a few farms which have been taken over by the workers, who have expelled those to whom Ben Ali's government had given these state properties. Around 80 big farms are involved.

**In the educational structures also, there has been the election of those who direct them — rather than them being named from above. In public transport there has been a big strike to change the chief executive who was a member of the RCD. But this is not very generalised.**

• Translated/abridged from an interview by Jan Malewski on 16 March, published in *Inprecor* magazine, [www.inprecor.fr/article-inprecor?id=1136](http://www.inprecor.fr/article-inprecor?id=1136)

# Libyan rebels fight for life

By Martyn Hudson

**Qaddafi has been draping himself in the battle flags of the past and appealing to international opinion in order to achieve a ceasefire which would provide a cover for the complete elimination of the rebel positions in Misrata.**

Draped in his Punic Roman toga whilst addressing "his" people, he has also received support from a super-team of his international pals — a pro-regime "anti-imperialist" international including Daniel Ortega, Castro, Chavez and Kim Jong-Il. The death of his youngest son in the NATO raids on his Tripoli compound has led to further appeals to NATO to back off. Some Tory MPs are receptive.

The rebels themselves insist that no settlement can be based on the perpetuation of Qaddafi's family clique.

The pro-regime militias have continued to target journalists, bloggers and paramedics, and more reports are coming out of wider atrocities in the early period of the uprising against civilians including widespread rapes and the mass murder of pro-rebel troops.

Libya's tribal complexity could have a serious impact on the struggle. Rebel spokespeople have spoken out against descent into tribalism and factionalism. The regime has threatened to use tribal militias against the people of Misrata, implying a threat that they would be particularly unrestrained in their brutality.

However, only Qaddafi's own Qadhafu tribe is totally loyal. The Warfalla tribe of Tripolitania, who provide many of the personnel of the security services, have wavered backward and forward between the regime and the rebellion. Other tribes, including the Tuareg, the Touballa, and the Magarha, who have been particularly persecuted by the regime, have entirely supported the rebellion.

Over the last two days Libyan regime incursions into

Tunisia to attack Berber insurgents at the crossing points have been documented. The Zuwayya tribe of Cyrenaica (Senoussi loyalists) have consistently committed themselves to the revolution.

The tribes will be important in democratic post-Qaddafi Libya but we must hope, as the rebel authorities do, that there is an overriding democratic mandate from the whole people of Libya, and a rejection of communalist politics.

Misrata itself is still under blockade under the most terrible conditions. Although there have been many attempts by the pro-tyrant left to downplay Qaddafi's drive for slaughter, and to brand the rebel movement reactionary, it is clear that the rebels form a genuine citizens' army.

They are not a socialist or working-class force — but if they stand for limited goals of an open civil society and multi-party government against Qaddafi, then that should be enough for the left.

Qaddafi himself has tried to buy off sections of the rebels by offering them cars and substantial cash payments. As one rebel, reported in the *Guardian*, said, the revolution was never about money, it was simply a refusal to submit to execution when asked to lay down arms against the regime. The rebels know the fate of those in the past who have offered any challenge to the Qaddafi family business.

To describe the uprising as about securing the oil lines for "imperialism" or being a proxy of sinister bourgeois forces is nonsense.

Of course, this is a bourgeois revolution, in the usual manner of bourgeois revolutions — contradictory, confused, and often unaware of its own nature. But the rebels know that if they lose militarily, then they will be physically eliminated.

**In the same way as the Petrograd commune, in 1919, fought for its existence, knowing that the counter-revolutionaries would kill them all if the city fell, so free Libya fights for its very existence.**

## Osama bin Laden: death of an enemy

By Martin Thomas

**Osama bin Laden targeted ordinary working people — nearly 3000 of them on 11 September 2001 — in the confident belief that the imperialist government of the USA would be more hurt by that than his own followers, on the fascistic far right, would be.**

Anyone who cares for working people, and opposes bin Laden's programme of terroristic religious fundamentalism, will be pleased by his death on 1 May at the hands of US forces.

We do not applaud or congratulate the US military. Their capture of bin Laden came after eight and a half years in which the US government and its allies have:

- turned Iraq into a hell of sectarian civil war and almost-random reprisals by US troops;
- trashed civil liberties in the USA, Britain, and other

countries;

- mired Afghanistan in a war which looks likely to end in at least a partial revival of Taliban power.

In 2001 we warned that the US-British attack on Afghanistan, in reprisal for 11 September, might well "end with bin Laden, or his similars, still at large and active, and new masses of recruits for them and other terrorist-fundamentalists".

We were right. Ahmed Rashid, an expert on the Taliban and Al Qaeda, writes: "Before 2001 there were no known al-Qaeda cells in Europe except for... one in Hamburg... Today every single European country has an al-Qaeda cell".

**The principles are the same as those in our response to Libya today. We will be glad if NATO intervention gets rid of Qaddafi. We will not mobilise to try to stop NATO imposing a no-fly zone or bombing Qaddafi's command centres (both of which are not imperialist invasion). But we will not endorse, applaud, or congratulate NATO.**

Iraqi workers' leader Falah Alwan on the May Day rally in Baghdad

# Iraqi government cracks down on unions

The General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW) has called for support from the international labour movement against a crackdown by the Maliki government in Iraq.

According to the GFIW a ministerial committee has "dismiss[ed] the Executive Bureau of the GFIW [and] authoris[ed] the Ministerial Preparatory Committee (MPC)... to renew and issue memberships to trade unionists".

These measures "pave the way for rigging [the] elections" for union committees now due to be held by ministerial decree.

The GFIW "call[s] upon... Iraqi civil society organisations... the International Confederation of Trade Unions, the ILO... to show solidarity and support".

Although May Day saw a workers' demonstration in Baghdad demanding union rights (picture above) we understand that other union organisations, including the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq (FWCUI), have faced similar government interference.

• More details: [www.iraqitradeunions.org](http://www.iraqitradeunions.org)

## Oppose Iraq deportations!

At least 30 Iraqi refugees are to be deported from Sweden on Wednesday 4 May. Among those on the flight to Baghdad are several families.

Across Europe, governments are forcibly returning hundreds of people to Iraq.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, 10 people have been killed by militia groups from the ruling parties, since demonstrations began in February. Hundreds more have been injured, arrested or disappeared.

• More details: [www.federationfir.com](http://www.federationfir.com) / [www.csdiraq.com](http://www.csdiraq.com); tel. 07856 032991.

## Egyptian trade unionists speak in Britain

Between 18 and 20 May, Egyptian trade unionists Kamal Abbas and Tamer Fathy will be visiting Britain, hosted by the Egypt Workers' Solidarity campaign.

**The Egyptian revolution was prepared by groups of workers struggling to build independent trade unions — and, since the fall of Mubarak, union organisation, workers' protests and strikes have spread like wildfire.**

**Kamal and Tamer are organisers for the Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services and the new Egyptian Federation for Independent Unions. They will be speaking at the Fire Brigades Union conference in Southport on 19 May, and at EWS public meetings in Liverpool on 19 May and London on 20 May.**

**Liverpool: 6pm, Thursday 19 May, Britannia Adelphi Hotel, Ranelagh Place. For more information ring Elaine on 07733 248 530**

**London: 6.30pm, Friday 20 May, Room G3, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square. Ring Mark on 07984 163 770**

[www.egyptworkersolidarity.org](http://www.egyptworkersolidarity.org) / [info@egyptworkersolidarity.org](mailto:info@egyptworkersolidarity.org)

# Hamas-Fatah agreement

By Mark Osborn

The Palestinian secular nationalist party, Fatah, has reached an agreement with the Islamists of Hamas to form an interim Palestinian government and to organise a general election.

The agreement goes alongside an Egyptian promise to open up the Egypt-Gaza border.

Speaking on Egyptian state television, Fatah central committee member Azzam al-Ahmad said the election would take place within a year.

The formal, detailed agreement is expected to be signed on 4 May. Hamas' leader Khaled Meshaal arrived in Cairo on 1 May to take part in the formal signing, which has been brokered by Egypt.

As details of the accord were announced, 100 people went to the Square of the Unknown Soldier in Gaza to celebrate. They were beaten by Hamas police thugs. Hamas has built a one-party clerical state in Gaza and tolerates little opposition — even, in this case, an independent manifestation of support for its own policy.

One proposed effect of the deal will be that Fatah will be allowed back into Gaza and Hamas allowed to operate openly in the West Bank. How that works in practice remains to be seen, but if the deal results in more political space in Gaza and the West Bank, this might be exploited by democratic opponents of Hamas.

Fatah holds power in the occupied West Bank. Hamas, which won the last parliamentary election in 2006, routed Abbas' forces in 2007 to take state power in Gaza. Both sides have heavily repressed their rivals in the areas under their control, although much more political space exists in the West Bank.

The Hamas-Fatah deal is a product of the recent upheaval in Egypt and represents an Egyptian policy shift. Egypt's military is aiming to gain leverage over Israel, mend fences with Iran, and gain credibility among a largely pro-Palestinian population. They are shifting Egyptian foreign policy away from the US and towards re-establishing Egypt as a major independent force in the region.

Fatah's President Mahmoud Abbas has lost his patron in Egypt, President Mubarak. Hamas may face a similar problem, as Syria's president Bashar Assad is facing his own uprising.

The reconciliation is backed by Iran. And the Syrians have followed the Iranian lead.

Egypt signed a peace accord with Israel in 1979. Israel worried that the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak would mean the scrapping of the peace treaty, although one of the first announcements made by the Egyptian military was to confirm their commitment to peace with Israel.

Israel has denounced the agreement. Israeli President Shimon Peres said, "The agreement between Fatah and the terror organisation Hamas is a fatal mistake that will prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and will sabotage chances of peace and stability in the region."

Hamas's description of the killing of Osama bin Laden as the assassination of "an Arab holy warrior" will not ease Israeli Jewish fears.

However, the current right-wing Israeli government has offered little to the Palestinians. Abbas has said he will not return to US-sponsored peace negotiations until settlement-building is halted in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem.

As a way of punishing Abbas, and applying pressure, Israel has suspended tax transfers to the Palestinians. Reuters reports that Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz has suspended a routine handover of 300 million shekels (\$88 million) in customs and other levies that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinians under interim peace deals.

The payments make up 70% of Palestinian Authority revenue. Hassan Abu Libdeh, the Palestinian economy minister, said the PA would be unable to pay salaries of its employees if the transfers were blocked. The PA pays the wages of 150,000 people in the West Bank and Gaza.

The US says it will keep funding the PA. A State Department spokesperson said, "If a new Palestinian government is formed, we will assess it based on its policies and [that] will determine the implications" for future aid.

## Syrian revolt at a turning point

By Dan Katz

**The confrontation between the Syrian police state and the popular movement is now in a decisive phase. Either the regime manages to use sufficient violence and terror to force the demonstrators off the streets, or the inability to do so fatally wounds it.**

There are two preconditions for a step forward for the mass movement. Firstly, a continued willingness — despite the obscene, murderous violence of Syria's rulers — to come out onto the streets and risk a massacre. Secondly, a serious split in the Syrian state machine.

The protest which began six weeks ago in the southern town of Deraa has cost over 500 lives, with hundreds more arrested. As *Solidarity* goes to press the town of 200,000 people is surrounded by Syrian military, tanks are in the streets and snipers on rooftops, bodies lie uncollected and decomposing, while water, telephones and electricity have been cut. Regime thugs are rounding up dissidents, and if the people on their lists can not be found, relatives are seized instead.

This is a disgusting regime.

During the first phase of the protests President Bashar Assad disappeared from view and seemed locked in internal debates about how to respond. Belatedly he offered some concessions. Political prisoners were released — mainly Islamists — and Kurds. Around 160,000 Kurds, mainly living in the north east, who had been denied Syrian citizenship, were promised Syrian documents. Assad seems to have been in negotiations with moderate Islamists and he may have promised them a legal political party.

These moves were designed to prevent the Kurds and Islamists joining the movement.

Assad also promised the abolition of the hated Emergency Laws, in place since 1963. However the concessions were too little, too late, and the movement continued to swell and spread across the country.

### SYRIA, EGYPT, LIBYA

**Politically — rather than geographically — Syria stands between Libya and Egypt/Tunisia.**

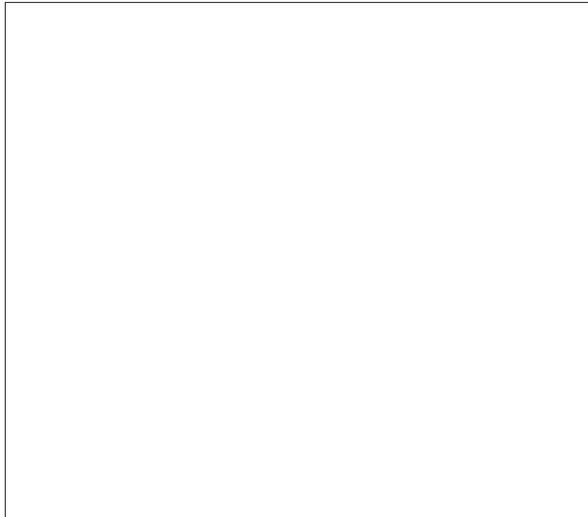
In Egypt, despite its authoritarian rulers, significant opposition forces existed and organised. The Islamist Muslim Brotherhood is a mass movement; workers organised strikes and their own committees, despite persecution.

Moreover, in Egypt, when the army decided President Mubarak had become a liability they were able to sweep him aside — easily, and without disruption of the state's functioning.

The UGTT union federation existed under Ben Ali in Tunisia, and quickly became an organising focus for the rising opposition.

In contrast, in totalitarian Libya, no opposition was tolerated, leaving the rebel movement without experienced political leaders (beyond those who defected) or established networks. Moreover the Libyan state is the highly personalised creation of a maverick, Qaddafi. Qaddafi has chopped up the security services and special units of the army, kept key units under the control of his family and deliberately run down the army to prevent the threat of a coup.

In Syria the state has more ideological coherence than Libya. The Syrian Baathist Party is a solid political entity and the regime has some real support. At the start of the mass opposition movement marches in support of the



**Syria's people are fighting for democratic rights and freedoms**

regime were not simply manufactured from above.

As the repression has increased, there have been at least 200 resignations from the Baath party, mainly from the area around Deraa, and including two MPs.

The regime's case against the mass movement has relied on two main themes: they say that the rebellion is the creation of "outside agitators" and Islamist terrorists; and they warn against fitna, an Arabic word meaning sectarian division.

In the past few days Syrian television has been screening people "confessing" that they belong to terrorist groups, and that they had been given money and weapons from various sources in Deraa, including the imam of the Omari mosque, one of the organising centres for the opposition.

The possibility of sectarian strife is not simply a concoction. The regime's central figures are from a dissident Shia sect, the Alawites, who make up around a tenth of the population. Other groups include Kurds, Druze and Christians, with a majority, at around three quarters of the total, who are Sunni Muslims. However, Rime Allaf, from the Chatham House think-tank claims, "Fears of sectarian strife are massively overblown. No one is claiming that the sects love each other, but there is no history of sectarian strife in Syria and no appetite for it now."

Demonstrators, aware that the regime is attempting to divide and rule, have raised the chant, "One! One! One! Syrians are One!" The *Economist* considers the biggest division is "between the haves and the have-nots", commenting that, "most Syrians are practising Muslims, but the young people who have predominated in the crowds are connected more by the internet than by religion."

### WILL THE STATE SPLIT?

**Over the last two weeks there have been reports that several dozen army and security personnel have been killed. The probability is that some have been shot dead for refusing to fire on demonstrators.**

In particular the *Sunday Times* (1 May) reports that 300 (probably largely conscript) soldiers from the Fifth Division had defected to the protesters. These soldiers have fought against the elite Fourth Division in Deraa. The Fourth Division is commanded by Bashar Assad's younger brother,

Maher. Activists blame Maher for previous killings in the town. When 25 peaceful protesters were shot down on 8 April, the crowds chanted, "Hey Maher, you coward, take your dogs to the Golan [the close-by area occupied by Israel]!"

Maher has been a focus for new US sanctions.

Maher is so powerful some reports suggest he actually runs policy, behind the scenes. Other key figures are either members of Assad's family, or are related by marriage.

Rami Makhoulf, Bashar's cousin, is also part of the inner circle. Makhoulf is a billionaire capitalist who owns oil, property and telecoms companies. Makhoulf has also been the subject of US sanctions for "public corruption" and is a hated symbol of regime cronyism. His brother Hafez Makhoulf is head of the secret police, the Mukhabarat.

Behind the ruling clique stands a layer of rich tycoons known as the "sons of power" — very rich businessmen who are mostly from military families who were close to Bashar's father, Hafez Assad.

The regime began based narrowly on Alawites, but broadened out. It also has the loyalty of Sunni capitalists in Damascus and Syria's second city, Aleppo. And various Christian and Druze figures hold high offices.

Moreover the Alawite community is not homogeneous. It is divided by sect and tribe — and some have done a lot better than others. It is significant that the Alawite centre around the coastal town of Latakia has taken a leading role in the opposition.

### THE OPPOSITION

**Because the Syrian state has effectively repressed opponents there has been little recent open opposition to Assad. After Bashar Assad came to power, succeeding his father, in 2000, there had been hopes that the repression would ease. A "Damascus Spring" was choked off in 2001, and a second period of relative openness in 2005 was also short-lived.**

In 2005 a group of secular Syrians, Islamists, and Kurds signed the Damascus Declaration. The text called for "peaceful regime change in Syria [aiming to] establish a national democratic regime ... and peaceful political reform based on dialogue."

Some of the groups involved in the Damascus Declaration have set up the new National Initiative for Change. The new movement includes a new layer of younger activists, including young women. Their latest statement declares, "Syria is at a crossroads... the best option is for the leadership of the regime to lead a transition to democracy that would safeguard the nation from falling into a period of violence, chaos and civil war."

The various exile organisations, based in Washington, Paris, and the Islamist Movement for Justice and Development in London, are small and seem to have little purchase inside the country. The Muslim Brotherhood, which was destroyed by the regime in 1982, has only just released a statement saying it supports the opposition movement. Its leader, living in London, Muhammad Riad Shaqfa, says he does not want to see an Islamist state.

Almost all the Arab governments have been silent about the clampdown in Syria. They fear a similar wave of protest at home.

Turkey, however, has a 500 mile common border with Syria, and fears a wave of refugees (especially Kurds). Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has called on Assad to use "maximum self-restraint."

**The US and EU states are implementing new sanctions. International TUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow has demanded an end to the repression: "It is time that the Syrian authorities respect fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to form and join genuine trade unions to represent their interests. The Assad regime must immediately stop its violent repression." Such a show of solidarity is a start, but much more is needed.**

## Oppose deportations to Iran!

**Six Iranian refugees are now in their fifth week of a hunger strike to demand asylum in the UK and protest against mistreatment by the Home Office.**

On Friday 6 May supporters will march to the Home Office in Westminster to demand fair treatment for refugees.

The six were tortured and imprisoned for their involve-

ment in opposition to the Iranian regime. But despite clear evidence of this, the Home Office has refused to let them stay in the UK.

Facing deportation, they took drastic action: four of them have sewn their mouths together in protest; by Friday all will have gone 32 days without food. They have been camping outside the UK Border Agency (UKBA) headquarters in Croydon, and Amnesty International in Clerkenwell.

Their case highlights the rotten state of UK asylum policy. Rather than support refugees, the UK Border Agency operates a systematic policy of disbelief: ignore, confuse, use every legal loophole to refuse asylum claims and keep the numbers down.

The hunger strikers will be on the march in wheelchairs. Bring banners, drums, music, and passion.

This demo is called by the hunger strikers and by supporters including members of No Border Network, Stop Deportations Network, SOAS Detainee Support and Cambridge Migrant Solidarity Group. <http://bit.ly/lfVF8i>

### Ali-Reza Nasab

**The next issue of *Solidarity* will contain an appreciation of Iranian Trotskyist Ali-Reza Nasab, who died on 23 April.**  
[www.workersliberty.org/ali](http://www.workersliberty.org/ali)

### Stop ethnic cleansing in Essex

**Resist the evictions at Dale Farm!**

**Dale Farm, the UK's largest traveller site, home to 1,000 people, is under imminent threat of eviction, by Tory-run Basildon council. The people facing eviction have not been offered suitable alternative space or accommodation.**

**Get in touch to help resist this:**

<http://dalefarm.wordpress.com> [savedalefarm@gmail.com](mailto:savedalefarm@gmail.com)



## The isolation of Dublin

We continue our series of articles by James Connolly about the 1913-14 Labour War in Dublin, and the power of the solidarity strike. On 9 December 1913, a special TUC conference considered a militant motion in favour of solidarity action with Dublin; union leaders opposed it, and won. As Connolly wrote afterwards, Dublin was isolated.

**It is not necessary, I presume, to remind our readers of the beginnings of the Dublin struggle. Let us, just for convenience sake, take up the fight at the moment it became a subject of national action on the part of the British labour movement.**

A public meeting had been proclaimed in Dublin in a brazen illegal manner. For declaring that this proclamation was illegal, and advising their leaders to disregard it and stand to their rights, a number of leaders of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union had been arrested and imprisoned. A wholesale batoning of the people had followed, and Dublin was the scene of the most unparalleled police brutality.

An appeal was made to the British Trades Union Congress, then happily sitting, and that body in the name of the British working class nobly rose to the occasion, and pledged the credit of the whole British labour movement to see their Dublin comrades through the fight. As a result, the right of free speech was re-asserted in Dublin, a supply of food was arranged for through the despatch of specially chartered steamers, and a huge amount of money was raised to enable the men and women of Dublin to keep the fight going.

Never was seen such enthusiasm in a labour fight. Trade unionists, socialists of all kinds, anarchists, syndicalists, all the varying and hitherto discordant elements of the labour movement found a common platform. For long years we have been preaching to the labour movement the necessity of concerted industrial action, telling it that the time was rotten ripe for industrial unity, and declaring that as the interests of each were the concern of all, our organisations should be rearranged with a view to the conserving of their common interests.

We found that to a large extent these ideas were taking root in the minds of the workers, but that to a still larger extent the tacit acceptance of our ideas failed to evoke concerted action built upon these lines. The forces of our enemies were united and wielded with all the precision and relentlessness with which the general staff of an army would wield the battalions and brigades which formed the component parts of that army, but the battalions and brigades of the army of labour when engaged in battle had no efficient general staff to guide and direct the whole army to the salvation of its individual units; and, worse still, had none of that esprit-de-corps which on the military battlefield would make the desertion of any section to its fate an unthinkable course to the officers of the divisions not engaged.

We had seen at London, at Leith and elsewhere that whereas the whole force of the Shipping Federation has been actively engaged in fighting the dockers of these ports, the dockers and seamen of the other ports had maintained the peace, and left their Leith or London brothers to bear alone the full force of the Federation attack, instead of meeting that attack by a movement against the flanks and rear of the Federation in these other ports.

We know that although much of this blundering was due to the sectional jealousy of various union leaders, much was also due to the fact that the conception of common action on a national scale by the whole working class had not yet entered the minds of the rank and file as a whole. Something had been wanting – something that would make the minds of the workers more responsive, more ready to accept the broader idea, and act upon its acceptance. That something Dublin supplied.

### IDEAS

**There are times in history when we realise that it is easier to convert a multitude than it ordinarily is to convert an individual; when indeed ideas seem to seize upon the masses as contra-distinguished by ordinary times when individuals slowly seize ideas.**

The propagandist toils on for decades in seeming failure and ignominy, when suddenly some great event takes place in accord with the principles he has been advocating, and immediately he finds that the seed he has been sowing is springing up in plants that are covering the earth. To the idea of working-class unity, to the seed of industrial solidarity, Dublin was the great event that enabled it to seize the minds of the masses, the germinating force that gave power to the seed to fructify and cover these islands.

I say in all solemnity and seriousness that in its attitude towards Dublin the working-class movement of Great

Britain reached its highest point of moral grandeur – attained for a moment to a realisation of that sublime unity towards which the best in us must continually aspire. Could that feeling but have been crystallised into organic expression, could we but have had real statesmen amongst us who, recognising the wonderful leap forward of our class, would have hastened to burn behind us the boats that might make easy a retreat to the old ground of isolation and division, could we have found labour leaders capable enough to declare that now that the working class had found its collective soul it should hasten to express itself as befitted that soul and not be fettered by the rules, regulations and codes of organisations conceived in the olden outworn spirit of sectional jealousies; could these things have but been vouchsafed to us, what a new world could now be opening delightfully upon the vision of labour?

Consider what Dublin meant to you all! It meant that the whole force of organised labour should stand behind each unit of organisation in each and all of its battles, that no company, battalion or brigade should henceforth be allowed to face the enemy alone, and that the capitalist would be taught that when he fought a union anywhere he must be prepared to fight all unions everywhere.

For the first days and weeks of the struggle, all labour stood behind Dublin, and Dublin rejoiced. Dublin suffered and agonised, but rejoiced that even in its suffering it was the medium for the apostolate of a rejuvenating idea. How often have I heard the responsive cheers to the question whether they would be prepared to stand by others as these others had stood by them!

And now? Dublin is isolated. We asked our friends of the transport trade unions to isolate the capitalist class of Dublin, and we asked the other unions to back them up. But no, they said we would rather help you by giving you funds. We argued that a strike is an attempt to stop the capitalist from carrying on his business, that the success or failure of the strike depends entirely upon the success or non-success of the capitalist to do without the strikers. If the capitalist is able to carry on his business without the strikers, then the strike is lost, even if the strikers receive more in strike pay than they formerly did in wages.

We said that if scabs are working a ship and union men discharge in another port the boat so loaded, then those union men are strike breakers, since they help the capitalist in question to carry on his business. That if union seamen man a boat discharged by scabs, these union seamen or firemen are by the same reason strike-breakers, as also are the railwaymen or carters who assist in transporting the goods handled by the scabs for the capitalist who is fighting his men or women. In other words, we appealed to the collective soul of the workers against the collective hatred of the capitalist.

### ASKED

**We asked for no more than the logical development of that idea of working-class unity, that the working class of Britain should help us to prevent the Dublin capitalists carrying on their business without us. We asked for the isolation of the capitalists of Dublin, and for answer the leaders of the British labour movement proceeded calmly to isolate the working class of Dublin.**

As an answer to those who supported our request for the isolation of Dublin we were told that a much better plan would be to increase the subsidies to enable us to increase strike pay. As soon as this argument had served its purpose, the subsidies fell off, and the "Dublin Fund" grew smaller and smaller as if by a pre-arranged plan. We had rejected the last terms offered by the employers on the strength of

this talk of increased supplies, and as soon as that last attempt at settlement thus fell through, the supplies gradually froze up instead of being increased as we had been promised.

In addition to this the National Union of Railwaymen, whilst in attendance at the Special Conference in London on 9 December, had actually in their pockets the arrangements for the re-starting of work on the London and North-Western boat at the North Wall of Dublin, and in the train returning to Dublin the day after the Conference, we read of the line being re-opened. No vote was taken of the men on strike; they were simply ordered back to work by their officials and told that if they did not return, their strike pay would be stopped. The Seamen's and Firemen's Union men in Dublin were next ordered to man the boats of the Head Line of steamers, then being discharged by free labourers supplied by the Shipping Federation.

In both Dublin and Belfast the members refused, and they were then informed that union men would be brought from Great Britain to take their places. Union men to be brought from Britain to take the place of members of the same union who refused to desert their brothers of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.

We were attempting to hold up Guinness' porter. A consignment was sent to Sligo for shipment there. The local Irish Transport and General Workers' Union official wired me for instructions. I wired to hold it up; his men obeyed, and it was removed from Sligo, railed to Derry, and there put on board by members of Mr. James Sexton's National Union of Dockers on ships manned by members of Mr. Havelock Wilson's National Union of Seamen and discharged in Liverpool by members of Mr. James Sexton's Union.

Whilst the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company was still insisting upon carrying the goods of our worst enemy, Jacob's (who is still enforcing the agreement denounced by Sir Geo. Askwith) the members of the Seamen and Firemen's Union were ordered to sign on in their boats, although our men were still on strike. We were informed by Mr. Joe Houghton of the Scottish Dockers that his union would not hold up any boat for us unless joint action was taken by the National Transport Workers' Federation.

As on a previous occasion, his members at Ayr had worked coal boats belonging to a Belfast firm that was making war upon the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, we do not blame Joe very much. He had been disobeyed at Ayr – perhaps he was coerced in Glasgow.

But why go on? Sufficient to say that the working class unity of the first days of the Dublin fight was sacrificed in the interests of sectional officialism. The officials failed to grasp the opportunity offered to them to make a permanent reality of the union of working class forces brought into being by the spectacle of rebellion, martyrdom and misery exhibited by the workers of Dublin.

All England and Scotland rose to it; working class officialdom and working class rank-and-file alike responded to the call of inspiration; it would have raised us all upward and onward towards our common emancipation. But sectionalism, intrigues and old-time jealousies damned us in the hour of victory, and officialdom was the first to fall to the tempter.

**And so we Irish workers must go down into Hell, bow our backs to the lash of the slave driver, let our hearts be seared by the iron of his hatred, and instead of the sacramental wafer of brotherhood and common sacrifice, eat the dust of defeat and betrayal. Dublin is isolated.**

• From *Forward*, 9 February 1914

• Rest of the series: [bit.ly/iqrAE1](http://bit.ly/iqrAE1)

## Man of men

**By Dominic Behan: *Irish Workers' Voice*, Dublin, June 1955  
Tune: Brennan on the Moor**

There lies a page in history,  
When workers first fought back,  
And the might of exploitation  
At last began to crack.

**Chorus:**  
**For Connolly was there,**  
**Connolly was there,**  
**Great, brave, undaunted,**  
**James Connolly was there.**

When the bosses tried to sweat the men,  
Away on Glasgow's Clyde,  
A voice like rolling thunder  
Soon stopped them in their stride.

### Chorus

And then in Belfast City,  
The workers lived in hell,  
Until at last they organised,  
And all the world can tell.

### Chorus

To smash the Dublin unions

The scabs they did enlist,  
But all their graft was shattered  
By a scarlet, iron fist.

### Chorus

They say that he was murdered,  
Shot, dying, in a chair,  
But go, march on to freedom,  
Irish workers, don't despair.

### Final chorus:

**For Connolly will be there,**  
**Connolly will be there,**  
**Great, brave, undaunted,**  
**James Connolly will be there.**

# By their heroes shall ye know them

**Reason in Revolt**  
By Sean Matgamna



This year, again, on the 95th anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916, which triggered a series of events leading to Ireland's war of independence, official celebrations in Dublin and elsewhere were low-key.

The scaling-down dates back to the 1980s. Sean Matgamna commented in *Socialist Organiser* (a forerunner of *Solidarity*), no. 482, 11 April 1991.

**This year's markedly muted celebrations in Dublin to mark the 75th anniversary of the Easter Rising, and of the martyrdom before the British firing squads in Dublin and on the gallows in Pentonville Jail of the founders of the Catholic Irish state, reminded me how starkly people, classes and nations may change their heroes.**

From Lenin to Yeltsin is a long way down... The descent from Wolfe Tone to Ian Paisley is even longer and steeper. In Britain it isn't "mainstream" any more to think much of the World War Two heroes whose very stiff-upper-lip exploits held the attention of the generation after the war, filling the movie screens, books of memoirs, novels and boys' comics. In part this change is the natural result of the distance that comes with the passing of time and of generations.

Of a different order is the changing public attitude in the Twenty Six Counties to "the names that stilled their childish play" — the heroes of Catholic Ireland's struggles for independence in the first quarter of the 20th century. This is icon-smashing with a vengeance! The blind, panicky vengeance of Ireland's huckster bourgeoisie, to be exact.

For many decades they endorsed and propagated a version of the story of Ireland's unequal contest with England, burnished into a splendid epic legend. The long half-forgotten myths of ancient pre-Christian Ireland — such as the story of the young champion Cuchullainn — were rediscovered, refurbished, and woven into the fabric of living history by men like Padraig Pearse. They took heroes like Cuchullainn, the great warrior who died on his feet, having tied himself to a tree to face his foes, his wounds staunched with moss, and Jesus Christ in Gethsemane and on the cross, as their inspiration for the lives they expended in political action.

Pagan myth, and Christian myth were merged and fused with ancient and modern history — and with the history of Christianity, in which the Irish have played and play a big part — to create a powerful messianic Catholic Irish nationalism. And, naturally, Irish nationalism also drew into itself much from the currents of romantic nationalism with which Europe was saturated for the first half of this century.

And whose history was this? What had all this struggle led to? To the rule of the miserable Twenty Six Counties' own pocket bourgeoisie — who lived on after their apotheosis as exporters of farm produce, and exporters, too, of generation after generation of Ireland's young!

## WORKERS

**As we used to say, arguing for socialism, anything less than the Workers' Republic was a grim mockery of the long struggle of the common people of Ireland embodied in our history, and represented even in the mythological version of it. The Ireland of the bourgeoisie was a grim mockery indeed.**

In fact, it was never their history. All that should be said about the true worth of the bourgeoisie and of their ancestors in the struggle of the great mass of the disinherited Irish people was said by one of the Jacobin "United Irishmen" leaders, Henry Joy McCracken, 200 years ago: "The rich always betray the poor."

So they did. So they do. Immediately after the 1916 Rising, which was to become the keystone of the Irish bourgeoisie's myth of its own origin, the Dublin Chamber of Commerce passed a "loyal" resolution denouncing the Rising and branding it as a form of "Larkinism" (the name then of Irish working-class militancy, which had fought the bosses to a standstill in an eight month industrial conflict in 1913-14).

The Ennis Chamber of Commerce, on the other side the country, passed a similar resolution — and many other such bodies across Catholic nationalist Ireland will have responded in the same vein.

After most of the 1916 leaders had already been shot, the *Irish Independent* — today the organ of Fine Gael, one of two main parties, only encouraged the British military authori-

ties to go ahead and shoot the badly wounded "Larkinite", James Connolly. They had scores to settle from the great Dublin Labour War of 1913-14.

It was never really their history: only the myths were theirs, and they gloried in them, preening themselves, dressing up like baboons who have broken into a theatrical prop room.

The disgusted pseudo-aristocrat Yeats, believing in noblesse oblige, had got their measure during the 1913 lock-out and strike, when they starved the workers and their children in an attempt to break their union.

In his youth he had spent three years in William Morris's Hammersmith Socialist Society, and he had actively sided with the workers in 1913, writing in the *Irish Worker* and speaking at at least one public meeting in support of the workers.

*What need you, being come to sense  
But fumble in a greasy till  
And add the halfpence to the pence  
And prayer to shivering prayer until  
You have dried the marrow from the bone?  
For man was born to pray and save;  
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
It's with O'Leary in the grave*

It was a sort of warning to them. And then, when the war of independence was over, and the bourgeoisie had seized control over the popular mass movement, divided and suppressed it, and assured their own rule behind the legal and ethical walls of the Catholic state they built — then, in safety, they could indulge themselves, not noticing the incongruities Yeats pointed to so bitterly.

Fifty years or so it lasted. And then the North blew up. The official Catholic-Irish myth had it that "the North" was just a matter of British imperialism and "British-occupied" Ireland, nothing to do with the other Irish bourgeoisie, the one enmeshed in the collapsing myths of the British Empire, and the Northern farmers and workers who followed them.

It had no grip on reality. Neither had the Irish bourgeoisie. Their interest in Northern Ireland collapsed, and so did their myths.

## LYNCH

**Perhaps the moment of sobering up came in 1970 when Prime Minister Jack Lynch put two of his Cabinet ministers (one of them the present Prime Minister, Charles J Haughey) and an Army officer, Captain Kelly, on trial for "gun-running" to the beleaguered Northern Catholics! (They were acquitted).**

According to the Constitution Lynch was pledged to defend, the Six Counties was part of his government's "national territory"

But Lynch didn't believe it. They bourgeoisie didn't either. Like the sobered adolescent whose day-dreaming has brought him close to disaster, they turned tail and extravagantly repudiated their former view of themselves. Now Romantic Ireland really was dead and gone. I has been succeeded by an age of the cold revision of history. Like pikes and guns, in the old song mocking British pretensions in Ireland, heroes such as Pearse and Connolly had been found to be dangerous things. They were cut down to size.

The Irish bourgeoisie has finally adapted to reality! From Pearse and Connolly to the grasping millionaire C Haughey — a son of Catholic refugees driven south by pogromists in the early 20s — and his rival, Fine Gael understudy blue-shirt John Bruton, that is the history of the modern Irish bourgeoisie in the nutshell! It is a long, long way down. This Easter's commemoration service sums it up nicely.

Like the Irish bourgeoisie for so long, many socialists have lived for decades in a world of inappropriate myth and misunderstood reality. That too has collapsed.

In Ireland, those who know what Pearse and Connolly and the Fenians and their predecessors really stood for will disentangle it from the bourgeois collapse, as they disentangled it from the grotesque parodies of it the bourgeoisie used to brandish.

And in the world of international socialism, the serious revolutionaries will disentangle the true socialism — working class liberation — from the Stalinist and other myths, fantasies and alien ideological encrustations. We will continue to do now, when so much has collapsed, what we did in the days when all sorts of freaks and horrors paraded around the world eagerly proclaiming their own horrible deeds to be the essence of socialism.

**In both cases the collapse of the debilitating and imprisoning myths and fantasies is good because the way is thereby cleared for the truth.**

The indomitable Jayaben Desai

# Remembering Grunwick

By Marge Dewhurst

**Having seen a link on Facebook, and knowing nothing about either the Grunwick dispute or Jayaben Desai, I went to the Tricycle Cinema in Kilburn last Sunday to learn all about them. The Brent TUC produced 'The Great Grunwick Strike 1976-1978: A History' and held a special screening of it, in tribute to the late Jayaben Desai, leader of the strike.**

The film is really well made and a really good resource for understanding class struggle. It's holistic in its representation and uses interviews and original footage to describe the events, personalities, decisions and betrayals that all contributed to the dispute and its outcomes. It's really worth watching, as it brings you very quickly into the heart of the problem and exposes what the struggle was about.

The film's strength, like the strike, is its grounding in strong and clear class politics, which manage to overcome every social division that normally separate us. All aspects of the strike questioned the traditional workings of the Trade Union movement at the time; it was led by a mostly female, immigrant, grass-roots workforce who were simply demanding union recognition. The film shows the importance of the action and the collective change that can result from such a struggle.

The Grunwick Strike brought people together, up and down the country, across races and genders, ultimately transforming it from a small dispute in North London into a national struggle for union rights and a wholesale fight against the State and the Tory government who were so determined to defeat it.

The filmmaker, Chris Thomas, has managed to capture the clear understanding of the striking workers — and of their many supporters from Yorkshire miners to *Observer* journalists — who could all see what battle was being played out through this dispute; the battle between capital and labour.

The most impressive aspect of the film, I thought, was the analysis of the State's role in the dispute. The filmmaker has managed to convey the varied and multiple attacks by all the authorities; the police using violence on the picket lines and arresting organisers, the media spinning lies to control public opinion, and the judiciary making special laws to get the boss off the hook — it's all in the film, and all explained clearly and effectively. This aspect of the film helps to frame the dispute in a wider context and illustrates a number of wider lessons that we should be aware of and be able to deal with when taking action ourselves.

The Brent Trades Council's production of 'The Great Grunwick Strike 1976-1978: A History' is a moving and important historical document. I hope to show it at my university next term because I think there's a lot to be learnt from the Grunwick Strike, and people should be able to have access to this history and learn from what's gone before.

**Contact the Brent TUC, by emailing them at [info@brenttuc.org.uk](mailto:info@brenttuc.org.uk), if you're interested in getting a copy of the DVD.**

## Tindle strike

By Vicki Morris

**Tindle Newspapers journalists are back at work after six days' successful strike. They hope the unity and determination they showed will force their employer to concede an additional member of staff.**

The workforce has halved in the past few years, and the reporters, subs and photographers are struggling to keep up with their workload.

The nine members of the Herts and North London NUJ chapel decided to strike after a year of negotiation had produced no shift by their boss. Ray Tindle owns more than 220 titles and his company made £3 million profit last year.

The North London and Herts titles are currently making a loss, but the journalists argue that Tindle should stick by them until the economy picks up.

The journalists have made many suggestions for increasing revenue.

Writing on the strike blog, Father of the Chapel Jonathan Lovett said: "if we still can't make management see sense, then we have every right to strike again... because what we are doing is not just for ourselves but for every journalist in every newspaper group which places quantity before quality, churnalism over journalism."

**On the eve of the strike Tindle wrote to the journalists with a thinly veiled threat to make them redundant if the strike went ahead; this only strengthened their resolve. The journalists were docked bank holiday pay as well as strike day pay, so they have lost 10 days' pay instead of six.**

To donate to the strike fund, send cheques payable to "North London & Herts NUJ Funds" to North London & Herts NUJ, 1st Floor, 43 Park Road, London N8 8TE.

Strikers' blog: [strikegazadpres.wordpress.com](http://strikegazadpres.wordpress.com).  
Email: [strikegazadpres@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:strikegazadpres@hotmail.co.uk)

## May Day signals a big job for trades councils

By Gerry Bates

**The Leeds Trade Council May Day march this year was much bigger and a lot livelier than it had been for many years.**

Young UK Uncut activists, and fresher trade unionists, outnumbered the ageing Stalinist stalwarts.

Glasgow also had an improved turnout. Even so, the numbers, 400 in Leeds and 3,000 in Glasgow, were modest.

Generally, across the country, turnouts remained around the poor levels of recent years, showing that the revitalisation of trades councils necessary for vig-

orous rank-and-file-level coordination between different unions against the coalition government cuts has not yet got anywhere near the level it needs to reach.

London's turnout of maybe 4,000 was dominated by Stalinist political-exile groups, as it has generally been in recent years. The *Financial Times* was able, without gross falsification, to "cover" the march by printing a picture of a large portrait of Stalin being carried by marchers.

**One conclusion for the left in London: next year we should come with large, visible and explicit anti-Stalinist banners.**

**Protesters marched through Colchester, Essex on 30 April against public sector cuts and NHS reform.**

**Around 250 joined the demonstration organised by Colchester Against the Cuts, which ended with a rally opposite the Essex County Hospital.**

**March organiser Andy Abbott said: "With the NHS reform bill currently going through Parliament we wanted to link what the Con-Dems are doing generally.**

**"The reform bill will leave the NHS exposed to the free market and effectively privatise it."**

Will Lodge

## PCS: don't leave jobs as a makeweight issue

By a civil servant

**The national executive of the civil service union PCS will put an emergency motion to its conference on 18-20 May, seeking permission to ballot members over pensions, jobs and pay.**

Delegates to the PCS conference are used to the Executive using the device of an emergency motion (on non-emergency matters) to dominate conference proceedings and to bypass and ignore normal branch motions put up in the normal manner.

That said, it is correct that members should be balloted on pensions, jobs and pay, particularly when we can co-ordinate such action with other unions.

However, taking industrial action over multiple issues when the executive is really only interested in one of them is another familiar device. This certainly is the case with the latest ballot.

The Executive is really only interested in pensions as this allows the possibility (in their minds) to link up with other unions; jobs and pay are makeweight issues, included just to "re-assure" activists.

On jobs, the Executive is seeking to strength the jobs protocols — a series of arrangements agreed between departments on how to handle staff surpluses. No serious moves on pay are contemplated.

The emergency motion calls for "discontinuous strike action and for discontinuous action short of a strike". If past practice is repeated, this will mean a one- or two-day strike taken with other unions, coupled with an overtime ban. This will not be enough to win.

Instead of the jobs protocols, we need a binding government/union agreement concerning jobs.

We should demand that 90-day notices given in advance of possible compulsory redundancies be rescinded, where they have been issued, and not issued where threatened.

On pay we need, minimally, cost of living increases.

On pensions the action is too limited in its aims. The Executive does oppose (some) increases in contributions and the change of the pension age from 60 to 65 for those with reserved rights.

But even if PCS were to win these demands that would still leave a two-tier workforce, with newer civil servants having a pension age of 65; and those with reserved rights have a pension age of 60. In the past, the union agreed a cap on employer pension contributions, therefore members' contributions will increase in any case.

We should demand an end to the two-tier workforce, with a common pension age of 60 and a re-negotiation of the employers' cap to take account of the effect of inflation on wages.

Lastly, there has to be a serious industrial action plan. We need as much national action as the members can bear coupled with paid selective action.

We need to raise levies and/or the diversion of members' subs from funding routine union functions to funding such selective action.

**A fight over pensions, jobs, services and pay can be won; but it requires a better campaign than that envisaged by the Executive.**

## RMT will strike to defend Tube reps

By Janine Booth, RMT Executive (pc)

**RMT London Underground drivers will strike for two days over a period of a week in the week beginning Monday 16 May, and again in the week beginning Monday 13 June.**

We demand the reinstatement of Bakerloo line drivers' health and safety representative Eamonn Lynch and long-standing RMT activist and Northern Line driver Arwyn Thomas.

We have named both sets of action at once, letting management know they won't be able to just ride out the first strike and have drivers back at work. The strategy was formulated in exhaustive meetings by a rank-and-file strike committee.

LU sacked Eamonn for following an instruction that turned out to be wrong, and sacked Arwyn following allegations by a strike-breaker.

Following two 24-hour strikes on the Bakerloo and Northern Lines, I successfully proposed to the union's Executive that we escalate the dispute to a strike ballot of all RMT's Tube driver members. Just under half of those members voted in the ballot, and nearly two-thirds of them voted yes. In context, the ballot result was good.

The union has often felt unable to escalate an anti-victimisation dispute beyond the workplace of the individuals being victimised, so this ballot was a big deal. We were asking people to strike and lose money to defend people they might never have met or even heard of until the start of this campaign.

Of course we can expect attacks from Boris Johnson about the turnout, but it is both a higher majority and a higher turnout than he got when he was elected Mayor of London!

A strong ballot result can not win a dispute by itself. We have a lot of work to do in building for the action, organising picketing, talking to people who did not vote yes and building support for the dispute across the Underground.

The pressure is on management here. It is very hard for them to explain or justify to the public what they have done. They can not really justify sacking two people on spurious charges and then refusing to reinstate them after Tribunals have granted them interim relief, something that sends a strong signal that they should be reinstated.

Arwyn's Tribunal pro-

ceedings have not concluded yet; Eamonn's concluded six weeks ago but we are still waiting for the judgment. If his complaint is successful, a "remedy hearing" on 3 June will decide whether to issue a reinstatement order.

But even if the Tribunal tells London Underground to reinstate Eamonn, the company does not have to comply! That is why we are striking; we can not rely on Tribunals and the courts to win justice for us.

We have had a lot of support from rank-and-file members of ASLEF; a lot of them are saying they will not cross our picket lines. They know that if the company gets away with sacking our reps, that has an impact on them too. It will change the nature of the workplace.

If the company gets away with it, remaining reps will feel more anxious about standing up to management and people will be more reluctant to come forward to be reps.

### REPS

**If you have a strong union rep in your workplace, someone who you know will fight for you if there are problems, it makes your day at work that bit more relaxed.**

If that goes, people will spend their working day worrying about what might go wrong.

London Underground is clamping down on attendance and discipline, with drivers receiving much harsher punishments from minor infringements than they would have done a few years ago. If the company takes out our reps, it will intensify that clamp-down.

This dispute is a chance to turn the tide. We have had some defeats recently and our campaigns have not always been effective. With this dispute, we are not discussing how to register a protest, we are discussing how to win. Reps and activists are having detailed, thoughtful discussions at regular meetings to work out what action will work best. We are also organising political and public campaigning alongside our industrial action.

There is plenty people can do to support the dispute, including visiting picket lines. We want to build solidarity throughout the labour movement, and are keen to send speakers to trade union branches and trades councils.

• To send a message of support or arrange a speaker email [janine.booth@rmt.org.uk](mailto:janine.booth@rmt.org.uk)



**LONDON  
TRANSPORT  
REGION**

**May Day greetings from the  
RMT London Transport Region**

**Secretary: John Kelly**

**[www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk](http://www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk)**

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Police kidnap anti-monarchists to prevent protest

By Daniel Randall

**On Friday 29 April I was arrested with nine others outside Charing Cross station in London — not for protesting, not for doing anything, but because the police wanted to clear the streets for the Royal Wedding.**

We are considering a legal case for wrongful arrest. What follows is an account of what the police did by one of my fellow arrestees, reproduced with permission from thegreatunrest.net.

**I was intending to go to the "Not the Royal Wedding" street party organised by campaign group Republic.**

A British Transport Police officer spotted some republican placards one of us had in a bag and decided to search everyone, under the Section 60 that had been invoked around the royal wedding area. The placards weren't out, we weren't having a demonstration. We were standing on a concourse outside a station, doing

nothing much.

Incidentally, one BTP officer, when explaining the context of the decision to search us, said that the Metropolitan Police had been "rounding people up" in advance of the royal wedding, despite the Met themselves denying that any arrests in previous days had been "specifically related" to the event.

After having been searched by the BTP, we were told we could not leave because an officer from the Met "wanted to talk to us." Within a few minutes, about twenty Territorial Support Group (TSG) officers had arrived and surrounded us in possibly the world's smallest kettle. After another few minutes, I was grabbed by a TSG officer who informed me that because we were in possession of "climbing gear" we were to be arrested to prevent a breach of the peace.

The BBC and the *Guardian* have both faithfully repeated the climbing gear claim as fact. There was none. There was nothing that anyone could rea-

sonably have mistaken for climbing gear. There seems to have been no attempt by these media outlets to ascertain the accuracy of that police claim.

We were cuffed and held until a hired coach arrived. Tourists stopped to pose for photos with London bobbies while we stood handcuffed in the background. A cameraman for a film crew making a documentary about protest took some footage.

"Ah," said my arresting officer. "We'll be taking you to the Tower."

"That's a good one."  
"Yeah, not bad for the TSG, eh?"

On the coach, we were transferred to a non-TSG unit and driven to Sutton police station, about a dozen miles out of central London.

Four of us were led of the coach to be processed in the police station. We were searched again and had our personals confiscated and details taken. We were not at any point charged with any offence, nor was any indication given that we would be

charged with any offence.

A senior officer, giving some background to one of the desk officers who were doing the paperwork, explained that we were "anti-royalists" who had been planning to "commit a protest" near the wedding.

This is language similar to that used by Metropolitan Police Commander Jones when she said this week: "Any criminals attempting to disrupt [the royal wedding], be that in the guise of protest or otherwise, will be met by a robust, decisive, flexible and proportionate policing response."

**At this point I was banged up in a cell for a little under an hour, before being released into the wilds of Sutton.**

• Police also raided squats in London, in the run-up to 29 April, and in Bristol, in an area where local people have protested against the opening of a Tesco store.  
<http://bit.ly/m4KXef>

## Teachers, lecturers, civil servants to strike together

By Tom Unterrainer

**Unions representing over 800,000 teachers, lecturers and civil servants are set to take national strike action on 30 June against Government plans to radically attack their pensions.**

The government has already switched the measure for annual increases for public sector pensions from the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the generally lower rate, the Consumer Price Index (CPI). A pension currently worth £10,000 a year will, by 2016, be worth £800 less than it would be on RPI.

The government also looks set to increase the level of contributions and raising the retirement eligibility age. For teachers this would mean an increase in contributions from 6.4% to 9.8% and an increase in retirement age from 60/65 (pre/post 2007) to 68.

Lecturers in further and higher education belonging to the same pension scheme as teachers will be similarly affected.

Low-paid civil servants organised by the PCS have, on average, a much lower annual pension of only £4,200, but will also be expected to pay higher contributions and retire later.

United action on pensions makes sound industrial sense: if ballots are successful across the unions then industrial cannot easily be ignored.

However there are problems. Each union operates at a different tempo and coordinated action may end up being dictated by the tempo of the slowest and least militant union.

A serious counter-attack on pensions will require more than a "one-off" day of united action.

Unfortunately, the "model" of trade union militancy over the past decade has been the strike activity of PCS — a one day strike followed by another one day strike, many months later, and then petering-out with very little won.

As things stand it looks likely that only one day of action will take place between now and the autumn. Efforts at the NUT conference at Easter to win a commitment to sustained, selective action in groups of schools was kept off conference floor by a bungling and sectarian left.

Cross-union, united action between the NUT, ATL, UCU and PCS is positive but it is only a start. These unions represent a small minority of trade union members in the public sector.

If the action does not spread to the other major teachers union (the NASUWT) and to Unison, Unite and GMB members in the public sector, then our class will be struggling with only a portion of its strength. These unions will only take action with considerable pressure from below — members need to see other public sector unions fighting and winning.

UCU has signalled its intention to take action against the massive proposed cuts in courses and jobs. Teachers face attacks on other issues — from workload to academies. None of these things will be tackled by the pension ballot alone.

In Nottinghamshire, Tower Hamlets and Camden, teachers and public sector workers have taken action against local cuts. That is good, but not enough. National attacks should be met by national action.

Teacher unions must organise for more action beyond one day of strikes. We need a commitment to open the new school year with further, named strike days.

Unions should work towards united national action across all public sector unions, but an individual union should not hold off on action before this happens.

Strike committees with representation from all the unions taking action should be formed to ensure a constant flow of information, support and accountability. Representatives from other unions should attend, and they should be involved in spreading solidarity and support.

Socialists in the trade unions need to fight on issues of organisation, democracy and politics in our movement: greater accountability from the union leaderships, greater rank-and-file control over disputes and for political ideas and action from the unions to take on both the Tory/Liberal government and the Labour Party.

A winning strategy will cause enormous disruption to the government and they will be politically neutered.

**Our movement should use its size, energy and organisation to fight for a workers' government — one that represents our interests and which depends on our class for its legitimacy — to replace the cutting, privatising, pro-capitalist and anti-working class Tory/Liberal coalition.**

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