

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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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.



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

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

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EDL in East London: the state is the real winner

By an East London anti-fascist

Everyone who came out onto the streets of Tower Hamlets on 3 September to oppose the presence of the racist English Defence League deserves congratulation and commendation for not staying at home and hoping the day would pass off without incident.

But the "victory" we won by keeping the EDL out of Tower Hamlets feels very hollow when the leaders of the anti-fascist movement — whether consciously or otherwise — remain reliant on the state to fight our battles for us.

The police were the real winners in the day's events. They put thousands of personnel on the streets of Tower Hamlets, were their usual community-friendly selves, hassling and stopping-and-searching people (who never seemed to be white) seemingly on a whim.

The EDL were prevented from crossing the borough boundary into Tower Hamlets by the tight policing of

their rally, but were still able to hold their action (at least 1,000) in the multicultural East End thanks to police facilitation. The police escort which got them from Moorgate station to their rally point at Aldgate, and then to their extraction points in south London, meant they effectively had the march that so much effort went into banning.

The police prevented anti-fascists from getting anywhere near the EDLers, meaning that the racists have been able to march in and out of the East End, holding a lively rally in between, without encountering any large-scale opposition. The presence of thousands of riot police on our streets, particularly when they are hassling Asian kids, and especially when they are actively facilitating large racist demonstrations, is nothing to celebrate.

A small blow was landed later in the day when local people were able to hold up and damage an EDL coach as it made its way out of Tower Hamlets, leading to a large police clampdown on the Mile

End Road. Certainly, those local residents who mobilised have distinguished themselves and proved that their political instincts and courage far outstrips that of their official political and religious "representatives", as well as the leaders of the mainstream anti-fascist campaigns.

A mass anti-fascist movement organised on the basis of direct-action tactics and working-class politics could have the strategic creativity to avoid police kettles and actually confront the racists on the streets, not chant to ourselves inside tight police cordons. It could also provide political answers to the social conditions that allow organisations like the EDL to grow.

Those who wish to see the development of an independent working-class anti-fascist movement must meet urgently to discuss this experience, and others, and organise.

The next time 1,000 racists march into a multicultural area, with the full facilitation of the police, they must be directly confronted.

Protest against "riot evictions"

By Mark Osborn

The Labour council in Southwark, south London has written to 35 tenants across the borough where members of the household have been charged with riot related offences.

The council is threatening eviction if members of a household living in a council property are convicted. Forty activists gathered outside Southwark Town Hall in Peckham on 31 August to protest against the collective punishment of whole working class families.

This vindictive second punishment will only be imposed on council tenants rather than home owners. And evictions will lead to the break-up of families, homelessness and possibly set in motion secondary waves of anti-social behaviour.

Moreover, the protesters are worried that such evictions could set a precedent whereby tenants convicted of other petty offences could be thrown onto the streets.

Labour and the police

By Sam Greenwood

Labour has announced an e-petition to oppose cuts to the police — its biggest opposition to any of the Tory/Liberal cuts since losing the election.

The leadership want to force a parliamentary debate on the issue in the aftermath of the riots which started in Tottenham following the police killing of Mark Duggan. Ed Miliband has used the riots primarily to argue against the cuts to the police: "The events of the last few days have been a stark reminder to us all that police on our streets make our communities safer and make the public feel safer".

He does not mention the massive cuts to the public sector, infinitely more damaging to young working-class people, or the heavy handed and racist policing that blights many inner city communities.

We face a cut of 60% capital spending in education, a £20 billion cut to NHS funding and an estimated 163,000 jobs threatened in local authorities. According to the Labour Representation Committee, Haringey Council in March, "Approved cuts of £84 million

from a total budget of £273 million. There was a savage 75% cut to the Youth Service budget, including: closing the youth centres; connexions careers advice service for young people reduced by 75%... Haringey has one of the highest numbers of children living in severe poverty, and unemployment in the borough is among the highest in the UK. In London as a whole, youth unemployment is at 23%."

These are the savage cuts Labour should be fighting. Instead they are protecting the police.

We must pressure Council Labour Groups, especially where they hold power, to support resistance against cuts by refusing to implement them. And we must demand resistance from the Labour Party nationally too.

We should demand that Labour supports striking workers instead of condemning them, and stops championing the unaccountable and racist police force, who are used regularly to disrupt working class lives by attacking strikes and protests, protecting fascists, and harassing working-class youth on the streets.

Abortion rights under attack

By Vicki Morris

Conservative MP Nadine Dorries and Labour MP Frank Field have tabled amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill with the aim of eroding abortion rights.

Their main amendment seeks to narrow the range of bodies that can advise women seeking a NHS abortion.

It says: "information, advice and counselling is independent where it is provided by either (i) a private body that does not itself provide for the termination of pregnancies; or (ii) a statutory body."

They want to stop funding to organisations such as the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) who offer counselling on reproductive issues, including abortion, and also carry out abortions.

They say that such bodies have a financial interest in increasing the number of abortions so can't give independent advice. Field compared this situation to the mis-selling of pensions!

Frank Field MP

But they provide no evidence that this is happening. Replying to these amendments, BPAS says:

"A care pathway has developed that could build in the importance of a pregnancy options discussion without putting barriers in the way of those women who are sure about their abortion decision. This is a crucial consideration for abortion services: abortion is a procedure that has to be carried out within a specific time-frame (before 24 weeks...), and is safer and more acceptable the earlier in gestation that it takes place."

If BPAS and such bodies cannot give advice, the only other bodies operating in this field are anti-abortion organisations such as LIFE and Care.

Israel: “the welfare state is coming”

Israeli socialist Adam Keller, who is a spokesperson for the left-wing peace group Gush Shalom, spoke to *Solidarity*.

There was a big upsurge of the Israeli social protest movement last weekend [3-4 September], with mass demonstrations. The slogan was the “Million People March”; in fact it was “only” half a million, with 300,000 in Tel Aviv.

It is one of the biggest protests in Israeli history, and certainly the biggest on social issues rather than foreign policy.

It seems now that there will not be a big protest every weekend, and the tent cities which exist across Israel are going to be at least partially dismantled. The organisers are considering other ways forward.

How are these decisions made? The movement has direct democracy, with general meetings in the camps building up to delegate meetings from across Israel. It's very democratic, but within it there are tensions. One of these is a sort of class tension, a split between those who started the movement, and tend to be hard-pressed, white-collar workers, and those who are much poorer and in some cases literally have nowhere else to live. The latter, obviously, are most hostile to closing down the camps.

By the way this division

is to some extent — not entirely — an ethnic one, between better off Ashkenazi and poorer Sephardi.

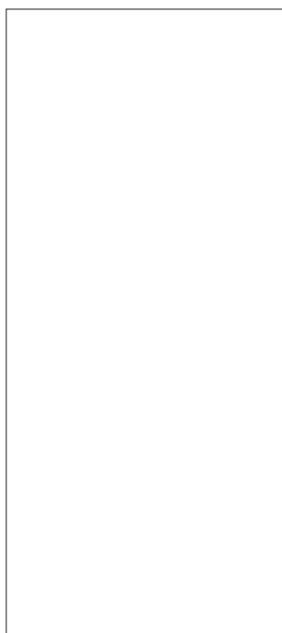
The relationship between the protests and the labour movement is quite interesting. The Histadrut has been supporting the movement, and for instance organised a big rally in support. But it doesn't go much further than that.

Some in the movement see the best organised workers as part of the problem, essentially what we might call a labour aristocracy. Take the electricity workers, who for a long time got free electricity and so were blamed for high bills. There is a real danger that the movement could be used by the right wing against the unions. But at the moment that is very far from the central dynamic. The key leaders of the protests want a social movement/union alliance.

STRIKES

Some important strikes by public sector workers have been intertwined with the protests. Just before they began, there was a long and very militant strike by social workers, over pay and conditions.

The Histadrut signed an agreement which gave them hardly anything; when most of the social workers tried to continue the strike, the Histadrut and the state went to court jointly and got the strike ruled illegal. The social workers have been very ac-



Tel Aviv, 3 September

tive in the protests.

Similarly, there has been a long partial strike by doctors in the hospitals. It has been linked to the demand to defend public healthcare in Israel, against privatisation and for more funding. The doctors were demanding a thousand new doctors' jobs to stop them being overworked and establish a better service.

The most militant section were the young doctors, mostly residents, who had their own organisation within the Israeli Medical Association, and who were somewhat sceptical of the older leadership of the union.

The leader of the IMA went on hunger strike and

got a lot of sympathy in the social movement; after that he agreed a deal with the state which on paper gave them the thousand jobs they wanted, but the young doctors said it was illusory, not adequate and so on. They tried to continue the strikes, and eventually resigned en masse, but the courts ruled this was an illegal strike and forced them back to work. Now some of them are on hunger strike.

The government began by denouncing the protesters as disguised left-wingers, i.e. left-wingers on the Palestinian question, and also denouncing them as hedonistic middle-class kids who have no idea about real suffering. They called them sushi-eaters and shisha-smokers!

After the protests gained strength, they acknowledged there are real problems, and appointed a commission headed by Manuel Trajtenberg, a sort of left-leaning figure, to investigate. Trajtenberg presents himself as a very liberal, open-minded, conciliatory figure, happy to engage with the protesters.

BUDGET

There is a very big debate in the movement about what attitude we should have to this. Some say we should engage to negotiate concessions.

But others point out that to win what we want, the public sector budget needs to be extended, and the commission's remit explic-

itly rules this out.

What next? Of course the movement may still dissipate. There is also debate about its relationship to mainstream, parliamentary politics. Should it become a political party and compete in elections?

Hadash [linked to the Israeli Communist Party] is very involved, but they don't delude themselves that they will lead the movement.

There is also the question of the Labor Party. Its leadership elections are coming up, and one candidate, Shelly Yachimovich, is seen as applying the ideas of the protest movement. The problem is that she says she is only interested in social issues, and will not talk about the settlements, the occupation and so on. She has participated in the protests, but not in a very outspoken way; nonetheless, she is probably counting on the movement's support.

Others believe the movement should remain an extra-parliamentary watchdog over politicians. But it is very clear that we have already achieved a shifting of the terms of debate.

In Israel, even more than other countries, it was taken for granted that free-market economics were a given, with a discussion only about competence and technocratic questions. That is changing in Israel.

Among the main slogans of the movement are variants of “the welfare state is coming”.

1968, 1989... 2011? Is this a year of global revolt?

By Chris Reynolds

“Perhaps”, wrote a columnist in the staid *Financial Times* on 30 August, “2011 will come to rank alongside 1968 and 1989 as a year of global revolt”.

The columnist cites North Africa and the Middle East (including Israel), but also Chile, China, Greece... If Britain does not look like that yet, maybe it is just that this country is a backwater, and needs to catch up.

Capitalist crisis has shaken people up. “Ordinary citizens who feel excluded” have stirred against “an internationally connected elite”.

In reaction to decades of top-level talk of “greed is good” and being “intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich”, “egalitarian political traditions that still strike a pop-

ular chord” have been rekindled.

The columnist sees the USA as the “one striking exception”, because the main “rebel” movement there, the Tea Party, has worked through organised political channels, not “disorder on the streets”.

Arguably, the notable thing about that exception is the markedly right-wing character of the Tea Party movement, not its channelling into organised politics. Leftish revolt in other countries would channel more into organised politics, and be more effective, if it had the easy channels to political effectiveness which small-town right-wing populism has in the USA and was not obstructed by the bureaucratisation and hardened apparatchik-rule which has gutted parties like the Labour Party, and unions too, over the decades of capitalist triumphalism.

The many-hundred-thousand strong rally in Egypt's Tahrir Square on 29 July, when hard-Islamists waved Saudi flags and chanted “The people want Allah's Sharia” and “we are all Osama [bin Laden]”, shows that in other countries too sizeable elements of the revolt of “ordinary citizens who feel excluded” against the rich elite can be co-opted by right-wing forces.

Revolt is breaking out all over, and most of it is broadly leftish, democratic, egalitarian. But some of it is channelled by the populist right. Socialists need to do more than shout “down with...” slogans and try to boost generic anger, revolt, or resistance; we also need to formulate and popularise positive demands to allow democratic and egalitarian impulses to express themselves rationally rather than being perverted.

Back in 1901 Lenin wrote, against other socialists who criticised him and his comrades for pursuing too much controversy rather than focusing on pushing forward resistance in general: “Catholic and monarchist labour unions in Europe are also an inevitable result of the interaction of environment and elements, but it was the consciousness of priests and Zubatovs [police agents] and not that of socialists that participated in this interaction”.

Revolt is an inevitable result of the interactions of the capitalist crisis. The question is which “consciousness” will participate most decisively.

And even more so today than in Lenin's time, or Marx's. In Marx's day, every popular revolt made its way in a political culture long broadly shaped by the battle of bourgeois democracy against the old

kings and feudalists. There were exceptions — trends like those whom Marx called the “reactionary socialists” — but the broad direction of popular revolt could usually be assumed to be democratic, the question then being whether it would be socialist too.

By the time Lenin was writing, many years of work by mass Marxist or semi-Marxist parties in the most capitalistically-developed countries had shaped a culture which also made the default direction of popular revolt broadly and generically socialist.

The ravages of Stalinism, and then of its ignominious collapse, and the progressive hollowing-out of bourgeois democracy, have changed those parameters.

Our job is to make the coming years a time of the re-establishment of socialist and democratic parameters, as well as a time of revolt.

New South Wales workers rally against union busting

By a Workers' Liberty Australia member

On Thursday 8 September public-sector workers in New South Wales, Australia, will strike and rally against moves by the new Liberal state premier, Barry O'Farrell, to cut jobs, pay, and workers' rights.

O'Farrell has legislated to have public-sector workers' pay rises set by law, and at rates below inflation, with any bigger rise “paid for” by cuts and speed-up as valued by the state Treasury. This means that industrial action over pay and conditions becomes unlawful.

The New South Wales Teachers' Federation has called on members to strike for 24 hours. O'Farrell has gone to the state Industrial Relations Commission to try to get the strike outlawed. The usually very un-militant state Public Service Association has called on members to stop work for long enough to get to the protest rallies. The Fire Brigade Employees' Union and the Nurses' Association are expected to mobilise while delivering emergency cover.

The central Sydney rally on 8 September should be huge. But the union leaders have no stated plan for action after that.

Workers' Liberty Australia activists have been involved in getting a leaflet sponsored by the Power to the People group, the NSW Union Activists' Network, the Activist Teachers' Network, and Progressive PSA, calling for more ac-

tion:

- Strikes, stopworks, and bans;
- Solidarity if unions or unionists are penalised for unlawful industrial action;
- Organise workplace meetings and community campaign groups.

The groups also call for demonstrators to meet after the big 8 September rally to discuss links and strategy.

• More: workersliberty.org/files/110908nsw.pdf

New on workersliberty.org:

• **Class-struggle dispatches from Iraq, by workers' leader Falah Alwan**

• **New stage in Palestinian quarry workers' fight**

Letters



Tatchell row on 3 September

During the anti-fascist mobilisations in Tower Hamlets on Saturday 3 September, veteran LGBT activist Peter Tatchell had a placard which read, on one side, “gays and Muslims unite: stop the EDL”, and “no the EDL and far-right Islamists: against ALL hate” on the other.

Just before the rally started breaking up, a young Muslim man began arguing with Tatchell — why was he dividing the movement by bringing gay rights issues to an anti-fascist demo? “Gays can’t be Muslims. God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. It even says so in the Christian bible.”

A small group of young, manly Asian, men gathered round and a heated argument ensued. An older black woman backed Tatchell up, arguing “He’s one of us, he’s come out in support of us, we should support his rights.” The gist of Tatchell’s argument was: “It’s ok for you to not agree with me — I’m not a Muslim, but I respect your rights. You don’t have to agree with me, but you should accept my right to be here.”

One of the young men who stood with Tatchell argued against the EDL’s “LGBT rights” agenda, dismissing it as ludicrous hypocrisy. When I asked where the black and Asian gay community were, he replied “LGBT people in the black community are too scared to come to these demos.” Tatchell added “There are organisations for Muslim LGBTs, but they’re largely social networking organisations with no political agenda.”

The Hackney Rainbow Alliance is organising East London Pride later this year; Tatchell and others have been pushing to have the march down Whitechapel Road and Brick Lane, passing some of the pubs where large numbers of homophobic attacks have been reported. However, members of the “far left” in the Alliance have been pushing to keep the march away from “controversial” areas with large Muslim populations.

The left and LGBT movement should be confronting homophobia wherever it exists, even within communities also facing racist attacks from the far-right.

We have a special duty to support LGBT activists within minority communities; LGBT politics should never be sidelined.

Hannah Thompson, north London

Go for the cheap membership offer

According to Labour Research magazine (September edition), the general union Unite has announced the launch of a community membership scheme.

On offer is cut-price membership of 50p a week for students, the unemployed and single parents in a drive to organise in local communities as well as workplaces. This is a small, but very significant development.

It will enable the unwaged to become active within the Unite union and the wider movement including trades union councils.

John Smithee, Cambridgeshire

We haven’t voted for a label

Dave Osler says (*Solidarity* 214) that the AWL has “adhered” to Shachtman’s position, i.e. that the Stalinist states were/are a form of class exploitation distinct from capitalism (“bureaucratic collectivism”). That’s not quite accurate.

In fact our collective position, adopted in 1988, does not conclude exactly what the Stalinist states were/are. We agree that they were class societies, with ruling classes that the workers had to overthrow in a full political and social revolution. We agree that they not post-capitalist, but detours within the general epoch of capitalism.

Of those in the AWL who have a definite opinion, some, I think a majority, hold some sort of bureaucratic collectivist viewpoint. Others regard Stalinism as a form of state capitalism.

But what would be the benefit of voting through a majority position? We have rough agreement on everything that significantly affects our political program. Meanwhile, we continue to debate the theory.

As our 1988 document, “Reassessing the Eastern Bloc”, put it: “Too often discussion of the command economies on the left has been just a search for a label that can then be wielded as a sect badge. But a label is no substitute for detailed, careful, factual analysis...”

“Our concern is first and foremost to develop an exact, concrete assessment of the workers’ struggles and the bureaucracy’s operations in the Eastern Bloc, and to fight for a programme for workers’ liberty East and West.”

Sacha Ismail, south London

Socialist Party resorts to lies

The Left

By Sacha Ismail



The Socialist Party (SP) has now published a third article attacking the AWL over Libya. The first two were by SP general secretary Peter Taafe — the second not just about Libya but a lengthy diatribe against various aspects of our tendency’s history and politics. The third is by Robert Bechert on the website of the CWI, the international tendency of which the SP is part. Bechert writes:

“The idea that there was ‘no alternative’ to NATO was already disproved in the magnificent Egyptian movement that led to Mubarak’s ousting. The imperialist powers intervened for their own reasons not in the interests of the Libyan working masses and youth.

“Any failure to explain this as, for example, the small British AWL grouping did when it initially uncritically supported NATO’s role in the fighting in Tripoli, politically disarms the workers’ movement, leaving it unable to warn of imperialism’s intentions. The AWL has consistently supported NATO’s bombing and it now seeks to justify this by claiming the organisation of workers will be “easier” now after Gaddafi’s overthrow, something which it is not at all certain to be the case. In reality this is a rationalisation of their view, shameful for a self-proclaimed left organisation, that the military assault by the imperialist NATO alliance had to be supported as Libyan workers and youth had no chance on their own of defending themselves or defeating Gaddafi.”

DISTINCTION

Here the SP goes beyond its existing boneheaded refusal to understand the distinction between “support” and “not oppose” (so if the police stand between us and a much larger group of fascists, we must either shout “Police out!” or endorse the police’s actions?) and descends into straightforward lying.

This is not a term we use lightly; it is generally not a helpful way of describing things in political debates. But it is the only appropriate word for Bechert’s laughable claims.

Lie 1: we failed to explain why NATO was intervening. Right from the start, the AWL has stated clearly that the NATO powers were — of course — intervening for their own reasons and not because they care about democracy, let alone “the interests of the Libyan working masses”. This is fully in line with the position we have taken in similar situations, e.g. the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosova.

Lie 2: we supported NATO uncritically. In fact, as the SP knows very well, we did not support NATO at all. Here,

however, they descend a level by, bizarrely, claiming uncritical support! The word “initially” is clearly intended to cover them against accusations of lying; but it is nonsense. At no point did we give any support to NATO, let alone uncritically!

As for the idea that the Egyptian revolution showed there was a viable alternative to NATO intervention, this takes the SP’s fantasy politics to a new level.

It is like saying that if you are about to be murdered by gangsters, the fact that there is a powerful strike down the road shows there is no need to worry! In Egypt there is a history of workers’ struggles going back most of a century, and for forty years working-class struggles carved out space, limited but important, for the beginnings of independent workers’ organisations even under Mubarak. In the revolution these organisations have flowered.

In Libya there is no labour movement at all, and never has been; under Qaddafi’s totalitarian state, the most basic civil society organisations were bloodily prevented from emerging. As of yet, the Libyan workers are not even minimally organised as a class.

REALITY

In the really existing situation, and in the time frame available, nothing was going to stop the crushing of the rebels except outside intervention. We do not like that fact, but we look reality squarely in the face — something the SP leadership is clearly incapable of doing.

Similarly — dismissing the notion that it will almost certainly be easier for workers to organise and struggle under the new regime than under Qaddafi is so ludicrous as to hardly require comment.

In Bechert’s article and probably in his head, the distinction between lying and failing to understand basic facts blurs until you cannot distinguish one from the other. This is typical of the SP.

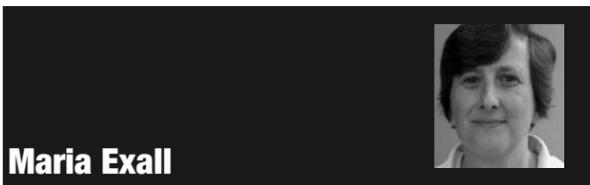
In any case, we want to know: why has the SP now published three articles attacking us, but still refuses to take part in any sort of public debate? Why were we told by one of their organisers that a debate was on, only to be told by an irate Peter Taafe that it wasn’t? Why have we not even received an email replying to our invitation?

A number of SPers have told us that the SP won’t debate with us because of the sharpness of our attacks. No doubt calling the SP leaders liars will not endear us to them any further. We would only point out the preciousness of this. The SP leaders have accused us of being apologists for imperialism! (Not to mention irrelevant, a sect, middle-class and so on) In general those being criticised never like the criticism, and the political tasks facing us are too urgent to get offended.

We reiterate our invitation to the SP to debate Libya with us at a public meeting.

• See tinyurl.com/splatest for the Socialist Party articles

The labour movement needs a political vision



Maria Exall

Earlier this year over half a million people responded to the TUC’s call to “March for the Alternative”. At TUC Congress on 12-14 September the organised labour movement has the opportunity to spell out what that alternative could be.

The issue of pensions and further future co-ordinated industrial action by public sector unions is on the agenda. Other motions submitted call for resistance in varying degrees to the Coalition Government cuts in the different industrial sectors from health and social care to the arts. But one of the most important things I think the 2011 Congress can do is to unite positive strategies for fighting back with a vision of a real socio-economic alternative.

A motion on economic policy submitted by the FBU says “the free market, neo-liberal model that has dominated for the past three decades has been exposed as a failure; a major change of direction is needed”. The motion, and amendments also submitted, then calls for full public ownership of the major banks and financial institutions and taking back into public ownership key drivers of economic growth and wealth creation such as energy, transport, water and telecommunications.

It is inevitable that the right of the trade union movement will either oppose these calls, or vote in favour but with no

serious intention of campaigning for them. There are several reasons for this.

These include the belief that the organisation of the movement is too weak to achieve any of these demands and the general conservatism of most unions’ industrial strategies (it is a remarkably persistent idea, present in both “left” unions and right that we can achieve more by accommodating to employers’ demands than by confronting them). However what is even more deadly is the commonplace view that the policies of the trade union movement on wider political issues cannot be seen to be too far ahead of the parameters of current debate. It is this last reason that has to be tackled directly if we are to have a meaningful alternative.

We need political trade unionism which takes up its place within the public arena without apologising for raising the demands of working people as a programme for the whole country. We need popular arguments against the Tories economic irrationality and lies.

And we need the trade unions to raise these demands of the Labour Party (and if they are affiliated to make the case within the Labour Party).

The 26 March demo could not have been successfully called without a consensus amongst trade unions and an appeal that reached beyond their immediate hinterland. On the day community groups, voluntary organisations, equality campaigners etc. all joined trade unionists on the March. The case for the political alternative cannot be made without this kind of unity — but trade unionists must lead.

The mobilisations of the organised movement against the cuts must also include the political case for the representation of working-class people’s interests. To fight to win you need a political vision.

Labour and McCluskey's promise

A year ago union members' votes installed Ed Miliband as Labour leader, against the wishes of the Shadow Cabinet and the majority of Labour MPs. He told Labour Party conference that he would move on from "New Labour", and that the invasion of Iraq had been wrong. The conference promised a thorough review of Labour's undemocratic structures.

All good. According to latest figures, 70,000 new members have now joined Labour since May 2010. It's a small figure by historical standards, but big compared to the shrivelled membership roll (below 140,000) before May 2010.

The big unions had shown slightly more sign of asserting themselves at Labour's 2009 conference, and there have been some murmurs and stirrings inside those unions over the last year. The Labour-affiliated unions (grouped together in TULO) produced a submission for the review which disappointed Labour left-wingers but included some positive proposals for democratic reform.

Yet, as Labour approaches its 2011 conference, opening in Liverpool on 25 September, the old New Labour machine is still asserting firm control.

At the Durham Miners' Gala in July, Unite general secretary Len McCluskey said he wanted a "more democratic Labour party. With thousands more members, with... an annual conference featuring real debates".

McCluskey and the other union leaders are not making good on such promises, and the more energetic among the 70,000 new members are not being organised into a rank-and-file movement demanding democratic rights.

Ed Miliband has attacked the 30 June strike against pension cuts, responded to the riots by criticising the Tories for allocating too little money to the police, and endorsed eviction of the Dale Farm travellers only the day before the UN criticised the planned eviction as a breach of human rights. And the major pressure on him inside the Labour Party is to be even more right-wing, even more "New Labour"-ish, even more an un-Red Ed.

The review of Labour Party structure has been botched and manipulated. The National Executive is planning to spring a "package" on delegates without notice at the start of conference, while at the same time democratic rule-change proposals submitted by Constituency Labour Parties in 2010 have been ruled off the agenda on artificial grounds.

BOUNCE

On Sunday 4 September the *Observer* ran an article, obviously "fed" to it by Miliband's office, on what it bills as a move by Miliband to "rewrite Labour's founding principles" by way of bouncing an amendment to clause I of the Party constitution through the conference without any chance for prior consideration or debate.

The "Hain report" in July (the Labour leaders' response to the review of structure) said that "A new Clause I should set out our desire to build a party fit for the future; a genuine movement where the connection between the party and the public is strong".

The best that can be said here is that if Miliband's office is feeding this waffle to the press as the main focus, then maybe it will back down on the worse proposals which could be in the "package" put to conference.

As the *Observer* reported: "One idea mooted would see [the unions'] voting power at party conference reduced to below 50% and a reduction in their sway over leadership elections. On Sunday [4th] a source close to Miliband said no decisions had yet been taken and that unions would realign Miliband was the first Labour leader in a long time to believe passionately in maintaining the union link".

Union delegates should strive to ensure that this means that the unions (which now supply 86% of Labour's income) will at least stand firm against anti-democratic changes being bounced through conference with no notice. In July the union reps on the National Executive did resist pressure from Miliband to give Labour's general secretary job to Chris Lennie (incumbent deputy GS, and a notorious Blairite hatchet-man), and instead voted in GMB political officer Iain McNicol.

To fight the coalition government's cuts we need a working-class political alternative that will lead a clear political battle against cuts now, and commit to reversing those cuts when the coalition is toppled. Ed Miliband's Labour is not offering anything like that. The unions and rank-and-file Labour activists need to organise.

• More: bit.ly/labpool

Take them over

Tax the rich! Expropriate the banks!

It wasn't the stars, or geology. It wasn't ocean currents, or the weather. The world economy was brought crashing down in 2008 by the particular way we have allowed it to be organised.

It was brought down by being organised around the priority of maximum competitive greed and gain of a small exploiting minority.

Today the world economy stands on the brink of crashing again, or at best of a long period of depression. Two emergency measures could stop that: expropriate the banks and financial institutions, and reorganise them as a public banking, insurance, and pension service, oriented to social investment; and tax the rich.

The governments are doing the opposite. Now that the British government has come up with some weak proposals for regulating banks, even though those proposals aspire to no more than protecting bank depositors from the bank bosses' desire to use their funds to play the markets, the plans have come under fire from the bankers and look like being postponed some years.

A few of France's, Germany's, and the USA's (not Britain's) ultra-rich have mused aloud that the governments should at least tax them a tad. The *Financial Times* drily reports: "Early signs suggest that the 'tax me more' drive by some prominent rich [people] is unlikely to gain traction".

FLUID

From the early 1980s to 2008, world capitalism became more and more governed by the drive for quick, fluid gains, measured and coordinated through an increasingly complex and fast-flowing system of world financial markets.

Ever more elaborate forms of credit were packaged and traded, faster and faster. The bubble was bound to burst soon. There have been periodic financial bubble-bursting crises all through the recent decades. This time, the bubble-bursting was big enough that its knock-on effects threatened to ruin the world's leading banks.

Over the time since 2008, millions have lost their jobs and their homes; in some parts of the world, millions are starving as a result of the food price rises which have been one sequel.

Fuller collapse was avoided only by the intervention of social control. Governments stepped in with "socialism for the rich". In Britain, the government pumped the equivalent of £18,000 for every child, woman, and man in the country into the banks, in cash, loans, credit, and guarantees.

Writers called this the "privatisation of gains and socialisation of losses". Then, it was a matter of a "socialisation of losses", government bail-outs with taxpayers' money, coming after the "privatisation of gains" in previous years and decades.

Now we have the "privatisation of gains" and "socialisation of losses" simultaneously.

As soon as the immediate crisis of late 2008 passed, the ultra-rich started coining it again, their costs reduced by the

job cuts and wage limitations they had been able to impose in the crisis.

Between 2009 and 2010, the top thousand multimillionaires in Britain increased their wealth by £77 billion, or 30%. The wealthiest 50 in the world gained £150 billion, a 25% rise; the 50 richest in Europe, £88 billion, a 27% rise.

The trend has continued. Top bosses at the top 100 FTSE companies in Britain had median earnings rise 32% in 2010-11. At the same time jobs, services, and real wages are cut for the majority. In Britain workers' real wages dropped 2.7% in 2010-11.

A market economy dependent for its impetus on the always-volatile spending of a rich few is necessarily more unstable than one more geared to the steady demand for routine services and goods by the majority.

The bail-outs of 2008 are now being paid for in the form of financial crises for governments, especially in the eurozone. The governments try to deal with those crises by cutting the services, jobs, and wages of the majority, again and again. The cuts make economic depression deeper.

In the *Financial Times* of 5 September, Wolfgang Münchau, a conservative economist who writes solely from the point of view of what will best help capitalism go forward, declares:

"The very least one should expect [now] is for all the eurozone to abandon all austerity programmes with immediate effect... allowing the automatic stabilisers [such as an increase in social welfare spending when private income sags] to kick in..."

"Instead [we get] contagious austerity with a contagious downturn".

BILLIONS

The top one thousand people alone in the UK have individual wealth totalling £396 billion. If those top thousand were reduced to £1 million each (to routine luxury, rather than ultra-riches) then that would yield £395 billion.

As for the banks, HSBC alone has assets of US\$2,690 billion (£1,670 billion), and last-year profits of \$13 billion. British bank profits totalled about £30 billion for 2010. Bonuses in high finance and in other industries totalled £22 billion this year.

The cuts in education, local services, health, and benefits in Britain, huge in their social impact, are small in comparison to the wealth of the rich: about £18 billion from benefits, £16 billion from education and local services, over five years.

The public sector pension schemes now under threat have total liabilities, for all the millions of workers they cover, and all the dozens of years of those workers' future pension years, of about £770 billion.

Seriously taxing the rich, and taking the wealth of finance capital under public democratic control, would reorganise economic life so that it could be made to serve human needs rather than taunting and ruining us.

The tyrant is toppled

By Clive Bradley

A year ago the Middle East and North Africa seemed a “stable” region: that is, most of the regimes had been in power for decades; and there had been very little in the way of mass popular opposition movements also for decades.

There were mass strikes in Egypt and Tunisia in the 1970s; there was the Iranian revolution at the end of the '70s. But since then most opposition movements had been, or had been presumed to be, “radical” Islamist in character. It had become a platitude of Western punditry that Arabs — perhaps Muslims in general — lived under authoritarian regimes because they liked them.

Now we have seen enormous opposition movements out on the streets across the region. The presidents of Tunisia and Egypt have been removed, though the regimes themselves still hang on (organising elections, however: the precise composition of the parliament due to be elected in Egypt later this year remains to be seen). Other dictators cling to power, in Syria for example.

By far the most thoroughgoing “regime change” has been in Libya, where Qaddafi has finally been overthrown. This revolution was not carried out by the Libyan people alone; NATO involvement was vital to it.

There are two questions, here: why was this so — why couldn't the Libyan people get rid of Qaddafi by themselves? And what effect will NATO involvement have on the future of Libya (a question linked to an assessment of the nature of the post-Qaddafi government, or of “the rebels”).

Qaddafi had a repressive apparatus — a series of militias largely under the control of his family — on a far greater scale than elsewhere in the region, or at least with far less scruple about murdering its own people. (A significant part of that apparatus, however, was foreign mercenaries.) Estimates of those murdered by the regime in Syria since protests started stand at something over 2,000 people — a terrible amount. Estimates of those murdered by Qaddafi even before NATO intervention, so in the first month of the rebellion alone, reach perhaps 10,000. Qaddafi was prepared to use all kinds of weapons, and for instance aircraft, in a way the other regimes have not.

The effects of this kind of barbarity — snipers on rooftops murdering people inside their houses, let alone out on the streets, etc — could hardly be overstated.

It seems there was a decisive moment in the early days — after Benghazi was taken over by the rebels — when mass

protests failed to materialise in Tripoli. Again, given the level of repression this is not very surprising. But it had a long-term, knock-on effect — a protracted war.

After the initial stages, and after NATO intervention, the Western media tended to suggest that Qaddafi depended, in fact, on widespread popular support, rather than simply terror. But that seems not to have been true; and his means of terror were very formidable indeed.

Until only days before Tripoli fell to the rebels, much of the Western press was still talking about “stalemate”, as if the war might go on indefinitely.

NEGOTIATE

The British government was making noises about a negotiated settlement with Qaddafi. (Presumably the motivation for this was that continued NATO involvement was expensive and politically fraught: if Qaddafi wasn't going to go quickly, it might be easier to negotiate with him. It is unclear if Western governments would actually have preferred this outcome. Probably not: Qaddafi, even after welcomed into the Western club, was and is an unreliable maverick.)

The opposition movement in Libya was, from the beginning, very much less politically developed and sophisticated than in, for example, Egypt, across the border.

To a large extent this also is because of the degree of state repression. Egypt had elections, legal (if timid) opposition parties, even quasi-legal or “only semi-illegal” movements able to contest elections, etc. (along, of course, with a reviled and violent police force, jails, and so forth). There had been, over the past few years, mass protest movements in Egypt, including waves of strikes. So when the revolution began in Egypt we saw a proliferation of movements, coalitions, manifestos, political demands.

None of that was possible in Libya. Oppositionists had been wiped out or forced abroad. When the uprising against Qaddafi began, many “dissidents” returned; but there was nobody comparable to even al-Baradei in Egypt, or to other political movements. A lot of the leaders of what became the National Transitional Council were defectors from Qaddafi. But the movement seems also to have been — at the rank and file level certainly — “ordinary” Libyans with no political experience, educated or influenced by no particular movement. (There have been also, in Benghazi, not a small number of foreigners coming to see what's happening or fight — and some, or a lot, of them seem to be anarchists. How influential they are is hard to judge; one imagines not very.)

It was the NTC itself which lobbied for Western involvement, the UN resolution, and NATO involvement. In part that was because much of this leadership is pro-Western;

Atrocities by Libyan rebels? We need consistency

By Sacha Ismail

Socialists who, like the AWL, have backed the Libyan rebels against Muammar Qaddafi's dictatorship should not ignore or downplay reports of atrocities by victorious rebel fighters in Tripoli and elsewhere.

Already, those on the left who are determined to prove that there is no difference between the two sides — or even that the rebels are worse than the old regime — are citing such atrocities to back up their arguments. But that does not mean that none of the claims are true.

The fact that there have been cold-blooded reprisals against those claimed to be Qaddafi officials and fighters is tragic and alarming. Evidence is emerging that not only African mercenaries fighting for the old regime, but also many migrant workers — not only in Tripoli, but in Benghazi and elsewhere — have been arrested, beaten and in some cases killed.

Many of the most sensational reports appear on pro-Qaddafi websites and are not backed up by evidence or sources. Nonetheless, we do not want to act as the mirror image of these apologists. We condemn such atrocities.

At the same time, we demand some consistency.

It is not the case that, pre-revolution, Libya was a racially egalitarian society with a benign, anti-racist government, in which the rebels emerged as an eruption of anti-black racism. Qaddafi's Libya had a long history of discrimination and outrages against black African workers in particular.

In 2000, many thousands of workers from sub-Saharan Africa fled the country following racist attacks sparked by a government crack down on foreign employment and by items on the government-controlled news services which

portrayed African migrants as being involved in drug-trafficking and dealing in alcohol. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions reported: “at least 500 Nigerians have been reported killed and many more injured during those attacks. Migrant workers from Ghana, Cameroon, Sudan, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Nigeria were the victims of attacks by young Libyans targeting black migrants....” According to Human Rights Watch, the Qaddafi regime deported 140,000 migrant workers between 2003 and 2005.

At the same time, the regime behaved in a racist and imperialist fashion towards geographical minorities in Libya — not just the Berbers, whose language was banned by Qaddafi but also black peoples in the south of Libya, such as the Toubou, who have also played a role in the uprising.

RACISM

Clearly, however, the rebel camp too is diseased with racism, with narratives about marauding black mercenaries (and not, for instance, the Serbs who have also been fighting to protect Qaddafi) flaring repeatedly into actual racist atrocities.

The rebel leaders have condemned reprisals; if they are serious about democracy, let them show it by speaking out loud and clear against anti-black racism and persecutions. As larger and larger numbers of black people are detained by the rebels, this becomes more and more urgent.

Having said all that: the idea that, because of this, there is no difference between the totalitarian state of Qaddafi and the popular uprising against it is wrong. It also exposes broader political inconsistency.

Take the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who led the overthrow of Egypt's British-dominated monarchy in 1952. In the

1920s there were about 80,000 Jewish people in Egypt. From the late 1940s, difficulties mounted for the Egyptian Jews; under Nasser this developed into serious persecution. After the Suez crisis in 1956, there was a stepping up of repression, and 25,000 Egyptian Jews left the country. After the 1967 war with Israel, almost all Egyptian Jewish men were deported or imprisoned, ending in the complete disappearance of the community. Fewer than 100 remain today.

You could add that Nasser was an authoritarian dictator who systematically repressed independent Egyptian workers' organisations! Yet it hardly follows that in 1956, when Britain, France and Israel attempted to return Egypt to the status of a semi-colony (i.e. a fundamentally different kind of imperialist war from the one NATO has just waged in Libya), socialists should not have sided with Egypt.

In terms of the oppression of minorities this is a stronger case for not supporting the “revolutionaries” than Libya today. Yet failure to do so would have been totally disorienting.

The reality is that those using the facts of racism and atrocities by the Libyan rebels to justify their hostility to the Libyan revolution are generally not too concerned about the records of those they support. Repression and atrocities of all sorts can be justified or ignored if they fit into the “anti-imperialist” world schema. It is perfectly possible, of course, to raise issues such as racism among the Libyan rebels in good faith. But they are being highlighted by pro-Qaddafi “anti-imperialists” primarily because of the rebels' alliance with NATO, and in order to whitewash Qaddafi.

Working-class socialists, in contrast, should be consistent.

some of them favour a neo-liberal economic policy, though it is too early to say if this is the dominant current. But it was also because they felt they had no choice. Without outside assistance — crucially, without being themselves armed — they were not strong enough to defeat Qaddafi's forces of repression. The Libyan movement remained clear throughout the war that it didn't want "boots on the ground"; it continued to criticise NATO for failing to give them — the rebel fighters — enough arms.

There has been some Islamist involvement. The last serious opposition in Libya was Islamist — though it was crushed. Islamism does not seem to have been a major component of the rebellion, however. An Islamist group was responsible for the murder of Major General Abdul-Fattah Younis; but the NTC's response was quick and firm.

The political programme of the Council, and its plans for forming a new government, are resolutely liberal, or "bourgeois democratic".

NATO and the West want a new government which is allied with them — for reasons of Libyan oil and regional stability. But it is false to believe that NATO intervention can be reduced simply to this intention.

First, and most obviously, they already had a pro-Western regime with Qaddafi. Indeed, it has now been revealed that these ties were not merely diplomatic or economic: Qaddafi's torturers were used by Western governments, including the UK's, via "rendition", in the War on Terror.

By far the simplest policy for the West, faced with Qaddafi's march on Benghazi, would have been to let him win. That they could not do so was in part because of the unpopularity — with their own populations — of simply allowing a massacre to take place.

The general aim of Western governments (whatever nuances exist between them) is for stability; for an end to the "Arab spring". But if the new Libyan government is pro-Western it is not simply because of NATO involvement: they would have been pro-Western anyway.

The leadership of the rebels and their ideology does not in itself define the revolution in Libya, any more than it does in Egypt or Tunisia. Here was a genuine, mass popular revolt against a hated tyranny. And its political evolution is not yet settled.

For sure, the chances of a democratic movement, not to mention a socialist one, and of a working-class movement emerging are almost incalculably greater now than they were under Qaddafi.

NATO

Most of the left, broadly defined, including for instance the Stop The War Coalition, opposed NATO intervention. Workers' Liberty took the view that we could not oppose it — demonstrate against it and try to actually stop it — when the immediate consequence would have been a massacre in Benghazi and the crushing of the Libyan revolution (with whatever terrible consequences that would probably have had for the "Arab spring" as a whole).

This did not mean losing sight of who and what NATO is, or "supporting" NATO. It was an immediate, life-and-death question.

There were three arguments against this view. First, that opposing imperialism is more important than the immediate fate of Benghazi. ("The sad fact is that massacres are a chronic feature of capitalism", as the SWP's Alex Callinicos put it. "The revolutionary left is, alas, too weak to stop them.") Aside from its moral repugnancy, such a view eliminates the agency of any meaningful anti-imperialism: the people who were going to be massacred.

The second is that there wasn't really going to be (or might not have been) a massacre — an assessment which flies in the face of all facts about Qaddafi's regime.

The third was that it would have been much better if the mass movement had overthrown Qaddafi without external assistance, as in Egypt. Indeed it would! But no movement was going to overthrow anybody if it was drowned in blood.

NATO intervention — always constrained by Western fears of being drawn into another Iraq — remained, all things considered, limited: there was no intervention on the ground, no plan for occupation of Libya (i.e., unlike Iraq). The West has some leverage over the new government — but it had that anyway, and there is, as yet, no radical "anti-imperialist" (still less socialist) movement to act as an alternative.

The overthrow of Qaddafi is a great step — for the people of Libya, and probably for the people of the region: finally, an entire regime has fallen. It is early days, and the outcome of events is not fixed. The Libyan people need our solidarity — especially any who are trying to form socialist or working-class organisations in the days to come. There are reports of an independent trade union in Benghazi. As yet that's all we know, but we will keep readers informed as more information becomes available.

The new struggle after victory

By Martyn Hudson

NATO intervention in Libya has now largely come to an end. The general laziness of NATO in prosecuting its campaign had frustrated a National Transitional Council (NTC) which had clamoured for support in terminating the Qaddafi regime.

But at a decisive point it prevented the taking back of Benghazi and Misrata in a terrifically brutal fashion. This halting of genocide led to a greater amount of leverage for the rag-tag rebel militias and ultimately to the fall of Qaddafi. The rebellion would not have survived without that intervention.

For those on the left who shrugged their shoulders at massacres, thought that somehow intervention destroyed the rebellion, or felt that the rebels were proxies of imperialism, the taking of Tripoli by its own people is a wake-up call.

As evidence of this the independence of the rebels and the NTC is quickly being asserted. There has been a point-blank refusal to tolerate UN troops on the ground. The uncovering of evidence that links MI6 and the CIA with torture and rendition under Qaddafi (including that of a senior rebel leader) and the identification of dissidents clearly marks a difficult moment in the relationship between the NTC and its UK and US allies.

The hypocrisies and complicity with torture by western governments is a valid reason for us not to "critically support" an intervention which was undertaken for their own reasons as part of their coalition of interests.

Blair and the Labour Party are being fingered for this by the right-wing press; but it's true that the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Qaddafi from October 2005 was a clear recognition of support for the vile dictatorship including the return to torture and imprisonment of Libyan asylum seekers and dissidents including gay and human rights activists.

LGBT groups in Libya and abroad have welcomed the rebel victory. Qaddafi's "purification" laws of the 1990s had reasserted a profound hostility to transgender and gay expressions including the banning of certain types of clothing and a blanket ban on any outside-marriage partnerships. The five-year jail sentence for this had led to many fleeing the regime to the UK only to find themselves returned to the regime by the UK government. Ironically, one of Qaddafi's sons left behind gay pornographic material as he fled as well as accounts of his affairs with men.

WOMEN

The formal legal rights of women under the old regime were also a complete fiction. Families were segregated according to gender and the much touted "revolutionary nuns" of Qaddafi's personal bodyguard are now recounting stories of personal rape by Qaddafi and his sons.

On 1 September 10,000 women in Martyrs' Square, Tripoli demonstrated in support of the victorious rebellion — a huge watershed in the emancipation of women in Libya. Long-time feminist activist Gahida Altwati, who had been imprisoned in Abu Salim prison by Qaddafi after she refused to work with the regime, spoke to the crowd.

Of course there are contradictions: there are serious worries about the extension of sharia law, patriarchal tribal structures, and both gender and racial crime perpetrated by the rebels themselves. We should not be too dewy-eyed about what follows tyranny — there are many unsavoury strands and politics many of which are overtly hostile to workers, gay and women's self-organisation.

And what about the workers?

The Qaddafi-approved General Trade Union Federation of Workers (GTUFW) has now collapsed. This had its origins in the immediate aftermath of the 1969 revolution. Qaddafi said at the time labour unions would not be banned but they must "truly represent their groups with a revolutionary spirit. We do not accept intermediaries between the

1 September 2011: 10,000 women joined a demonstration in Martyrs' Square, Tripoli to celebrate the rebel victory

revolution and its working forces".

He used exactly the same argument for eliminating the idea of a free press, elections and a plurality of parties. It was a formula designed to destroy independent workers' organisation and expression, not facilitate it.

The quarter of a million workers assembled in the GTUFW were all Libyan nationals. Migrant workers had no legal right to join a union. Sixty seven Nepalese construction workers struck last year but were subject to a lockout by state bosses and were deported in awful circumstances. A number of Bangladeshi workers also went on strike last year against bosses who hadn't paid their wages.

International solidarity, independent observation, and financial support for the development of independent working class organisation is now a real possibility. We shouldn't underestimate the significance of this but neither should we underestimate the challenges.

Workers, migrant and Libyan nationals will be facing a hostile NTC and their international capitalist backers. They will have little interest in developing the economic and political power of working class representation.

But after years of dictatorship there will be a significant will on the part of the working class to use the political liberty offered by a burgeoning civil society, a free media, and a plurality of parties, to organise and challenge all of the regimes to come.

For us it means creating solidarity between the large migrant workforces and Libyan workers themselves — of every ethnic group, of every sexuality and gender — and also to create from a molecular level a relationship between international and Libyan workers' organisations.

Confronted by the bosses, by the possibility of a re-assertion of Islamism, even by remnants of the old regime unwilling to tolerate the new settlement, the red flags in Martyrs' Square will be a long time coming. But the first necessary preparatory steps are being taken.

The British Libya Solidarity

Campaign — interview

Solidarity spoke to Lucinda Lavelle about the British Libya Solidarity Campaign.

"In 2006 a few of us set up the British Libya Solidarity Campaign at the SWP's 'Marxism' event, believe it or not! We thought it would be an easy sell to the left.

"After all, Qaddafi was now collaborating with the West, helping the 'War on Terror', we'd heard about rendition flights to Tripoli, and he was murderously policing the borders to prevent African migrants getting to Europe. But unfortunately most of the left couldn't get into its head just how repressive the regime was..."

• More: www.workersliberty.org/libyainterview

Ten years since 9/11: What we said at the time

Ten years ago this month al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four passenger planes in the USA. They flew two of them into the "Twin Towers" buildings of the World Trade Centre in New York, another into the Pentagon. A fourth plane crashed into a field after the passengers attempted to re-take it. This AWL editorial, written two days after the attacks and before al-Qaeda had declared itself responsible, was our initial response.

To use civilian planes, full of people, to attack buildings full of civilians, mostly ordinary workers, is a crime against humanity, whatever the supposed aims.

What cause could the hijackers have been serving when they massacre thousands of workers in New York? Not "anti-imperialism" in any rational sense — whatever anyone may pretend or imagine — but only rage against the modern world. Only on the basis of a dehumanised, backward looking world-view could they have planned and carried out such a massacre. Such people are enemies for the working class and the labour movement as much as the US government is. In fact, more so.

Modern capitalism includes profiteering, exploitation, and imperialism, but it also includes the elements of civilisation, technology and culture which make it possible for us to build socialism out of it.

Lenin, the great Marxist advocate of revolutionary struggle against imperialism, long ago drew a dividing line between that socialist struggle and reactionary movements such as (in his day) "pan-Islamism" [in our day, Islamism]: "Imperialism is as much our mortal enemy as is capitalism. That is so. No Marxist will forget, however, that capitalism is progressive compared with feudalism, and that imperialism is progressive compared with pre-monopoly capitalism. Hence, it is not every struggle against imperialism that we should support. We will not support a struggle of the reactionary classes against imperialism."

We, the socialists cannot bring back the dead, heal the wounded, or assuage the bereaved. What we can do is understand the conditions which gave rise to the atrocity; see how they can be changed; and keep clear critical understanding of the way that the US and other governments will respond. Here the recent history of three areas of the world is crucial.

PALESTINIANS

Some Palestinian Arabs in the Israeli-occupied West Bank were among the very few people in the world who rejoiced at the massacre.

The official Palestinian leadership condemned it strongly, but amid the despair and frustration of recent years radical Islamic-fundamentalist groups have gained ground among the Palestinians — groups to whose philosophies such massacres are not at all alien so long as they are directed against supposed "Zionists" or "imperialists", and who are likely to see any Jew as a "Zionist", any American as an "imperialist", and the two as almost interchangeable.

The Palestinians have been dispossessed, harassed, oppressed. In 1948 the Jewish community in what had been the British colony of Palestine declared independence. The surrounding Arab states invaded. Over 700,000 Palestinians, who naturally sided with the Arab armies, fled or were driven out by the Jews. The new state of Israel would not let them back in; the Arab states would not integrate them economically, or undertake negotiations with Israel which might get them a livable settlement. About 600,000 Jews fled, or were driven out from the Arab states and into Israel over the following years.

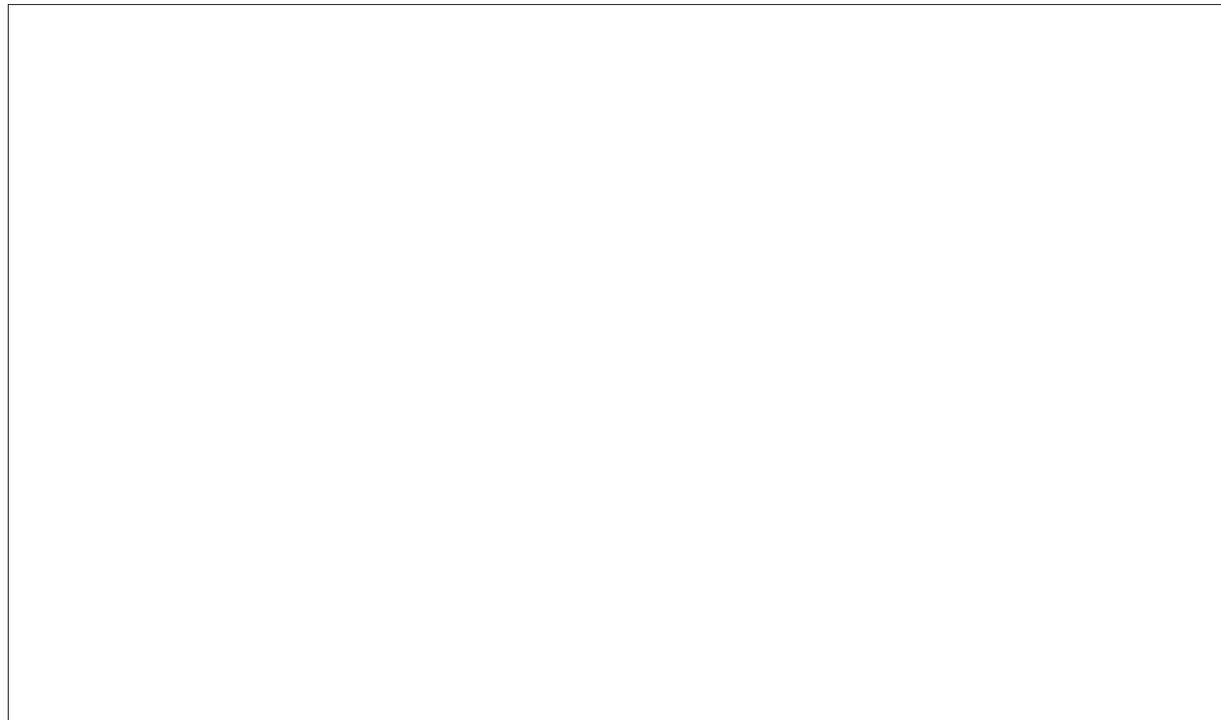
The Arab states tantalised the Palestinians with promises that they, the Arab states, would soon "drive the Jews into the sea" and restore the Palestinians to their land. From those promises came only further catastrophes.

After the 1967 war the Arab states — and the Palestinians — rejected negotiations to make the West Bank and Gaza some sort of Palestinian territory. Israel established, and continued, military rule there.

Slowly and painfully, the Palestinians developed a movement of their own. From 1988 they launched an uprising in their territories which Israel had seized in 1967 and began to propose a positive programme to take the peoples of the region forward — two states for the two nation Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews.

In the early 1990s the Israeli government started negotiating. But it has double-crossed the Palestinians again and again, combining general promises that the Palestinians can eventually have their own state in the West Bank and Gaza with a vigorous drive to construct Israeli settlements in those areas and assert a framework of Israeli control.

Two states for two nations — meaning, immediately, Is-



Stalinism, capitalism and Islamism shaped the conditions that gave rise to al-Qaeda

raeli military withdrawal from the occupied territories, and an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel — is the only basis on which to begin to drain the poison.

Immediately, the New York massacre is not only a human disaster, but also a political disaster for the Palestinians. The backlash against an Islamic-fundamentalist atrocity which so much outstrips, in its ferocity and scale, the Israeli military's crimes in the occupied territories, will greatly reduce the pressure on Israel to reach a democratic settlement... Socialists must reject the "politics of the last atrocity" and argue for Palestinian rights.

IRAN

Iran became a centre of Islamic fundamentalism after 1979, when the Islamic clerics there took power on the back of a huge popular revolution against the Shah's dictatorship and then quickly consolidated total control.

The dislocations, the mesmerising promises and deceptions, of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in the country; the fact that the Islamic clerics had been the only section of society able to organise autonomously under the Shah; and the failures of secular nationalism — those were the background.

The clerics largely represented old social classes, like the bazaar merchants, threatened and displaced by the top-down capitalist reforms of the Shah: their regime is, to a significant extent, the revenge of the traditional ruling classes.

Throughout the Middle East, the rational use of the region's huge oil wealth, to enable a good life for all rather than to bloat some and taunt others, is the socialist precondition for undercutting the Islamic reactionaries.

AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan, an economically-underdeveloped, mostly rural society was thrust into turmoil in the late 1970s. The PDP, a military-based party linked to the USSR, tried to modernise, with measures such as land reform and some equality for women, but from above, bureaucratically. Islamists became the ideologues of a land-lord-led mass revolt.

In December 1979, seeing the PDP regime about to collapse, the USSR invaded. It spent eight years trying to subdue the peoples of Afghanistan with napalm and helicopter gunships. It was the USSR's Vietnam.

The USSR's war had the same sort of regressive effect on society in Afghanistan as the USA's attempt to bomb Cambodia "back into the Stone Age", as part of its war against the Vietnamese Stalinists, had on that country. In Cambodia the result was the mass-murdering Khmer Rouge, which tried to empty the cities and abolish money; in Afghanistan, it has been the Islamic-fundamentalist regime of the Taliban.

The US government will respond to the New York massacre with bombing raids abroad and a clampdown at home.

Its aim will be to make a show of retaliation and retribu-

tion. It will not and cannot mend the conditions which gave rise to this atrocity, conditions which the US government itself, capitalist and imperialist, has helped to shape. Probably ordinary working people who live in "terrorist" states will be the victims.

Civil rights will come under attack both in the US and in other countries, including Britain.

These blows at civil rights will do far more to hamper the labour movement, the only force which can remake the world so as to end such atrocities, than to stop the killers.

Repression may well, on the contrary, increase support for the most desperate and dehumanised groups.

Public opinion will lurch towards xenophobia. The basic democratic truths must be recalled: not all Arabs are Muslims, most Muslims are not Islamic fundamentalists, most of those who are Islamic-fundamentalist in their religious views do not support Islamic fundamentalist militarism. To seek collective punishment against Muslims or Arabs is wrong.

The first, and still the most-suffering, victims of Islamic fundamentalist militarism are the people, mostly Muslim, of the countries where the Islamists are powerful.

The only way to defeat the Islamists is by the action of the working class and the labour movement in such countries, aided by our solidarity.

Refugees seeking asylum in Britain do not in any way share blame for the New York massacre. In fact, many of them are refugees because they are fleeing Islamic-fundamentalist governments. To increase the squeeze on already-wretched refugees would be macabre and perverse "revenge".

REMAKE

We must remake the world. We must remake it on the basis of the solidarity, democracy and spirit of equality which are as much part of human nature as the rage and despair which must have motivated the New York attackers.

We must create social structures which nurture solidarity, democracy and equality, in place of those which drive towards exploitation, cut-throat competition and acquisitiveness and a spirit of everything-for-profit.

The organised working class, the labour movement, embodies the core and the active force of the drive for solidarity, democracy and spirit of equality within present-day society. It embodies it more or less consistently, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how far we have been able to mobilise ourselves, assert ourselves, broaden our ranks, and emancipate ourselves from the capitalist society around us.

Our job, as socialists, is to maximise the self-mobilisation, self-assertion, broadening and self-emancipation of the organised working class.

That is the battle to which we must rededicate ourselves. That is the battle in the name of which we will oppose all moves by the governments of the big powers to make spectacular retaliation or to restrict civil rights.

Si monumentum requiris, circumspice

Paul Hampton reviews *Tony Cliff: A Marxist for His Time* by Ian Birchall (2011)

"Si monumentum requiris, circumspice" [If you seek his memorial, look around you] — plaque on the grave of Christopher Wren, architect, in St. Paul's Cathedral

Ian Birchall was once derided for writing a loyalist history of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), tragically entitled *The smallest mass party in the world*. His new biography of the SWP's founder and inspirer, Tony Cliff is equally farcical.

Cliff was born Ygael Gluckstein in 1917. He grew up in the British mandate of Palestine. After briefly flirting with Stalinism in 1933, he became a left Zionist and then a Trotskyist. He was imprisoned for anti-war activity in 1939-40. More information on that early part of his story would be interesting. But after Gluckstein moved to Britain in 1946 and became Tony Cliff, much of what he did was destructive of building a healthy revolutionary left.

The standard "Cliffite" line on Cliff is that he contributed three theories vital to re-arming the left after 1945: state capitalism (in the USSR), "permanent arms economy" and "deflected permanent revolution".

Instead of the celebrated troika, Birchall attempts to elevate Cliff's importance in other areas: first his writing on

the Middle East; second his contributions on the class struggle in Britain; third and most importantly, his efforts to build the SWP.

In fact, Cliff's "lost" book on the Middle East (written in 1946), merely indicated his break from his relatively sane early writings (as L. Rock) and his embrace of what would become left anti-semitism on the question of Israel. Thus Cliff came to oppose Jewish immigration into Palestine just as the extent of the Holocaust became clear.

Cliff wrote off the Jewish working class as well as the possibility that Palestinian Arabs could win on their own. With no progressive force in the conflict, Cliff laid the basis for other substitutes — intellectually prefiguring the SWP's flirtation with Hamas and other Islamists. Though Cliff would acknowledge in the early 1960s that "what's done is done — the state of Israel existed and history could not be rolled back", he drew no conclusions from this assessment and soon lurched into "destroy Israel" mode. Israeli Jews were treated as an exception from every other nation. Cliff's mature legacy on the Middle East is thoroughly rotten.

Cliff's writing on the British class struggle in the 1960s produced some snappy descriptions of "do-it-yourself reformism". It was far harder to break militant workers from the grip of Labourism, the trade union bureaucracy and Stalinism. In all this, Cliff lurched from an extreme voluntarism to the most arid pessimism by the end of the 1970s.

While trade union militancy did abate from the late 1970s, it was still vibrant, uneven and capable of victories. The worst element of Cliff's "downturn" perspective was not the attempt to assess the strength of working class forces, although even in that he was prematurely defeatist. Rather it was the political conclusions — principally that revolutionaries should walk away from trade union structures and from efforts to build an unofficial, rank-and-file organisation that could fight back.

The nadir of this period in the SWP's history came during the miners' strike. It virtually wrote off the struggle from the beginning and denounced those who backed the miners' support groups as "left-wing Oxfam". It offered no strategy beyond more picketing. Persisting with pessimism, the SWP initially denounced the poll tax non-payment campaign that emerged in 1988-89, then chased after *Militant* in the wake of their growth.

ULTIMATE

The ultimate measure of Cliff's legacy is the organisation he spent 50 years building — the SWP. A fair chunk of the biography consists of vignettes of various people who met Cliff and remain transfixed. Many are still nominally members of the "party". For those like Birchall who have endured every twist and turn, none of it accounted for, the review of Cliff's life begs the question: what's left?

Politics is not in command in the SWP. What's left is whatever the current central committee says it is. There is no coherent and consistent politics behind it. Cliff's legacy is that the organisation comes above the politics and before the ideological front of the class struggle.

Cliff's version of "Leninism" downgraded the need to work out a clear, consistent Marxist view of the world and instead substituted machine politics, where "tactics contradict principles", where anything — any twist, turn, zigzag — is acceptable if it appears to build the SWP.

Hence the SWP model fillets "Leninism" — little internal democracy, no sharp ideological demarcation, little fight for clarity, no political accounting with earlier and other politics. Hence Cliff's decisive 1971 shift on the European Community (to oppose it) to avoid isolation from the nationalist left. Hence the SWP's promotion of anti-fascist "festivals" over the active anti-fascist defence of black and Asian communities. Hence Cliff could characterise the Muslim Brotherhood as clerical fascists, and the SWP could form alliances with them.

The SWP's rationalisations — most of them worked out when Cliff was in charge — were not justifiable changes because reality had changed. They were manoeuvres in the hope of building the SWP — irrespective of what was being built.

The SWP is a machine for mangling militants. It despoils the British left. It ruins promising initiatives, it offers no concrete strategies in struggles and it instead substitutes stripped-down banality in place of socialist answers. Cliff built the SWP into the locust of the left it is today.

Cliff had an almost-Maoist way with catch-phrases. He often said that post-Trotsky Trotskyism was like trying to find your way around the Paris metro with a map of the London Tube. But Cliff's "Marxism" burned the map and instead navigated using his own astrology.

The three great theories?

The Cliffite mythology held that he explained the expansion of Stalinism with his theory of state capitalism, explained the revival of capitalism with his permanent arms economy (PAE) theory, and understood third world developments with his theory of "deflected permanent revolution". The AWL has long argued that this Cliff-fable does not withstand scrutiny. Remarkably Birchall concedes these weaknesses.

The theory of "deflected permanent revolution" amounted to one scrappy, obscure article. It treated "the revolution" in the third world as a semi-automatic process much like other "orthodox" post-Trotsky Trotskyists did, allowing middle class intellectuals and other strata to substitute for working class leadership, with only a disagreement about the outcome (almost inevitably a form of state capitalism). Nowhere did Cliff anticipate the rise of industrial working classes and labour movements in places such as Iraq, Indonesia, South Korea, Brazil and South Africa, which could lead the fight for democracy and potentially for socialism.

Birchall concedes that Cliff borrowed the permanent arms economy without attribution from Shachtman's tendency. He acknowledges that the idea of arms production propping up capitalism was commonplace. And it explained neither the long boom nor the slump that followed after 1973. What really defined Cliff's group in the CND period (early and mid 60s), when it talked most about PAE, was its belief in the stability of capitalism. Despite Chris Harman's efforts to breathe life into the PAE corpse, the SWP have largely discarded it.

As for Cliff's "state capitalism", his 1948 analysis treats

Russia as one big factory. But "capital" which doesn't compete with other capitals is not capital in the Marxist sense. Cliff thought he could neutralise this objection by postulating international use-value competition in the form of armaments. This was certainly an innovation, but not one consistent with Marx's political economy, where capitals compete for a share of the surplus value pumped out of waged workers. Originally Cliff admitted that Soviet labour power was not a commodity. His "theory" was actually a description of a bureaucratic collectivist state, with "state capitalism" an arbitrary label.

The downfall of the USSR showed the paucity of Cliff's assessment. He had defined state capitalism as a higher stage of development than Western capitalism. In 1948 he had referred to the USSR as "the extreme theoretical limit which capitalism can reach" and a transition stage to socialism. However when the Soviet Union reached its structural impasse, Cliff's supporters simply floundered. As late as 1987, The SWP's Russia "expert", Mike Haynes, criticised those who believed that the crisis of Soviet society was terminal. Harman argued in 1990 that after rapid industrialisation from the 1930s to the 1960s walled off from the world market, the USSR had suffered a "normal accumulation crisis" which forced the bureaucracy "to try to change its ways".

It is possible to define Russia as "state capitalist" in Cliff's sense only by reasoning with dubious analogies: i) In capitalism of type X, Y occurred; ii) Y occurred in the Soviet Union; iii) therefore, the Soviet Union is capitalist. Cliff's "theory" of state capitalism never succeeded in being both Marxist and consistent with the facts.

Another side of the Tyne

Lawrie Coombs applauds the work of Newcastle's Side Gallery

Operating in the shadow of Tyneside's burgeoning official cultural quarter, Side Gallery operates as a radical space bereft of the level of financial support available to the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art or the Sage Gateshead music venue.

As part of the Amber Collective it promotes independent, radical and quirky expositions of cinema and photography. Side Gallery has consistently sought to chronicle unheard voices and perspectives, highlighting working class struggles and experience.

Since opening in 1977, Side Gallery has highlighted the theme of landscapes, witnessing the ex-industrial nature of the North East, positively marking out the flourishing of humanity against the odds.

Whilst a full range of the North East working class experience has featured over the years, from emotive images of the construction of the Tyne Bridge to iconic camera work chronicling the 84-85 Miners Strike, it would be very wrong to view the Side Gallery as promoting the whimsical flat cap nostalgia that yawningly features within Newcastle and

Gateshead's Arts scene. Side Gallery has shown a commitment to internationalism through the lens of the marginalised, regularly highlighting exceptional work from across the globe

The current *Fields of Vision* exhibition explores ideas and realities in northern urban and rural landscapes, critically in the context of the north being looked down as "the other" by bourgeois metropolitans within the central power structure of this country; this imagery is willingly exploited by the local professional Geordie culturati, who swapping champagne flutes for pint pots arguably buy into this notion.

The exhibition contrasts 60s concrete flyovers with the coal cast, where forgotten boots and trainers are set in glazes of copper and as far removed from the traditional British seaside themes as it is possible to be.

Photography from several decades past, highlight the constant reconstruction of society and of the working class experience within this. Bridges across the river Tyne feature as does the struggle of nature against dockland in Wallsend; we are presented with notions of working communities making lives on what can often seem to be lunar type landscapes, whose richness exists against so-called chic sophis-

tication of our rulers and political and economic dishonesty.

Other images movingly portray the panoramics of Teesside industry and industrial/nature confrontation across the north from Tyne and Wear to the Lake District. I was particularly struck by the eerie punctures of smoke across the Weardale, evident during the foot and mouth crisis, and the suggestion of ecological apocalypse in the tender portrayals of open caste mining.

The underfunded Side Gallery

Socialists and working-class activists should support this small oasis cum celebration of independent working class culture, complete with well worn rickety stairs, funky postcards and locally produced film.

• *Fields of Vision* is open until 1 October.

www.amber-online.com

NHS: “Waiting lists will spiral”

Kate Ahrens, a health worker and shop steward in the Leicestershire Health branch of the public sector union Unison, spoke to *Solidarity* in a personal capacity about the issues facing health workers.

Working in the health service, it's easy to think that everyone is as aware as we are of the huge threat posed by the Health Bill and the ongoing cuts and attacks on the service.

But I suspect that the wider public have very little idea of what is coming their way.

Waiting lists are going to spiral out of control this winter as bed closures and staffing cuts mean that operations will be cancelled over and over again to make some room for the emergency medical admissions over the winter months. And once the service begins to decline, the pressure to bring in private management to “sort out” our “failing” hospitals will grow.

Never mind that the failure has been deliberately engineered by government policy or that private companies will be just as bad at managing the insufficient resources. And private health companies are licking their lips at the huge profits to be made from selling private top-up health insurance to the middle class “worried well” who will want to ensure that they can have access to

medical care whenever they want it while the poor are left to wait or do without the care they need.

The union’s propaganda on this issue so far has made some reasonable efforts at describing bits of the attack.

What it’s been very weak on however, is identifying any ways, beyond writing to your MP, to fight against it.

The union’s demands on safeguards from the government are just wrong. While Unison is busy demanding that the NHS remains “free at the point of use”, the real socialist aspect of the NHS (that care was planned based on an assessment of the health needs of the population) is being done away with.

PAY
Now, the consideration hospital trusts make is “what care can we get Primary Care Trusts to pay for?”, not “what does the local population require?”

And GP commissioning will cement the idea that competing for money is the way to organise healthcare resources.

The NHS is far from being perfect, but the core aspect of it that we should be fighting to keep is precisely the idea that the Tories desperately want to get rid of: healthcare provision planned to deal with the healthcare needs of the whole population.

This isn’t just a fight for those working in the NHS,

but for everyone who uses the health service. My fear is that we will only wake up to the importance of this fight after its too late.

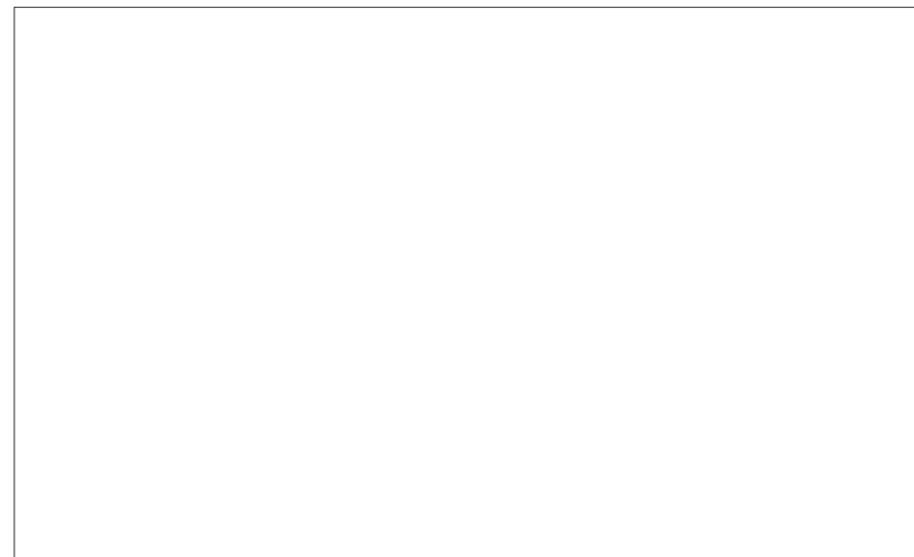
On top of all that there’s a pay freeze which was accepted by all the unions without any fight at all. There are threats to our pensions both in terms of our contributions and the benefits. They will extend the period we will have to work for at least another five years, and more for the younger members of the workforce.

There is also the Health Bill, the implications of which are only just really being revealed. On top of that there are the cuts to services, the staff shortages, the constant reorganisations, and the perpetual battle for resources which makes just getting through each shift and giving the care that you want to give a struggle.

The fight over pensions isn’t the biggest issue in people’s minds. I would imagine that staffing levels are probably more of an immediate concern.

Of course, people are angry at the attack on their pensions. But there are such vague signs coming from the national unions about a fightback that the temptation is to assume that the battle has already been lost.

There is also a lot of personal fear: the NHS seems to be in a permanent state of reorganisation so that everyone is slightly off balance: worrying about their jobs, worrying about keep-



ing their flexible working arrangements. Will they be moved to a different ward, a different site, a different speciality, downgraded etc.?

So I haven’t heard a lot in the way of militant anger from health workers, which is what we need.

DESPICABLE
Unison’s national approach to the pensions issue has been nothing short of despicable.

Dave Prentis bolstered his image inside the union in the run up to national conference by appearing to be militant and radical over the pensions issue and using all kinds of fiery language.

But the move to separate scheme-specific negotiations without having won any concessions from the government in the joint talks led us into a blind

alley.

Health workers have had no kind of national dispute for decades and I think its extremely unlikely that a ballot for action focused only on health would be successful. But the national union’s strategy appears to be solely focused on winning a minor concession or two in Local Government, in the hope that this will appease what’s seen as the more militant Service Group in the union.

I think the only hope for health workers to avoid this fate lies to a certain extent outside of our hands.

It relies on Local Government workers not being prepared to be bought off for the rubbishy deal that will be offered to them.

A ballot for industrial action in Local Government, against a better deal than the one being offered to health workers, might just

be the thing that could galvanise a mood for a fightback in health.

The initiative from Camden, Tower Hamlets and Kirklees for a branches-based conference on 24 September to discuss the pensions issue it is significant, although I think its a shame that its not reaching out across the service groups more. The left has spent a long time in Unison hemmed in by the anti-democratic rule book which prohibits branches talking directly to each other. The pensions issue has finally broken past that.

However, it’s easy to get carried away. This is still a very small minority of branches and until we can stretch beyond the “usual suspects” of left branches then this new found channel for democratic discussion is extremely vulnerable.

Demo good; “cross-party coalition” bad

By Dale Street

The Scottish TUC has called an all-Scotland anti-cuts demonstration for Saturday 1 October, in Glasgow.

After the summer lull following the TUC demonstration in London in March and the public sector strikes at the end of June, the demonstration provides a welcome focus to re-vitalise anti-cuts campaigning.

The demonstration will also be taking place in what could prove to be the run-up to widespread strike action in November, possibly involving the PCS and the EIS (the Scottish teachers union), which recently agreed to ballot its members on the issue of pensions.

Over the next three weeks trade unionists and anti-cuts activists need to

prioritise building the biggest possible turnout for the demonstration. Last October’s demonstration in Edinburgh saw 20,000 on the march. This October’s demonstration should be even bigger.

But there are real problems with the STUC’s political strategy.

At an STUC rally held in February to mobilise support for the following month’s TUC demonstration in London a number of speakers — trade union Scottish Regional Secretaries — advocated the creation of an anti-cuts campaign along the lines of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly (CSA).

The CSA was set up by the STUC in 1980. It was a cross-party campaign which brought together trade unionists and clerics, celebrities and dissident Tories. When the then Labour MP Dennis Cana-

van attacked Tory spending cuts at its founding rally, he was shouted down for making a political speech.

In 1989 the CSA gave birth to the Scottish Constitutional Convention (SCC). Like the CSA before it, the SCC emphasised its breadth (its steering committee included representatives of Scottish business) rather than political clarity and a focus on popular mobilisation.

Decision-making by the SCC was based on lowest-common-denominator consensus rather than political argument and voting.

The anti-cuts demonstration of 1 October, as advocated at the STUC rally last February, is part of a strategy to recreate such an alliance, but this time in relation to public spending cuts rather than the creation of a Scottish

Parliament.

The STUC initially launched the ambiguously titled “There is a Better Way” campaign as its anti-cuts initiative. This has now given rise to the “People First” campaign, in whose name the demonstration on 1 October is being organised.

The STUC’s stated aim is to “include other civic partners and organisations as formal partners and supporters of People First.”

Alongside the Right to Work Campaign and the Coalition of Resistance, the current list of sponsors of People First includes the Church of Scotland, the United Reformed Church, the Muslim Council of Scotland, Church Action on Poverty — and the Salvation Army.

(The Salvation Army’s explanation of recent riots may not prove to be uni-

versally popular. According to its paper, *War Cry*:

“Godlessness is to blame. Our increasingly secular, self-centred and materialistic society is reaping what it has sown. Britain has been desensitising its Christian moral compass. ... People reject God. They don’t want God mentioned. And this is the mess that results.”)

Instead of raising slogans in defence of all jobs and against all cuts, the demonstration aims to “Protect the Hardest Hit Through Decent Services and Fair Benefits!” (so those who are badly hit, but not amongst the hardest hit, will just have to grin and bear it?) and “Build Stronger Communities for All!” (a slogan so vague that even David Cameron could support it).

The left of the anti-cuts movement should combine building for the

biggest possible turnout on 1 October with promoting debate about the centrality of trade unions and industrial action to anti-cuts campaigning, and about the need to step up anti-cuts campaigning in the Labour Party.

People First March and Rally

Saturday, 1 October

**Assemble Glasgow Green, 11.30am
Rally at Kelvingrove Park, 1.30pm.**

Further details on People First website:

peoplefirstoctoberfirst.org

Charity workers strike against cuts

By Jan Clarke

Unison members employed by the Scottish charity Quarriers struck for 24 hours on 6 September in opposition to plans to impose brutal pay cuts.

Quarriers provides support for some of the most vulnerable and distressed

adults and children in Scotland, including adults with disabilities and epilepsy sufferers.

Over 560 of its employees are now at risk of a 10% pay cut. Others stand to lose as much as 23%.

In addition to pay cuts, Quarriers is proposing cuts to sick pay, cuts to maternity, paternity and adoption pay, scrapping redeployment salary pro-

tection, increased pensions contributions, and making any future pay increases (both incremental and cost-of-living) discretionary.

In order to 'alleviate' the impact of such pay cuts, Quarriers has suggested setting up a Hardship Fund for its staff, funded by the pay cuts which it is seeking to implement.

A ballot on industrial action saw Unison members

employed by Quarriers voting three to one in favour of strike action, and over four to one in favour of action short of strike action.

A 24-hour strike was subsequently called for Tuesday 6 September.

Quarriers is defending its attack on its employees' terms and conditions by arguing that the cuts are a knock-on effect of cuts in local authority funding. As

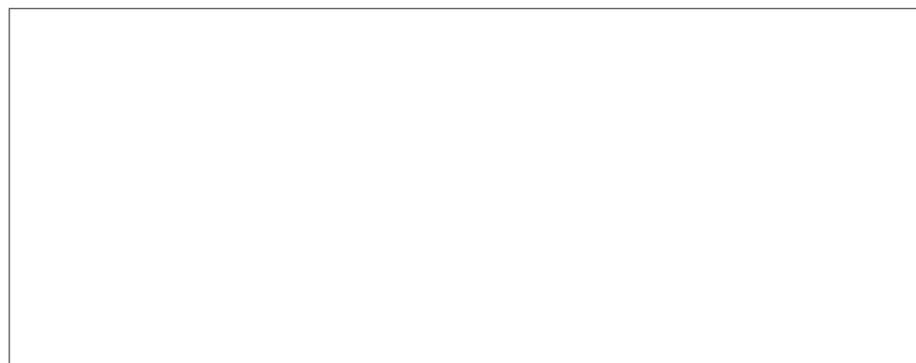
an explanation of the trigger for the cuts this may be true. But it is also all the more reason for opposing them.

More and more voluntary sector organisations are turning on their own staff, either because local authorities have cut their funding, or because voluntary sector organisations are engaged in a "race to the bottom" in order to win contracts from

local authorities.

The result is worse rates of pay for voluntary sector workers, and a worse standard of services for service-users.

Instead of passing on cuts in funding from Holyrood, local authorities should be allying themselves with council and voluntary sector workers in a unified campaign of opposition to all cuts.



London cleaners win again

By Stewart Ward

The recent wave of cleaners' militancy in London is continuing, winning a new victory at Senate House in Bloomsbury.

The win follows successes at Heron Tower near Liverpool Street and Guildhall (where workers have been organised by the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World).

Cleaners employed by Balfour Beatty at Senate House took wildcat strike action on the morning of 1 September and were bol-

stered by a hastily-arranged solidarity demonstration by other trade unionists and activists.

They were striking against the non-payment of wages, a scandal which has seen some workers, who are members of the public sector union Unison, go eight months without their full pay. The dispute has exposed the University of London's commitment "in principle" to pay the London Living Wage as unreliable at best; its outsourcing of services to companies like Balfour Beatty (which is also busy attempting to

undermine collective bargaining in the construction industry) mean that it always has an excuse for the mistreatment of the workers who make its facilities function.

It took less than four hours of strike action for Balfour Beatty bosses to cave, providing written commitments that back-pay would be paid and that there would be no victimisation of workers involved in the strike.

Unison reps from London universities attended cleaners' picket lines to support them.

Rank-and-file leads construction fight

By a supporter of the *Site Worker* paper

Eight major contractors are proposing to cut the hourly rate of pay by up to 35% for some parts of the job.

Currently the Joint Industry Board sets a £16.25 per hour rate across the board, but the eight companies want to leave the JIB and set rates of £10.50 per hour for metalworking, £12 for wiring and £14 for finishing. These contractors are the ones with the most work in the industry, so a lot of workers will be affected by this. If they get away with it then other contractors will follow suit.

This has been on the cards for a long time, but people had serious doubts about whether the union would organise a proper fight, so we called a meeting ourselves as grassroots activists. That was in Conway Hall on 13 August; 500 workers turned up and we elected a rank-and-file committee to coordinate our

campaign. We took a motion from that meeting to a national shop stewards' committee in Leeds, but Unite officials spoke against us and we were outvoted. However, on that same evening I took the motion to my branch meeting — the London Construction branch — and 200 electricians turned up and backed the campaign.

We have a rank-and-file paper called *Site Worker* and our campaign so far has been entirely led by the rank-and-file. Union officials are saying they won't get involved; they've abused us, calling us "Trots" or "troublemakers". But we're just doing what the union itself should be doing and organising a fight against attacks by bosses. We want the union to ballot us. It has said it won't do anything until the new year but we need action now.

We've had members of other construction industry unions like GMB and UCATT involved in our demonstrations and we're

planning more. We want to target sites where the eight contractors are, like the Olympic site and the Faringdon Crossrail site.

Our protests aren't just about the eight contractors leaving the JIB. They're about the whole state of the construction industry.

There are enormous health and safety concerns as well as ongoing blacklisting of union activists. The fundamental problem is a lack of direct employment. Agency working is very widespread, and because agencies aren't part of the national agreements they can get away with just paying their workers minimum wage.

We're appealing to workers to get involved in our protests and fight in their union branches for a similar approach to the one we adopted at Conway Hall.

Ultimately the only way this can be resolved is through a national construction workers' strike; we want the unions to get together and ballot their members for action.

Threat to unions' political rights

By Gerry Bates

The long-simmering issue of political party funding will come to the boil in October, when the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL, a sort of quango, set up in 1994, with members appointed by the Government and the three big parties) reports.

The *Guardian* of 30 August claimed that the CSPL has "agreed to recommend a new limit on donations, introducing an annual cap with figures ranging from £50,000 to £10,000 being considered".

Ed Miliband has in the past tried to play clever on this issue, proposing a low cap but saying that union affiliation payments to the

Labour Party should be unaffected because they are aggregates of millions of small individual donations.

The *Guardian* quoted a Tory official: "If the purpose of a cap is to deal with the perception that money can buy influence then it must apply equally to individuals, companies and trade unions, from whom the Labour party receives 85% of funding and who get extensive policy concessions in return". Lib-Dem leader Nick Clegg is also known to be keen to get a cap imposed.

The *Guardian* calculates that the cap would reduce Labour Party income by 72%. No political party without rich backers can operate unless it has some effective, organised, way of

aggregating small individual donations, as Labour has through the unions' political levies.

A rich backer, on the other hand, can easily circumvent a cap by channelling, say, a £500,000 donation in the form of ten ostensibly separate donations from family members or business colleagues.

Maggie O'Boyle of CSPL says that the committee is "still discussing", and it will report "after the party conferences" (i.e. after 6 October).

Union leaders should speak out in defence of the right of working-class organisations collectively to fund political activity.

• Background: bit.ly/labcash; bit.ly/nstates

Plymouth council workers take on union-busting bosses

By Ira Berkovic

A meeting of Unison members at Plymouth City Council on Wednesday 24 August voted unanimously (with just one abstention) to call for a strike ballot unless the council reverses its decision to de-recognise Unison.

Messages of support for the campaign against union busting have been flooding in from as far afield as New York, including from the Communication Workers of America,

notable for its recent battle with telecoms giant Verizon.

Unite and GMB, the other unions organising at the council, have withdrawn their support from the agreement that sparked the de-recognition. Unity between all unionised council workers will be vital if council bosses are to be forced back. If Unison members ballot for a strike, Unite and GMB must join them.

Unison's lawyers are threatening a legal challenge, but this battle will not be won in the courts.

When Republican governor Scott Walker attempted to de-recognise public sector unions in Wisconsin, USA, workers responded by occupying the Capitol Building. Unions in Plymouth may need to use similar tactics to force the council's hand.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Build for November pensions strike!

By Ira Berkovic

The National Union of Teachers Executive should soon name a date for a second strike against government pension cuts, probably early November.

The other unions which participated in the 30 June strikes — the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), the University and College Union (UCU) and the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), will probably join the strike. The Executive of the Scottish teachers' union, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), is expected to approve a request by a sub-committee for a strike ballot over pensions. The Fire Brigades' Union's latest bulletin to its members on pensions describes an "ever-increasing likelihood of industrial action".

Public sector workers need to start mobilising to make the strike as big and solid as possible.

The big element missing is Unison, the biggest union in local government and health. Its leaders preach delay.

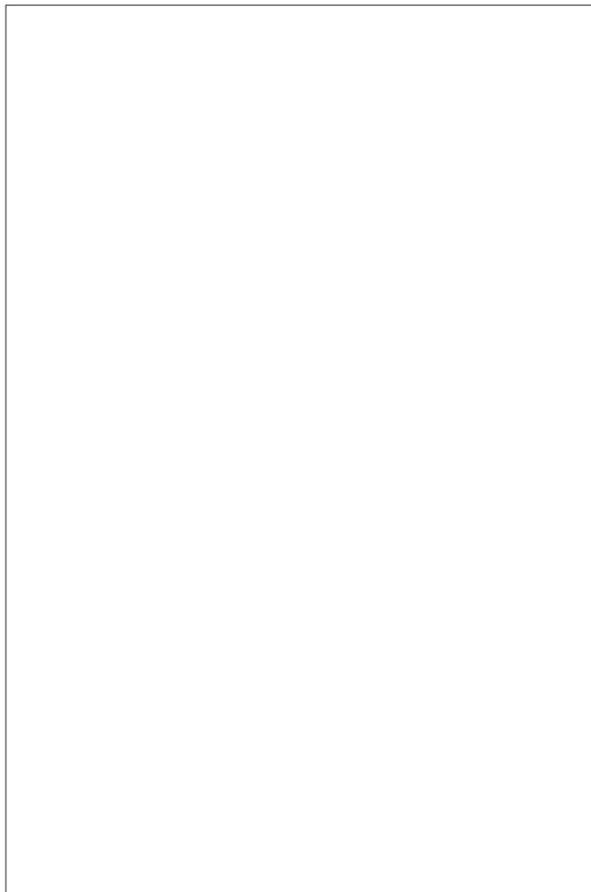
Tower Hamlets, Camden and Kirklees branches of Unison have called a branch-based conference on 24 September to discuss

the dispute. This is important — an initiative of a type almost unprecedented in Unison, which has long suppressed branch-to-branch coordination in favour of top-down organisation.

Activists in Unison are worried that their leader, Dave Prentis, is preparing to settle for minor concessions in the Local Government Pension Scheme, and even to accept the Tories' plans for the other schemes in return for that. Prentis may be hoping he can buy off local-government union activists by securing a delay of several years before employee contributions to their pension scheme increase.

The 24 September conference, initiated by local government branches, should reach out to health branches, and union activists must begin drawing up a battle-plan to resist NHS cuts too.

The Socialist Party-run National Shop Stewards' Network has organised a lobby of the TUC's upcoming mini-congress on 11 September. It has won some union backing, and the demonstration will be a chance to express discontent with the union leaders' sluggishness. Unfortunately it makes



only the ritual, and oxymoronic, demand for a "24-hour public sector general strike", and puts no pressure on the front-line union leaders to move forward.

Getting the already-active unions to move forward, and apply pressure to draw Unison along with them, rather than allowing the Unison leaders to hold the whole campaign back, is crucial.

Maximum democratic control of the campaign is also needed. Cross-union strike committees should be set up in every city to

coordinate activity on the strike day. They should build for mass strikers' assemblies that can discuss the dispute and the politics behind it rather than just top-down rallies featuring a parade of union bureaucrats. They should reach out to workers not yet balloted for strikes, such as Unison members.

Real picketing must be organised; not just token efforts but active, participatory mini-demos at the gates of schools, colleges and job centres to stop scabs from entering.

Graphic: Chris Bird

Defend the NHS

By a health worker

On 6 and 7 September a revised Health and Social Care Bill has its third reading in Parliament amid talk of a backbench Lib Dem rebellion and leaked documents outlining the Tories' secret plans to sell off hospitals to multinational corporations.

Under political pressure last April, the Tories postponed the third reading for a "listening exercise". But the bill has come back with little substantive change.

Despite protestations from health secretary Andrew Lansley that the Tories would "never, never privatise the NHS", a freedom of information request has revealed that plans are underway to sell up to 20 hospitals to the private sector.

The Bill will:

- remove the statutory duty on the secretary of state to provide "a comprehensive health service for the people of England, free at the point of need" giving individual GP-run consortia the power to decide what they offer free on the NHS;

- give power to regulatory body Monitor to promote competition and the private sector;
- remove the cap on the number of private patient beds;

- give control of NHS budgets to private companies who will now do commissioning on behalf of GP consortia.

These proposals are also intended to help the NHS make £20 billion "efficiency" savings by 2015. In fact, they will have the opposite effect, with more NHS money finding its way into private hands and being squandered on

administering this fragmented system.

While a legislative framework to sell off the NHS is put in place, the cuts are undermining the NHS as a world-class health service and creating a market for the private sector. There have been large increases in waiting times and some trusts are now refusing patients some elective treatments.

Andrew George, a Lib Dem MP may now lead a backbench rebellion, saying the bill is "driven more by private profit than by concern about patient care." If the Bill reaches the House of Lords then Shirley Williams and other Liberal peers have signalled they will oppose.

When the NHS was created in 1948 it was the achievement of decades of working-class struggle. It signalled that the working-class movement had won a significant argument that the values of social solidarity and equality were more important than capitalist parasitism. That movement won important reforms but these only managed to civilise capitalism, they did not fundamentally change the system. Now, over 60 years later, the capitalist class is attempting to reverse those gains.

Liberal Democrat politicians may be of some help in the immediate battle to defeat the Health and Social Care Bill.

But we need to rebuild a mass working-class movement to fight for our values of solidarity and equality and maintain the NHS as a free, comprehensive service.

- For more information see: <http://pcwww.liv.ac.uk/~alexss/nhs.pdf>

Defend our pensions: open meeting for Unison branches
Saturday 24 September, 1-4.30pm, University of London Union, Malet St, London WC1
Details: alexis.chase@towerhamlets.gov.uk/020 7364 5302

Dale Farm eviction set for 19 September

The eviction by Basildon council of 90 Traveller families from their homes at Dale Farm in Essex is set for Monday 19 September.

Since the High Court ruled that the eviction could go ahead, the Travellers and their supporters have been making plans to resist it.

Over the weekend of 27-28 August more than 100

supporters visited Camp Constant, a base for human rights monitors and those who will engage in civil disobedience to stop the bulldozing. They discussed the campaign against eviction and learnt about Traveller and Gypsy history and culture.

The police and council will move to restrict access to Dale Farm ahead of the eviction date. The Save

Dale Farm campaign advises:

"Bailiffs and police will start securing the site the week of 12 September, and will start taking out caravans the week starting 19 September. We urgently need people to come down to Dale Farm from the 12th. The public date is the 19th, but it is written in the eviction letters that they plan on coming in before that.

"Sleeping space in homes is available, but please bring a tent if you can."

A march is planned for Saturday 10 September. Assemble 1pm, Wickford Station, 30 minutes by train from London Liverpool Street; march to Dale Farm and Camp Constant.

- Keep updated by visiting the website: dalefarm.wordpress.com