

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

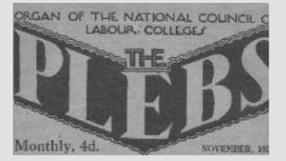


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Mobilise the rank and file

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

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Greece: potatoes and the Stalinists

By Theodora Polenta

Since the start of March, pictures of farmers in vans distributing potatoes to queues of people have dominated the Greek media.

Producers of potatoes in the Pieria region decided to get rid of the middleman and distribute their potatoes at €0.25 per kilo instead of €0.60.

Almost everybody across the political spectrum, including the government and the mainstream media, has endorsed this "potato movement", though for different reasons.

The strident and significant exception is the strong though diehard-Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE).

The far-left coalition Antarsya, for example, has declared: "These movements show that the fat cat middlemen and capitalist bosses are not invincible... Getting rid of the middlemen is an important step so that the producers and the consumers can cope with the attacks of the [EU/ECB/IMF] Troika and the national unity government".

PATRONISING

"It is patronising to describe it as the potato movement. It is directly connected with the needs of both the producers and the people who are on the brink of starvation and social deprivation and destitution. It is connected with the future.

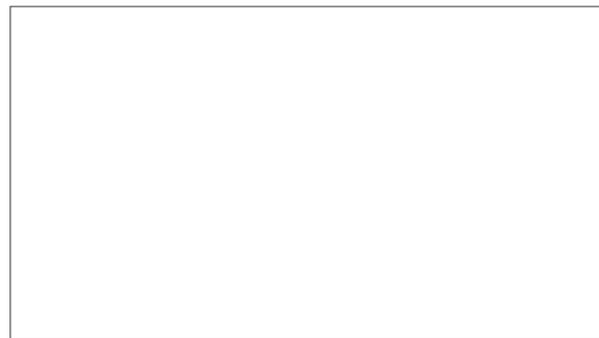
"It carries images from the future. It reveals the tremendous potential opened up when the producers and creators of society's wealth take control over their products. All working class people can benefit by having access to cheap and good quality food".

As Antarsya notes, the potato movement is connected and interlinked with the versatile, imaginative, and multiple forms of struggle developed during the last two years of Greek working-class struggle.

It is connected with the neighbourhood non-payment movement, first against road tariffs and bus fares, and lately against the new regressive property tax. It is connected with the movement of "indignant citizens" in the city squares. It is connected with all the small and big struggles in workplaces across Greece.

Yet the KKE has printed virtually an article a day denouncing the potato movement.

KKE explains the obvious — that the potato movement is not socialist collective farming; it operates within the framework of the capitalist society; it



will not solve food high prices overall, or meets all of society's food needs.

Last week the KKE paper *Rizospastis* declared: "Pushed by the mainstream media and encouraged by the government, a propaganda campaign is developing that has as its aim to deceive working-class people and the small peasants... This propaganda is referred to as the potato movement

"The aim of the cheap-potatoes movement is identical to that of the 'indignant citizens' in the city squares. It is to try to mislead the poor peasants away from the agricultural unions, away from the fight against EU's Common Agricultural Policy, away from the fight against the monopolies...

"The feeding of the people, the production of cheap and good quality agricultural products, is a very serious problem that cannot be solved via activism, voluntarism and sporadic internet orders [the farmers involved take orders over the internet]...

GAP

"There is indeed a big gap between the price at which producers sell products to the middlemen and the price at which these products are sold to the consumer.

"But as long as the laws of the markets and the profits prevail the above problem cannot be solved..."

"As long as capitalist relationships are present, exploitation will operate at every level against the people, independent of their status, pensioners, workers, unemployed, producers, consumers..."

"Under a planned economy, the process of production and distribution of agricultural products will guarantee a satisfactory income for all producers, to cover their needs, as well as cheap and healthy food for all people, as well as new jobs. But that can only be achieved within the context of a workers' and people's government and economy".

KKE's hostile stance against the potato movement is in line with its stances against the students and youth rebellion movement of 2008 and against last summer's movement in the city squares. It is in line with KKE's sectarian policy of separate demonstrations

and protests during the general strikes.

It is in line with KKE's attempts to build separate neighbourhood movements, and its hostile stance towards any movement that is not politically and ideologically under the wing of the party. Deploying Stalinism and mechanistic conspiracy theory in classic form, the KKE declares that the potato movement is "directed by big capital, like the city squares movement".

Recently KKE has backtracked a bit. Its secretary, Aleka Paparyga, has made a statement saying that there had been exaggerations in KKE's response, but the main points had been right.

MOMENTUM

The movement initiated in Pieria has now spread all over Greece, gaining momentum every day, with councillors and mayors being involved to facilitate it. In some areas it has been extended to other products such as honey and oil.

There is now talk of farmers directly distributing rice, flour, olive oil, beans, and lamb for Easter. The oil will be distributed at €3 per litre (€6 per litre in supermarkets), flour at €0.50 per kilo (€1 in supermarkets), rice at €0.70 per kilo (€3 in supermarkets), beans at €3 per kilo (€8 in supermarkets), lamb at €7 per kilo (€13 in the butchers).

It all started a couple of months ago, when the producers of milk and fruit were protesting against the EU's Common Agricultural Policy outside parliament. Instead of throwing their products at the parliament and ministry buildings, as customary in previous protests, they decided to distribute them free in Syntagma Square.

Their move gained overwhelming support, and all the products were distributed to the people within a space of a few hours.

With the economically active population earning monthly wages of €500 and €600, over one million unemployed, and 20,000 homeless people in Athens alone, of course distribution of free or cheap agricultural products results in massive responses from the people.

Alongside the potato movement there are the

not-so-publicised "alternative networks of product exchange" in which people are swapping possessions, and the "social kitchens" where people are sharing resources in cooking and offering food to the destitute and unemployed. Other unpredictable forms and ways of dealing with basic needs for foods and shelter will be developed by the movement.

The left should not underestimate the danger of these movements being incorporated by the establishment, as a peaceful charity appendix of the government's cuts, or channelled into reformist ideas and illusions about building oases of freedoms within the capitalist system.

POTENTIAL

But these movements, with their massive appeal, also carry potential to be a first step towards a concentration of forces and the building of a massive working-class movement with radical characteristics.

For that, they need to be linked with the trade union movement and the workplace struggles, and with the neighbourhood community movements, and given clear political direction by the left.

- Redistribute the land owned by the church and the big farmers to the peasants

- Create agricultural co-operatives under peasant and social control, with representatives elected, accountable to, and recallable by general meetings

- Nationalise the fertiliser and farm machine industries under workers' social control

- Coordinate food policy and agricultural production on the basis of Greek society's needs and respect for the environment.

A sweat-free Olympics?

No Sweat London dayschool, Saturday 31 March

11am-5pm, Unite HQ, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN (nearest tube Holborn)

Anti-sweatshop campaign No Sweat discusses the Olympics and what it means for workers Sharon Sukhrum from the TUC's "Playfair" campaign will speak on their achievements so far, and other more overtly "anti-games" campaigns are invited.

Free entry, lunch provided. For more information please email admin@nosweat.org.uk.

What's wrong with Kony 2012?

By Patrick Smith

An internet and street art campaign, Kony 2012, launched by the charity Invisible Children on 7 March, instantly gathered enormous support across the world, with its denunciation of Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord's Resistance Army.

That the campaign has alerted millions to the crimes of militias like Kony's (sadly, there are others like it) is good. But less well publicised ways to build the social forces that can defeat these people are better than Invisible Children's fundraising, which has problems.

We can solidarise with the still weak but real trade-union movements and other movements for social justice in the region.

ABDUCTED

Kony's militia has committed many atrocities in central Africa.

LRA has operated in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, southern Sudan, and Uganda since the late 1980s. It is probably much weaker today, though still destructive.

Kony's militia was originally founded with the aim of overthrowing the government of Yoweri Museveni in Uganda and replacing it with a Christian theocracy.

Until 2002, the Sudanese government funded the LRA as a counterweight to the Ugandan government, which supported the south-Sudanese movement for independence.

About 80% of LRA's soldiers are children abducted from schools, villages and orphanages. They have killed, maimed and enslaved non-Christian Acholi in Northern Uganda.

Invisible Children was set up by Ben Keeseey, Jason Russell, and Laren Poole in 2005.

The charity has been paying CEO Ben Keeseey, and co-founders Jason Russell and Laren Poole \$90,000 a year salaries on top of their expenses. The charity has a net worth of almost \$6,500,000 according to their accounts on the Charity Navigator website.

Over \$1.4 million a year of the money donated to the charity goes into "management and administration", on top of the money spent producing films and so on. Compared to other charities which focus on direct aid, Invisible Children puts a relatively small amount of the net cash-flow from its publicity activities into helping people on the ground.

Kony 2012 also includes lobbying for direct American military intervention in Uganda.

UNWITTINGLY

The socially-conscious people who want to do something about Kony are being nudged into unwittingly taking sides with Uganda's President, who is little better than Joseph Kony.

And into taking sides in a wider, regional sectarian conflict rooted in the legacy of colonialism.

Uganda's president Yoweri Museveni involved his country in the Second Congolese War in which an estimated four to eight million people were killed (as direct or indirect consequence of war). During the conflict Museveni recruited child soldiers himself. He also aided the Tutsi against the Hutu in the brutal Rwandan civil war that killed almost a million people.

More recently Museveni supported an anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda that would see members of the LGBT community imprisoned for life for the crime of "homosexuality" and killed for "aggravated homosexuality". He spouted so much homo-

Still from Kony 2012 film

phobic bile on Ugandan national television that the west threatened to withdraw aid from Uganda over the bill.

The LRA is shaped by a history of sectional conflict in the region, shaped partly by divide-and-rule policies and artificial borders from the colonial era. The latest phase opened with the genocide (of Tutsi by Hutu) in Rwanda in 1993. A Tutsi movement, the RPF, backed by the Ugandan government, eventually intervened and halted the genocide. Millions of Hutu fled into Congo.

The RPF, led by Tutsi Paul Kagame, supported the Ugandan Army and the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), led by Laurent-Desire Kabila, to overthrow the corrupt, brutal, nationalist dictator of Zaire (Congo), Mobutu Sese Seko. Kabila became President of Zaire/Congo in 1997, and appointing some of his Rwandan-Tutsi allies as ministers in his government.

When Kabila replaced Rwandans with native Congolese and expelled the Ugandans and Rwandans

the Tutsi RPF agitated the remaining Tutsi and anti-Kabila forces in the country in order to defeat the Hutu RDR which was still conducting raids on Rwanda from Congo. The uprising started the Second Congolese War, lasting until 2003.

Congo is still plagued by militia conflict. Kony's LRA is one of a number of militias in the area, and often the official armies act not very differently from militias.

Invisible Children are right in wanting to stop Joseph Kony. But they propose to do that by taking sides with Museveni in a highly toxic situation. The evidence is that those with the best interests of the local people at heart would do best to avoid taking sides and instead to seek to help the building of peace and a workable civil society.

Pushed by and supported by Invisible Children, in 2010 the US government sent troops to Uganda to help Museveni track down Kony. Obama has also signed off the Northern Uganda Recovery Act, which pledges

\$10,000,000 a year to the Museveni government for "justice initiatives".

The US government, for its own reasons, wants stability in Africa, especially in mineral-rich Congo. We would not mourn if US troops had found Kony and arrested or killed him; but equally we should not congratulate the US government for pursuing its own narrow interests, in its own way, when big-power intervention has so often worsened rather than mended affairs.

WORKERS

And if the USA is reluctant to intervene militarily on a larger scale — realistically fearing another Afghanistan in Africa, or another Somalia — we should be glad of that, rather than sorry.

The Kony2012 campaign assumes that change can only come from above — by US military intervention, or US military aid to the Ugandan government — and ignores the possibilities of social change and justice driven by movements from people in the region.

We need to look to the

experience of when Hutu and Tutsi workers and farmers came together briefing in the 1980s, because they realised that they shared more in common with each other than they did with the sectarian militias.

In that brief moment, the sectarian conflict was forgotten to defend working people against the devastation and barbarism of a capitalist crisis.

Uganda does have a labour movement, although a very imperfect one.

As we saw recently with a general strike in Nigeria it is possible to mobilise workers in the most precarious working conditions and against the odds of an economic crisis.

It is only through solidarity with the workers of central Africa, and the world, that we will change the conditions of poverty, ruthless exploitation by multinational corporations, and looting by local crony-capitalists, which create the basis for militias like Kony's.

• More: bit.ly/ycKYGG
invisiblechildren.tumblr.com

Workers of the World

By Clarke Benitez



Kenyan health workers face down mass sackings

The Kenyan government has sacked 25,000 health workers in a desperate attempt to break a mass strike over pay.

The government is ask-

ing unemployed and retired health workers to report to their nearest hospital or clinic to participate in interviews for the vacant posts.

The workers are on strike for higher pay; health workers in Kenya currently earn around 25,000 shillings (less than £200) per month, and are fighting for an increase that would double this amount.

Alex Orina, spokesman

for the Kenya Health Professionals Society, said:

"We are ignoring the sacking threat. These are cat-and-mouse games, you cannot sack an entire workforce. It is a ploy to get us to rush back to work, but our strike continues until our demands are met."

The sacked workers include members of the Union of Kenyan Civil Servants, whose leaders brokered a deal with the government and ordered its members back to work. The nurses, however, refused and continued with their strike action.

Other public sector workers including teachers,

university lecturers and workers at the state broadcasting service have also recently taken strike action.

The health workers have now been on strike for over a week.

Chinese workers fight on

February saw nearly 30 industrial disputes across China, according to labour-movement NGO China Labour Bulletin (CLB).

The strikes took place across a wide range of in-

dustries around a range of demands focusing on pay, hours, terms and conditions. Four of the disputes centres on management plans to relocate workplaces or unreasonable employee deployment. One strike took place when workers previously employed by German manufacturer Putzmeister demanded a higher compensation package after the company was sold to Sany Heavy Industries (the largest Sino-German business transaction in history). Sany is run by Liang Wen-gen, one of the China's richest men with an estimated personal wealth of

over \$10 billion. Many commentators and analysts expect him to soon join the Chinese Communist Party's central committee.

5,000 workers at the Hanzhong Steel Company staged a three-day strike demanding pay increases. Some of them are paid as little as ¥1,000 (slightly over £100) per month.

According to CLB, dozens of workers were detained in each strike.

• More: China Labour Bulletin — clb.org.hk
• CLB's strike map — bit.ly/sP6Yth
• Also online: Quebec students strike — bit.ly/zh1Yud

Fight the SNP from the left

Scotland
By Dale Street



The deadline for submissions to the Westminster government's consultation on the conduct of the referendum on Scotland's constitutional future passed on Friday 9 March.

The Holyrood government's consultation on the referendum has a later submissions deadline of 11 May.

The "model response" to the consultations drawn up by the Scottish Labour Party argues in favour of a single-question referendum: "... in order to give a definitive answer on whether or not Scotland remains part of the UK."

There is a democratic basis for that position. The referendum is being held because the SNP's 2011 election manifesto included a commitment to hold a referendum for/against independence.

Calls for the inclusion of a further question — on "devo max", which has now morphed into "devo plus" — would do nothing to clarify the basic issue at stake in the referendum.

Even so, the proposal that there should be a third option is gaining traction, from sections of "civic Scotland", some trade unions, and, in a characteristically mealy-mouthed fashion, from the Scottish TUC.

The SNP — or at least its leader Alex Salmond, who now appears to be empowered to make SNP policy on the hoof — has stated that it will support a third question if the consultation process demonstrates support for it.

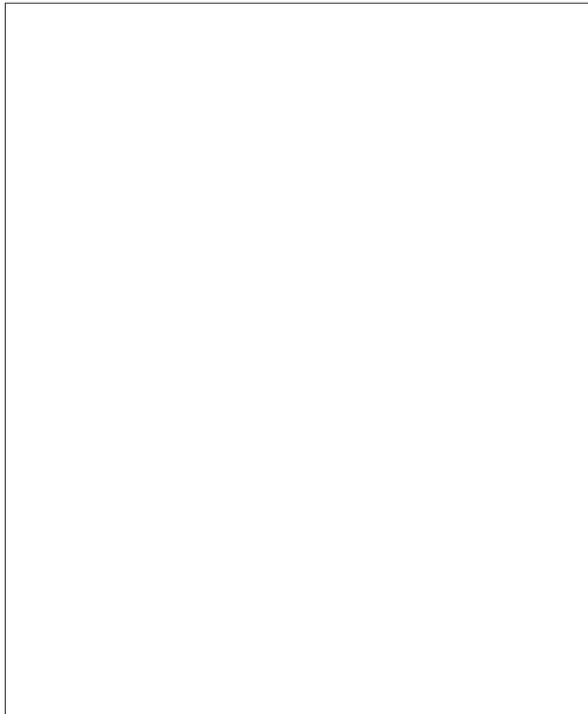
The SNP wants the ballot paper to ask the leading question: "Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?" Some opponents of independence want the question to be along the lines of "Do you support the break-up of the United Kingdom?"

BREAK

The SNP's argument on that is they are not proposing to break up the United Kingdom. The independent Scotland they want would still retain the monarchy. They are proposing to annul only the Treaty of Union of 1707, not the earlier Union of the Crowns.

Linked to these issues is the question of which body should oversee the referendum. This question is addressed by both the Westminster and Holyrood consultations.

The Scottish Labour Party — and just about everyone opposed to independence — wants the referendum overseen by the existing Electoral Commission. The SNP wants to create a new, Scottish, electoral commission specifically for the purpose of the referendum.



Rupert Murdoch has come out for Scottish independence

Support for the referendum being overseen by the Electoral Commission is rooted in the belief that the SNP is not to be trusted with setting up a body to oversee the referendum.

The SNP is, after all, the organisation that argues that if a majority in the referendum votes for independence (say, 51%) but an even bigger majority votes for "devo max" (say, 80%), then this would be a mandate for independence.

Why? Because as independence incorporates "devo max" the bigger majority would still get what they voted for ("devo max" plus a bit more!)

Another issue addressed by the consultations is the timing of the referendum. The SNP wants it to be held in the autumn of 2014. Most opponents of independence want it to be held next year (the soonest it could realistically be staged).

The SNP calculates an October 2014 date will increase their chances of securing a majority for independence.

It is already clear that the SNP will try to run its campaign as a vote of "no confidence" in the Tory Westminster government, rather than around the democratic and national issues posed by the nature of the United Kingdom as it is currently constituted.

The "good" reason why some opponents of independence want the referendum held earlier is an alleged negative im-

pact on the Scottish economy arising from uncertainty about its future constitutional status. The real reason is that they reckon that an early referendum is more likely to produce an anti-independence outcome.

Also subject to consultation is the question of who should be entitled to vote in the referendum. The SNP is proposing that the franchise be extended to 16- and 17-year-olds, who are more likely than not to vote for independence.

Despite the self-serving motivation of the SNP, making the referendum as democratic as possible does require giving the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds.

In fact, if the major Westminster parties had not shown a total lack of interest in extending the franchise for all elections to 16- and 17-year-olds, this would not even be an issue. Their failure to do so is now catching up with them — as the SNP can now posture as the champion of rights for young people.

The SNP/Alex Salmond has stated that it will not launch its pro-independence campaign until May, because it is "so confident about winning the referendum".

No doubt Salmond's confidence was boosted by press baron Rupert Murdoch's recently announced support for independence. (Just another nail in the coffin of the Scottish left's claim that independence for Scotland would be a blow against British imperialism and the beginning of the socialist revolution!)

CUT

The labour movement should cut through all the nonsense now surfacing around the issue of the referendum.

It should back a straightforward yes/no referendum, with the franchise extended to 16- and 17-year-olds. It should also counterpose an "all-round" democratic restructuring of the UK state — in the form of a federal republic — to the SNP's advocacy of a capitalist, neo-liberal and monarchist independent Scotland.

Labour movement activists should also be demanding that the Scottish Labour Party scrap the unrepresentative commission which it has set up to decide "the party line" on the referendum.

The party's policy should be democratically decided by a specially convened conference. As a recent press release from the Labour-left Campaign for Socialism puts it:

"The terms of the referendum debate must not be dictated by narrow nationalist interests. The Scottish Labour Party needs a full debate, ranging from full independence through to devo-max, indy-lite, devo-plus, federalism, home rule, etc., concluding with a special conference in the autumn.

"We want a full discussion, and one which exposes the empty nationalist rhetoric of the SNP, which is no more than a cloak for a tartan neo-liberalism. The way to defeat the SNP is from the left, and the way to develop the left ideas necessary to do that is through dialogue and democracy."

Letters



Iran, the left and nuclear weapons

There are two arguments, I think, usually put forward regarding Iran's putative possession of nuclear arms on the left. One is that it isn't true — that this is a re-run of the WMD argument over Iraq.

But the other is that, even if it is true, Iran is — in effect — entitled to have nukes if imperialist countries, and of course Israel, has them. One version of this is that it's hypocritical to worry about Iran having them and to make less of a fuss about, especially, Israel. The stronger version is as I put it before: if Israel has nukes, Iran is entitled to them.

Either way — isn't there an implicit acceptance of the old Cold War argument that nukes act as a deterrent? That is, somewhere in there, there's the suggestion that all Iran could possibly want nukes for is to maintain the balance of power — to be able to threaten, say, Israel, if Israel was threatening it?

If we're against nuclear weapons, surely we're against new countries getting them. To say "other people have them so why is this a problem?" — even leav-

ing aside the specific character of the Iranian regime — seems to me just perverse.

[Contribution to debate on the AWL website, "Iran: dancing towards war" <http://alturl.com/mkubm>]

Clive Bradley, north London

Sunderland Poly Jewish Society

It is by pure fluke that I googled Sunderland Poly Students Union and got directed to the AWL site and digested your "As we were saying: 'Anti-Zionism'" (Solidarity 234).

I've got to say it's been a fascinating read for me. I was the former Chairperson of the Sunderland Poly Jewish Student Society that was at first banned and then eventually re-ratified by the Sunderland Students Rep Council.

By comparison to the "firewall" that we as Jewish students faced at that time by the SPSU and its outside supporters, with inflammatory arguments relating to the UN "Zionism=Racism" policy, it has been like a real breath of new air to see the progress in understanding based upon your article. Back then I could only have dreamt of such a rational viewpoint you express.

Certainly there is much work to be done to achieve what you correctly conclude is the only viable democratic policy — a two state solution where neither Israel nor Palestine feel threatened in any way by any neighbour, regional state, or organisation.

Jews, be they in the diaspora or in Israel, are no more and

no less racist than any other nation that inhabits this earth. You rightly state that the majority of Jews are Zionists — and should not be deemed racists based on their nationalist movement being singled out over any other nationalist movement. To so do is certainly construable as anti-semitic.

Our perpetual experience of persecution down the ages (culminating in the Shoah [Holocaust]) puts us naturally radar-like vis-à-vis perceived threats that most other peoples probably would neither perceive nor fear.

One specific point from your article which I believe requires contest is:

"The Sunderland student union ban was not the work of an unrepresentative minority. Over 1,000 students attended its General Meeting which endorsed the ban."

Indeed it was a very well attended meeting — however, not all one-thousand-plus students voted in favour of the ban. By my recollection, the majority of those in favour over those against the ban was only in the magnitude of several tens.

There were approximately 20-30 Jewish students studying and eligible to vote at the poly at that time. By contrast, there were probably in the region of 500-600 mostly overseas Arab/Islamic students, attending mostly engineering courses. Many attended the EGM. There was a significant block vote in favour of banning the Jewish Society. I believe that this considerably dilutes your "not the work of an unrepresentative minority" claim, in as much that the block vote against the JSoc was generated more by natural bias rather than by specific democratic reasoning.

That said — great article.

[Contribution to debate on the AWL website, "As we were saying: 'Anti-Zionism'", <http://alturl.com/4d6w2>]

Brian Plainer

Pensions fight: build for sustained action after 28 March!

By Patrick Murphy, National Union of Teachers Executive (pc)

Based on the responses I've had from workplaces meetings, I think members of the National Union of Teachers will overwhelmingly endorse the union's rejection of the Government's terms on pensions, and will vote yes to further strike action.

The survey in the NUT, concluding on 14 March, asks for support for further action starting with 28 March. Just one further strike day can't be enough, and neither can more of the same (i.e. disconnected one-day strikes).

We need to develop a strategy which maintains the pressure in a more constant and sustained way. That has to mean selective and rolling action alongside (not instead of) national strike action - bringing out workers on a branch by branch or region by region basis, or coordinating regional or citywide strike action with PCS, UCU and possibly the Fire Brigades Union.

Pension contribution increases will be imposed by the Government from April, and come after two years of pay freeze and more years of below-inflation rises. When members feel the pinch in their pay packets from April that will

raise the issue of pay again - and just as the government's next assault, regionalised pay, arrives. Public sector unions need to develop plans for a national fight on pay.

Another issue for teachers is workload. The main reason teachers in particular think it is ludicrous to propose that we work to 68 is that the job is so demanding physically and mentally.

INDIVIDUAL

Quite a few people have relied on the individual strategy of holding on as long as they can, maybe going part-time toward the end of their careers and then grabbing their pension.

In many cases this means going early and taking a reduced pension. Those options are much less viable when the retirement age rises to 65 and then 68.

We should use that fact to argue that tackling excessive workload, bullying managers and the insane target culture we work under is now an urgent priority.

The dispute is not over. We should demand the reopening of talks, and fight around demands for specific concessions. But there are already lessons which every teacher and school worker can learn from the course of this dispute.

The existence of three separate TUC-affiliated unions for classroom teachers is a crippling weakness. We have a workforce that is very highly unionised and skilled; factors which ought to lead to substantial industrial strength. On issue after issue, however, each union takes a different stance. Attempts to co-ordinate take up huge amounts of time and effort and then often don't come off.

We should argue that one "industrial union", organising all workers in schools (not just teachers), would be a huge step forward.

That's something to aim for, but we also need an approach to organise effectively in the meantime. That has to be based on much better workplace organisation, confident well-informed reps and unity from below on concrete industrial issues.

Any dispute I've organised in my area has included as a matter of course attempts to co-ordinate with the other unions. At the level of the workplace this is easier because the problems are more or less the same for all of us, and the bureaucracies who tend to block joint action find it harder.

The future is for activists in all the school unions to focus on more effective fighting workplace organisation, as part of a wider strategy for building industrial unionism in schools.

Help us raise £20,000

Ever wondered what do the stinking rich do with all their money?

One indicator is the "cost of living extremely well index" - an annual survey of price trends for the stuff that only rich people can afford - produced by US business magazine *Forbes*.

Items include: Hospital VIP treatment, a Russian sable coat, thoroughbred racehorse, a Sikorski helicopter, a concert grand piano, a Rolls Royce Phantom, one kilo of top-notch caviar, a box at the opera, a year's tuition at Harvard University.

Feeling green with envy? Or just feeling sick?

According to *Forbes* the global number of billionaires rose to 1,226 in 2011, and their combined wealth went up to a record \$4.6 trillion (£2.9 trillion), despite the impact of the economic crisis.

Despite the 50% tax bracket for top earners there are more of these people in the UK than there used to be. Why? Because all of them are "non-doms". Unlike most other places in the world, such people don't pay taxes on their overseas income.

The argument goes if they come here, spend their money... who cares? Except there no evidence that their spending "trickles" down income to the rest of us. Quite the contrary, inequality is getting worse.

We need to ditch the system which puts the making and selling of ephemeral stuff just for rich people above the daily life and untapped potential of all human beings.

It is time to invest a little in a socialist project.

If you do have some money to give to us - however little - we can continue publishing *Solidarity* as a weekly,

improve our website and organise events such as our Ideas for Freedom summer school.

Please consider:

● Taking out a monthly standing order to the AWL. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and on this page. (Even a few pounds a month really does help.)

● Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL") or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

● Organising a fundraising event.

● Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.

● Getting in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

For more information on any of the above, contact us: tel. 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, SE1 3DG.



Total raised so far: £9,973

We raised £186 this week from donations, new standing orders and a fundraising event. Thanks to Sheffield AWL, Rosie, Martin, James and Beth.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

.....

Account name:

Account no.

Sort code:

Please make payments to the debit of my account:

Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20 (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

Return to 20e Tower Workshops, 59 Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG

This is the fight

Above: June Hautot confronts Andrew Lansley

“Disrupt their lives like they intend to disrupt ours.”

By June Hautot

We need to get people on to the streets in support of the NHS. We need people treating this issue like they treated Thatcher's poll tax.

We need to make the Health and Social Care Bill, when it becomes law, unworkable. We should make every Tory and every Lib-Dem who voted for this Bill suffer as they intend we should suffer when they privatise our NHS.

We should find out where they live and we should disrupt their lives like they intend to disrupt ours with their cuts and their privatisation. We have to find out where the likes of Lansley lives and where the big private bosses live who just want to make a profit out of people's ill health and we should make life difficult for them.

Andy Burnham, Shadow Health Secretary, spoke at last week's TUC rally to save the NHS and he vowed to repeal the Coalition government's Health and Social Care Act (as it soon will be). Well, good for him. This is what we want from a Labour government. I feel sure Labour know they made some big mistakes with the NHS, but Andy Burnham's promise to repeal what the Coalition are forcing on to us is a good start. From that we can rebuild the NHS.

We're expected to pay for the mess the bankers have made of the economy, this is unfair and unreasonable.

We shouldn't stand for it. We must organise the biggest fight back possible to save the NHS. We have to educate people about the issue. We have to urge them to take one day off work (except emergency workers) or, better still, the TUC should organise a strike to save the NHS.

Mike Bailey, Chair of “Better Services, Better Value” (a review of health services in south west London), says that once the Bill goes through “...there will be a ‘save our hospital’ campaign at every hospital”. We need a united fight-back in defence of the NHS

By Jill Mountford

You get sick, you will be cared for regardless of your income. When you need healthcare, the National Health Service is there — for free. That is the founding principle of the NHS. All of that is now under threat.

The principles embodied in the NHS are a high point, perhaps *the* high point, of attempts to civilise and tame capitalism. As profit reigned supreme above all else, establishing the NHS was a major victory for the working class. What went before it was misery, suffering and premature death for workers and their families.

Yet the Coalition government is being allowed to snatch the NHS away with little more than a whimper and a moan from the labour and trade-union movement.

The logic of capitalism always dictates that the working class pay for the crises caused by the bosses. It is our job is to organise as a class to resist their attacks, to set our own agenda, to make demands and fight for them so that workers and their families can live with as much dignity as this brutalising, profit-worshipping system will afford us.

BOSS CLASS

The leaders of the boss class know instinctively what to do in a crisis. They make us pay.

On the other hand, the leaders of the working class have lost any instinct they might have had. Coupled with this is their lack of theory and ideas independent of the dominant ideas of capitalism. They have no ballast to keep them grounded in the working class.

Instead they aspire to being nothing more than third-rate plasterers smoothing over the cracks in the system. And this is how, in the midst of this historic world economic crisis, when the injurious brutality of capitalism is laid bare for all to see, the government of the bosses' class can get away with robbing us of the National Health Service.

The uselessness of our “leaders” was made abundantly clear at last week's TUC rally (March 7) in central London against the Health and Social Care Bill. Brendan Barber (General Secretary of the TUC), Len McCluskey (General Secretary of Unite), and Dave Prentis (General Secretary of Unison), were amongst the 16 speakers to address a crowded hall of protesters.

These three powerful men, between them leaders of several million workers, failed to show any leadership. They

“The real implications of the Coalition's NHS Bill will now be played out in every community across the country as health facilities are privatised, hospitals close, waiting lists rise, and treatment are rationed and withdrawn. The battle to save the NHS is only just beginning. We need a national demonstration to show the scale of resistance to the Coalition's attack on the NHS and to kick off the next phase of this struggle.”
— John McDonnell MP

all said that the NHS is ours and we should fight to save it; but none of them offered one word, not one single word, on how we should fight to save it.

None of them mentioned a national demonstration in defence of the NHS (some people will remember the 50,000 strong demonstration to save the NHS in the 1980s when Thatcher began her programme of restructuring that laid the foundations for the privatisation of healthcare in Britain).

Neither did any of them utter a single syllable about industrial action to defend “health care free at the point of need”. There was no mention making the bosses pay for the NHS through taxing the rich and big business. There was no mention of mobilising the might of our class to take what is rightfully ours.

COURAGE

More than half of all the platform speakers quoted Nye Bevan: “The NHS will last as long as there are folk with faith to fight for it.”

Nye Bevan, not a revolutionary socialist by any means but at least an honest and dedicated reformist, would have known how to fight for it. He'd have had the courage to agitate for a fight and he would have dared to lead a fight. Instead we have leaders, taking leadership wages, wearing leadership suits, driving leadership cars, but resolutely refusing to lead.

If the NHS is to be saved, if our class is to retain the right to “healthcare free at the point of need”, then we have to organise to win. We cannot rely on the unaccountable officials and bureaucrats whose wages we pay from our monthly union subscriptions. We have to rely on ourselves to organise a bottom-up campaign of rank-and-file activists.

The Health and Social Care Bill looks set to be passed as law within the next few weeks. If we cannot prevent that, we have to organise and mobilise to make it impossible for the law to be applied and put into action. We have to build a campaign that can apply pressure to stop the law in its tracks.

We have to take up the campaign in the unions, in the Labour Party, and on the streets and in communities. We need to bring together the many different NHS campaigns around the country and unite them in action, coordinating the fightback to save the NHS.

Tories' foundations laid by New Labour

The Health and Social Care Bill is the biggest attack on the core values of the NHS since its inception and it runs in tandem with £20 billion of cuts to local healthcare services.

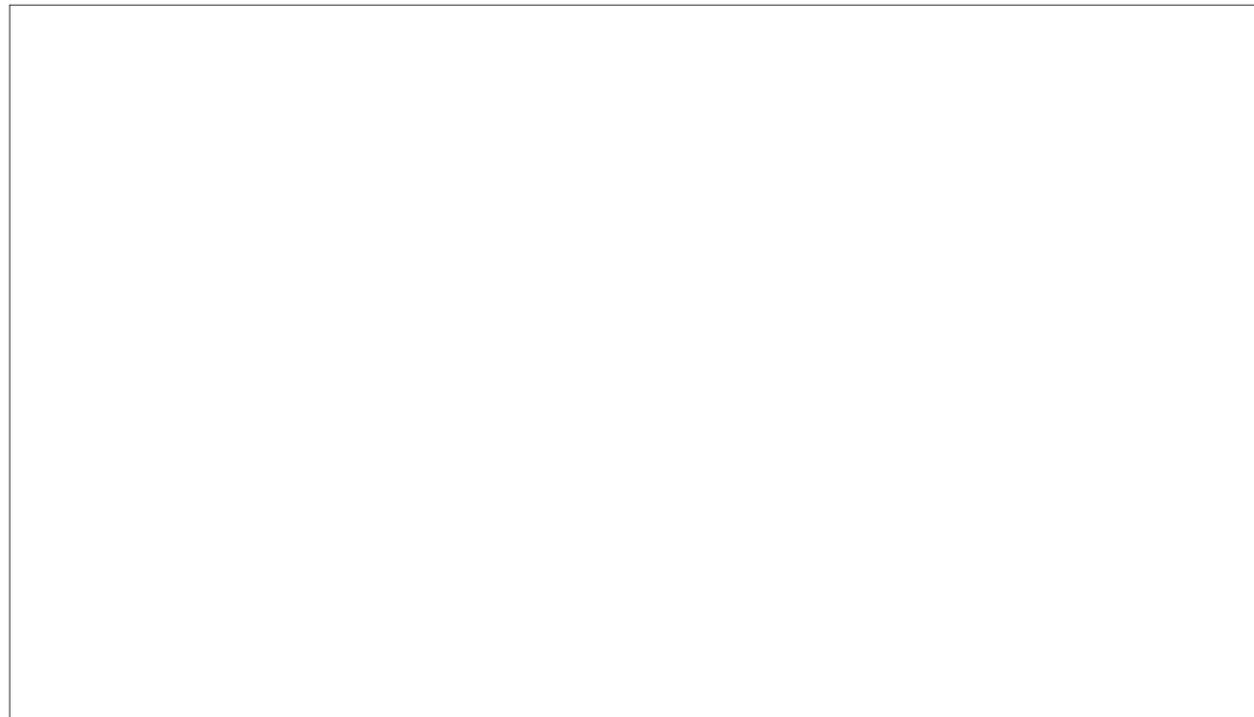
Once the Bill is law, the NHS will be turned into a host of private companies that either commission or provide services or both and NHS will be reduced to a logo. It is widely believed by professional bodies in the health service, by NHS workers and trade unions that complete privatisation of the health service is at the heart of Lansley's agenda.

Successive governments have made cuts since the late seventies, though it was not until the Thatcher government in the 1980s that the challenge to the core value of 'health care free at the point of need' began.

Both the Blair and Brown Labour governments continued Thatcher's work with the introduction of market structures, foundation trusts, GP consortia, the introduction of private corporations into commissioning services.

It is on those foundation that Lansley and the Coalition government are now able to lay the Health and Social Care Bill.

nt of our lives



Health Alarm at protests in London on 7 March

Demonstrate on 17 March!

● “Kick the market out of the NHS”

Richard Branson’s company Assura Medical plans to bid for contracts in the new NHS. Demonstrate 11am-2pm at Virgin Health Club, Plaza Shopping Centre, 120 Oxford Street, London W1D 1LT. Called by Health Alarm

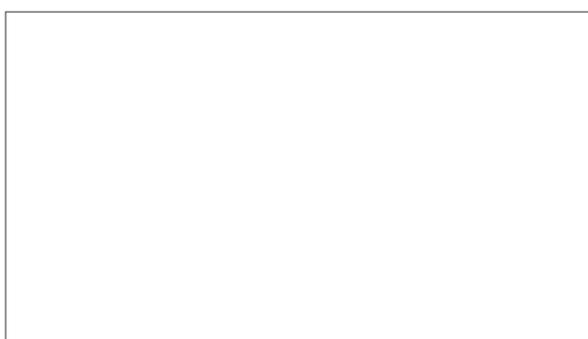
● Picket the Department of Health - from 2:30pm at Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS. Called by Hackney Keep Our NHS Public

Unite the fight to save the NHS!

An invitation to all NHS campaigns to come together to establish a national coordinating committee

Wednesday 21 March 7pm at Unite HQ, 128 Theobald’s Road (corner of Boswell Street), London WC1X 8TN

Speakers include: John McDonnell MP, Ron Singer (MPU-Unite), Rosie Woods (Unison Health). Plenty of time for discussion/planning



On 10 March, with the slogan of “Clegg off”, 250 anti-cuts campaigners, students and community activists marched from Byker — hard hit by the present cuts — through Newcastle to demonstrate outside the Lib Dem conference on Gateshead’s Quayside. The march met up with a TUC static rally which was just finishing. Other protests included: a large “CONDEM Capitalism” banner-drop on one of the bridges, Keep Our NHS Public actions and fringe meeting at the conference. The “Clegg Off” protest has given local activists the confidence to realise that if we cannot get the local TUC to organise protests in the city centre, we can do it ourselves.

Ed Whitby. [Picture: Emma Conway]

Make Labour fight!

Andy Burnham, Shadow Health Secretary, has pledged to repeal the Health and Social Care legislation if he becomes Health Secretary in the next Labour government.

Whilst this is a step in the right direction we believe it does not go far enough.

We are asking all Labour MPs to sign our pledge to:

1. Actively support the repeal of the Coalition government’s Health and Social Care legislation.
2. Actively support the rebuilding of the NHS to pre-Thatcher government levels.
3. Actively support taxing the rich and big business to pay for this.

Lobby your Labour MP to sign!

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

1. Organise lobbies, pickets and protests outside private health companies offices; hold street meetings raising awareness of the coalition’s plans to privatise the NHS; petition people; invite anyone who signs to take part in your next protest.

2. Make contact with local doctors, find out who opposes the Bill and who will get involved in campaigning. Start a discussion with healthcare professionals about how the Bill can be made unworkable when it becomes law.

3. Call meetings to plan campaigning, but also call meetings to discuss what kind of health service we want and need. We should go beyond defending the status quo. There’s plenty of room for improvement.

To contact Health Alarm call Rosie Woods on: 07734 088 243 or email healthalarm@yahoo.co.uk. Visit healthalarm1159.wordpress.com and [facebook.com/HealthAlarm](https://www.facebook.com/HealthAlarm). Postal address — BM Box 4628, London, WC1N 3XX

Please support these initiatives:

- dropthebill.org • dropthebill.net
- 38degrees.org.uk/page/s/ProtectourNHSPetition
- keepournhspublic.com

“This will create chaos in the NHS”

By Dr. Ron Singer, President, Medical Practitioners’ Union — Unite (pc)

In light of the Health and Social Care Bill passing into law, there will to be a huge tension in the system and it will be further compounded by massive cuts.

It will create chaos in the NHS. What we will see over the coming years is a simple reduction of what the NHS provides, on a big scale. Routine procedures will, in effect, be axed, and more and more people will have to go private for operations such as hip replacement and cataracts.

GPs commissioning services will have to act in a ruthless way that PCTs never had to. GPs will get the blame when patients can’t get the care they need through the NHS. The national fight against the Health and Social Care Bill will turn into a wave of local fights over the next five years as local hospitals and services are cut, and campaigns are set up to defend them.

Social democracy is so discredited it is now saying we can’t afford a welfare state, instead it will be each person for themselves. This is a backward step for civilised society.

Cutting out political punch

Molly Thomas reviews *Bel Ami*

I wanted to like this film. I really did. But *Bel Ami*, despite all its potential, is just unlikeable.

Based on Guy de Maupassant's novel published in 1885, it is the first film directed by Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod, the co-founders of theatre company Cheek by Jowl.

Bel Ami boasts an impressive cast: Kristin Scott Thomas, Uma Thurman, Christina Ricci, and Colm Meaney all play supporting roles. The production values are impressive considering the film's small budget. But it is undone by a weak script and an abysmal leading man.

The story follows its protagonist Georges Duroy (portrayed incompetently by the charmless Robert Pattinson) as he rises to power with the help of three women: Madeleine Forestier (Thurman), Clothilde de Marelle (Ricci), and Virginie Rousset (Scott Thomas).

His social climb is set against the backdrop of France's conquest of Tunisia in 1881 (lightly fictionalised as a conquest of Morocco, which actually came after Maupassant's death) and the rise of the mass-circulation press and its close connections with financial speculation.

ANTI-IMPERIALIST

The original text has some radical anti-imperialist edge, all but excised from the screenplay (which inexplicably re-dates the story to 1890).

In the film, Madeleine and Georges uncover that the French government is planning to invade Tunisia (alias Morocco) and they use that to topple the government through Duroy's column in the newspaper *La Vie Française*, run by Rousset (Meaney).

Then the new government, with which Rousset has links,

French colonial troops, which had been in Algeria since 1830, took Tunisia in 1881. The book's sharp and critical slant on the colonial conquest is sidelined in the film.

French occupation of Algeria, is invited by Charles Forestier, an old army friend. Clothilde quickly starts an affair with him, for reasons entirely unclear to the viewer.

Duroy in the film has none of the scoundrelly charm of Duroy in the book. One simply cannot understand why these women like him.

He glowers and glares his way into women's beds, barely uttering a word. Even the formidable Madeleine, who first responds to him by saying that she will not become his mistress (as if it were automatic that she should, absent some special reason otherwise), eventually marries him following her husband's death.

BORES

But her informed and intelligent conversation bores him and he is already sleeping with the young, beautiful and loving Clothilde. He later takes up with Virginie, ostensibly to punish Rousset for some slight despite the fact that the only reason Rousset is unkind to him is that Duroy is lazy and makes Madeleine write his articles for him.

The film ends with Duroy marrying the Roussets' daughter Suzanne (Holliday Grainger), having exposed Madeleine's infidelities and divorced her. He's ruined many lives but there is no sense of poignancy.

This may be because Pattinson as Duroy never changes his expression. Despite a busy plot, he only ever frowns or sneers, even when things begin to go his way.

The film drags, yet cuts out much of the political punch of Maupassant's book, and many of its grace notes, such as Duroy and Madeleine visiting Duroy's parents.

Educating for capitalism's needs

Joe Flynn reviews *School Wars* by Melissa Benn

In *School Wars* Melissa Benn lays out in details the increasing privatisation of Britain's schools, the scale of an impending disaster.

Benn begins by highlighting a 2011 *Guardian* article which revealed that "civil servants privately advised ministers that schools should be allowed to fail, if government was serious about reform". The Tories' vision rests on an ideological belief in a market system which will allow thousands of students in unfashionable schools, the ones with difficult pupil intakes, bolshie staff not keen on pay-and-conditions-smashing privatisation, or parents not willing to allow a local "philanthropist" to have complete control over their child's education, to be left to rot.

Underfunded, run down and then targeted by a politically-motivated Ofsted, they will be forced to close or privatised (become academies).

Since the book's publication late last year the "war" has been escalated by the struggle over four Haringey primary schools being forced to become academies against the wishes of heads, staff and parents.

EXCLUDE

Benn demolishes the idea that academies or private "freedoms" empower schools or improve results, and proves time and again that the way schools show "improvement" is by manipulating their pupil intake. The figures on exclusion rates are particularly telling — academies exclude 82% more pupils than non-academy state schools.

Benn later coolly documents the flagrant corruption of the fat cat scumbags behind the biggest academy chains.

Quoting from an ATL-researched document which received scant attention in the bourgeois press, Benn explains: "In April 2010, E-ACT [a leading education sponsor] whistleblowers revealed how the company's directors had claimed thousands of pounds of public money for luxury hotel rooms and long-distance taxi journeys; they also used chauffeur driven limousines to visit academies around the country."

E-ACT got £250 million from Labour government grants. Their director general, who has since resigned, paid himself £280,000 a year and once claimed £1,436 for two nights in hotel suites for him and a colleague. These will be the kind of people with total control of our children's education

within a few years, unless the labour movement fights back.

One section of the book dealing with Manchester Enterprise Academy was particularly terrifying.

Here is a brand new school in a fabulous building with class sizes of 15-20 on average — something teachers can usually only dream of.

This is a "New Labour Academy" — a school set up in a predominantly deprived area with the smug Victorian-era idea that a philanthropist with a head for business is best placed to shape the future lives of Britain's youth. (As opposed to a "Tory Academy" of mostly middle-class schools, rated "outstanding" by Ofsted, in wealthy areas with few difficult kids, who think that by opting out of their local authority they'll save a few bob on paying for general council services which mainly benefit students with special educational needs.)

PACKAGE

The main sponsor of Manchester Enterprise Academy is Manchester Airport.

The Year 9 students do projects on Leisure and Tourism (I've used capital letters because that's a bona fide subject in schools now, in case you didn't know); in the sixth form students are offered work experience and placements.

The students are encouraged to think about the "package" of qualifications they need to get a job when they leave school — and of course the set of qualifications on offer is developed in partnership with the school's sponsor.

This is the future of "education" — training working class people in the basic minimum skills required to do certain jobs; and to make it easier for companies to train particular workers in the basic skills required for their jobs. Why not allow companies to run schools? It all makes sense — if you're a capitalist.

Teachers know this sort of ideology is creeping into even relatively normal schools, through the introduction of "subjects" such as Workskills, where students study entire units on why working for free is great for developing your CV — softening up a generation of young people to the exploitation of the workfare schemes.

Unfortunately, teacher unions have little to say about it, and the wider labour movement even less so, meaning most teachers — and indeed most public sector workers who see the same erosion of basic social (let alone socialist!) values in their own workplace — simply adapt to the new madness as best they can.

The overview provided by a book such as *School Wars* is useful as a way of awakening, and potentially using, an undercurrent of dissent which must be present among teachers, students and parents across the country.

And yet the labour movement, certainly the socialist movement, will need its own materials apart from those provided by social democrats like Melissa Benn to win the "war" over education, because, of course, it is a class war, part of the wider class struggle.

This book is too kind to New Labour, and Blair in particular, particularly on pedagogical issues. For example, Benn supports the creativity-stifling "literacy and numeracy hours" in primary schools.

She ends the otherwise excellent chapter on selection and ability issues in schools by supporting a bizarre proposal endorsed by Conservative Future for a "banding" type solution, which I think most socialists would find it hard to agree with.

COMPREHENSIVE

Her history of the movement for comprehensive education in Britain is very unsatisfying.

She admits it wasn't centrally driven by a Labour government, and praises the odd head of a local council here, radical educationalist there, but the role of a fired-up, post-war working class, fed up with inadequate and unequal social provision in education and other public services, is underplayed. She also strongly denies any link between the movement for comprehensive education and progressive pedagogy, insisting that they are completely separate issues.

Even on the socialist left there is plenty of debate about the validity and limits of some of the "progressive" educational ideas implemented in some schools during the heyday of comprehensive education — but that debate needs to be tackled head on, and we shouldn't pretend that there isn't a link between the comprehensive ideal and the creation of space to experiment with different forms of education.

Though *School Wars* has some of the flaws of a text written by a single-issue-obsessed social democrat, it is essential reading for socialists interested in the frightening future facing Britain's education system.

We need to rearm the labour movement to organise for an alternative, based on comprehensive educational provision for all young people.

Refounding working-class education

Colin Waugh, further education activist and author of *Plebs: The Lost Legacy of Independent Working-Class Education*, spoke to *Solidarity*

Q: What sort of deal do working-class people get from further and higher education?

A: Further education was transformed by the Thatcherite “de-industrialisation” of the economy. This undermined the clear-cut rationale that existed for further education (FE) prior to the middle 1980s. It’s never really recovered from that. It now consists mainly of vocational courses related to service sector employment in such fields as IT, health and social care, automotive, building crafts, etc. The other big element in FE now is ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). And this has become important because of the globalisation of the labour force.

The previous model of FE was based on apprentices on day- or block-release from industry — for example, mechanical engineering, mining, shipbuilding, etc — into technical colleges. They were normally in unionised employment. The lecturers were drawn from the same fields. Students generally could be certain of continued employment at the end of their course and apprenticeship. That is no longer the case, except in a few niche areas.

The majority of 16-19-year-olds in FE are on nominally full time courses, although some will be trying to sustain themselves by working in precarious, casual employment.

On these old-style technical courses there was a small, contrasting element of “liberal studies”. It was mainly because of this that people like myself — i.e. arts or social science graduates — were able to get jobs as lecturers.

Further education also traditionally provided a “second chance” route for people who hadn’t been successful at so-called academic subjects in school to redo these subjects and/or progress to A-levels. But because of the competition with sixth form colleges and school sixth forms, many FE colleges have stopped providing this.

FLEXIBLE

These changes to FE reflect a ruling class drive to re-structure production, create a more flexible labour force, and weaken unions.

Unions had a large degree of say in the old apprentice training/education, but that came to an end. Lecturers’ conditions were also undermined. Relatively good conditions for lecturers had been related to the fact that colleges needed to draw skilled craftspeople from industry into these jobs.

However, the development of higher education may offer a better key than FE does to thinking about the “deal” working-class people get and the possible relation of independent working-class education to this.

At the time of the Ruskin strike (1909) a section of the ruling class were interested in picking out and “sandpapering” working-class activists in order to produce compliance. Some of the expansion of higher education (HE), especially in the humanities and social sciences, has arguably been driven by a similar desire.

Between the late 1950s and the election of the Cameron government there was a drive by the ruling class to “cream off” from working-class backgrounds people who otherwise might have become thinkers and organisers for the workers’ movement, and give them a route through higher education into professional or para-professional jobs. In short, a strategy similar to the one tried out at Ruskin College in 1909 was reproduced on a larger and larger scale. However, the Cameron Government’s decision to cut all the funding for teaching humanities and social sciences in HE suggests that decision-makers judge that this method of producing compliance is no longer needed — at least in the UK.

This decision must lead to many working-class people



Ruskin College strikers, 1909

being pushed either into vocational subjects or out of HE altogether. The university sector is likely to shrink, and parts of it will become more like further education, claiming to offer preparation for — or progression in — service sector jobs. At the same time, the 20 or so largest, richest and most exclusive universities, which attract the overwhelming bulk of research funding, will market themselves as global brands. However, the same decision may also both reawaken a demand for independent working-class education and create opportunities for socialists to rebuild it.

The creaming-off process blunted the edge of working-class demands for access to higher education by appearing to make it available. It is arguable that this is the single most important reason why upsurges of working-class activism since World War Two have not been accompanied by from-below education movements of the Plebs League type. But it is becoming increasingly clear that much of what was offered was bogus.

While there is always a struggle in HE in which some lecturers try against the grain to design good courses and teach in ways that are valid from a working-class standpoint, the overall thrust has always been, as the Ruskin strikers recognised, to miseducate.

The state has offered humanities and social science HE to some sections of workers, but more often than not in a limiting and/or distorted form. But the need for valid education — i.e. education which tends to reverse rather than to reinforce the “division of labour” between those who take strategic decisions and those who can only implement those decisions — is stronger than ever, especially in those fields.

Socialists need to recognise this and organise themselves to fight in a sustained fashion for valid provision and for increased control both by working-class students and by those lecturers who want to provide them with worthwhile teaching and learning.

We also need to press for valid education to be available for people who are at work, including in routine and supposedly unskilled jobs. One way in which we can do this is to struggle for valid general education at all levels — including in vocational courses. This would involve rebuilding something akin to the Liberal Studies that used to exist in technical colleges, but this time thinking it through more rigorously and organising ourselves more systematically to provide it.

STARTED

Q: When/how did you start thinking about independent working-class education?

A: It started for me soon after I became employed as a Liberal Studies lecturer with industrial release students from 1969 onwards, first at Brixton (now Lambeth) College, then from 1970 at Tottenham College (now CHENEL).

At Tottenham between 1972 and 1974 a colleague called Lauri Say showed the Liberal Studies lecturers there — about 14 of us — how the job could be worth doing. Lauri had in his childhood been to a Socialist Sunday School, i.e. to an institution that was part of the tradition of independent working-class education. Later, when attempts to narrow and crush Liberal Studies, along with FE more generally, occurred (from about 1977 to the mid 1980s), because I had been inspired by Lauri, I tried, with others, to organise a struggle to defend it, in that college, across London and nationally. While that was going on and a movement had been created amongst those lecturers, a discussion took place amongst us at Tottenham that had a big effect on me.

A part-time Liberal Studies lecturer called Jock Shanley — I didn’t know him well except that he had been a leading trade unionist in the furniture trade — posed an extremely searching question about what we were trying to do. He just said “Yes, but what is it [i.e. Liberal Studies etc] for?” I re-

alised that I did not have a satisfactory answer to this question. (I found out later that Shanley had been a student at the Central Labour College in the 1920s. And much more recently I found out that when the TUC suppressed the National Council of Labour Colleges in 1964, he had been one of the tutor organisers who tried to rebuild it.)

The point is that I hadn’t connected what we were doing — defending Liberal Studies — to the history of independent working-class education, the Plebs League and so on. I did think in a general way that Liberal Studies had been under-theorised, but I hadn’t made this specific connection. Nor did I fully understand the class basis of our struggle to defend it — for instance that the existence of apprenticeships, day-release FE, etc, was dependent on the strength of union organisation, built up over years, in industry.

I also didn’t really understand that the shape of Liberal Studies and liberal education as it existed then in FE owed a lot to the WEA (Workers’ Education Association) i.e. to the organisation that the Ruskin strikers were fighting most directly against.

For example, it was modelled at least partly on the education for soldiers organised by the army during World War Two, which consisted largely of discussions about current affairs, topics supposedly intended to “broaden the mind”. This was under the control of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA), which in turn was shaped by people from the WEA.

Within the industrial release courses for apprentices in FE from the 1950s to the 1980s, liberal education took the form of General Studies, i.e. an hour once a day, or a couple of hours per week. There were guidelines for content, but nothing strict was laid down. It could be very free-flowing. Often it developed as discussion of social issues, something in the media, or a philosophical discussion. I also did activities aimed at developing students’ capacity for logical thinking or reasoning, because they seemed to want and enjoy this. Despite many problems, General Studies was often reasonably successful, and serious discussion did take place, especially if you as a lecturer came from a background which enabled you to connect with the students.

Liberal Studies was pushed out, but some lecturers like myself have continued to devise ways to introduce what we would see as valid material into the curricular elements which have succeeded it. The most recent such element is called Functional Skills. Of course this is very much more restricted than Liberal Studies, and most of the people teaching it have had little or no chance to become aware of the history which lies behind it, and therefore do not consciously contest the basic skills ethos which dominates it.

PLEBS

Q: What historical experiences should we look to in relation to independent working-class education?

A: For me the Plebs League was unique, and the most valid model of practice that we have.

There have been other examples which anyone trying to rebuild that tradition can learn from. One was the Scottish Labour College. Another was the SPD set-up in Germany, which included a trade union school, a WEA-style programme — with singing clubs, cycling clubs, etc — and the party school founded in 1906 in which Rosa Luxemburg taught. Another example was Brookwood College in New York State — where people around A. J. Muste tried to take on AFL domination and were eventually shut down by them.

But to my knowledge the Ruskin strike and Plebs League are the only example of workers themselves opposing the educational arm of the ruling class — in their case, Oxford

Continues on page 10

Ruskin College

Ruskin College was established by American philanthropists in 1899 for working-class men who lacked formal education.

In 1909 a group of students committed to Marxism and/or a better education at Ruskin, went on strike for their own educational goals and in defence of their Principal who had been sacked.

Students and ex-students at Ruskin had already established the Plebs League, which stood for independent working-class education.

Ruskin strikers set up the Central Labour College, which would work closely with the Plebs League.

A long article by Colin Waugh on these events can be found at www.post16educator.org.uk.

From page 9

University in alliance with the WEA — directly in the way that they did.

Some of the initiatives which people tend to connect with working-class self-education were probably not much good. For instance, on the basis of the one in Turin, Gramsci criticised the Popular Universities, which existed in many parts of Europe including pre-revolutionary Russia, essentially on the grounds that they offered workers a substandard curriculum made up of dumbed-down fragments. He maintained that workers entered them with a genuine appetite for education but, because big-name philosophers like Benedetto Croce refused to become involved, they were, in his view, dominated and rendered worthless by a positivist ideology.

To assess such initiatives we need an independent conception of what education aimed at activists is for, and a model of how it can be conducted. For me such a conception would focus on workers trying to inform themselves about what really happened on occasions in the past when “the instrumental classes” — i.e. industrial workers but also pre-industrial artisans, peasants, etc — have taken action collectively for themselves, including about the strategies that they created and the ideas that went with this.

And this model needs to be centred on “reciprocal” or “mutual” education between, on the one hand, people who have undergone mainstream higher education and have attached themselves seriously to the socialist and working-class movement, and, on the other, working-class activists, who have often been autodidacts.

This kind of educational exchange is something Gramsci wrote about. Eventually he arrived at the idea that those two groups of people could come together and work on a project of educating wider layers of people both within and beyond the core industrial working-class. They would be simultaneously educating one another, and connecting with peasants, artisans and impoverished intellectuals who, in the Italy of his day, would otherwise be mobilised by the fascists. I think that, like the activities of the Ruskin strikers, this model has a lot to tell us about what we should try to do now and in the future.

REBEL

Q: Do you think there is any scope for students in higher education today to “rebel” against the kind of education they get?

A: When I was at Sussex University in the early 1960s the education I received looked superficially quite innovative, but the more I reflect on it, the more conservative I think it was. I did rebel against it at the time, and I did come from a background that should have equipped me to do that effectively, in that both my parents were autodidacts, and my father became a socialist by conviction while serving in World War One.

But, as with Liberal Studies, I think I would have been much better able to formulate a coherent critique of the curriculum at Sussex if I had known about the tradition of working-class self-education. So I think that rebuilding the IWCE tradition could play a big part in helping present-day university students who are questioning the value of their courses to think their way through to valid alternatives.

Q: What else do we need to think about when talking about IWCE today?

A: I think it’s not catastrophist to say that all three sectors of state-provided post-compulsory education — FE, HE and adult education — are undergoing a crisis in which they are very close to becoming dysfunctional. But every attempt to resist this from below is hampered by the lack of a positive, concrete alternative.

With regard to FE, for example, the attempt to propose alternatives often starts from a crudified anti-vocationalism. But you can’t talk to young working-class people if you don’t relate to their need or desire to work and earn a wage and therefore to get on a course which they think might help them do that — especially at a time when life has been made so difficult for young people. If we had a vibrant IWCE system, or at least a reasonably high profile attempt to build one, a model for such an alternative would be much more readily available than it is now. But at the same time, any attempt to rebuild IWCE in isolation from struggles to defend and rebuild the state-provided system is also likely to fail. So there needs to be a constant and dialectical exchange between these two areas of activity.

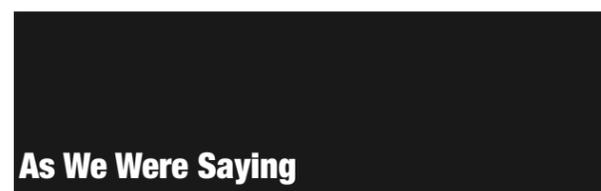
Q: And what kind of projects now?

A: The project which we have developed from the unexpected level of interest generated by the pamphlet on the Ruskin strike which I put out in 2009 has had some success in drawing together a constituency of people who are interested in these concepts and historical experiences. It has held meetings in Sheffield, at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, at Northern College and in London, and I have spoken about the Plebs League to a range of audiences.

Just explaining the background to the strike and giving a narrative of what the Ruskin students did seems to inspire people.

The trap of “left-wing” relativism

Saddam Hussein’s “Victory Arch”. For the politically-correct, there are no objective standards, either in aesthetics or in politics.



As We Were Saying

This article from *Solidarity’s* forerunner, *Socialist Organiser* (11 June 1991), criticises “political correctness”, focusing on art and culture, from the point of view of the Marxist left, (as opposed to right-wing prejudice). Jim Denham argues here in favour of free speech and objective standards in aesthetics, in a still-pertinent debate.

A number of colleges and universities in the US have begun adopting PC codes, supposedly intended to curb behaviour and/or language that might give offence to racial minorities, women, gays and lesbians.

Some of this is quite reasonable and no-one but a bigot could object. But quite a bit is downright silly, and some of it is an affront to any conception of free speech.

The University of Connecticut, for instance, has prohibited “inappropriately directed laughter”. The *New York Times* has adopted a “style book” that requires the use of the term “adult male” in place of “man”. The word “burly” is also on the PC banned list.

I tried the “burly” on my boss, a committed feminist and anti-racist. What images and implications did the word conjure up? “Male”, “big”, maybe (but not necessarily) “stupid”. The PC movement has banned “burly” because it supposedly gives a negative image of black men.

As my boss pointed out (when I explained the point of the exercise to her), that argument only makes sense if you are pre-disposed to the assumption that all black men (sorry, males) are big and stupid.

But linguistic Stalinism is only one manifestation of the PC: it comes as part of a package deal that involves extending (or rather, reducing) multi-culturalism to an absolute “relativism”. According to this view, there is no such thing as objective “knowledge”, “facts” do not exist; philosophically “reality” is a complete illusion. One culture, philosophy, scientific theory, concept of history, or whatever, is as good as another. It’s all subjective, a matter of opinion.

But here we come to the central contradiction of PC/relativism: instead of applying their own laissez-faire approach to themselves (as well as everyone else) they proclaim it to be the only acceptable point of view, and set about purging reading lists, limiting free speech and hounding “incorrect” academics.

A special target are “DWEMs” — Dead White European Males. These include Plato, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Newton and (presumably) Marx. The object seems to be the complete repudiation of the entire Western cultural tradition (tainted as it is with racism, sexism, etc) in favour of more “Politically Correct” alternatives.

In particular, mighty efforts are being made to “prove” that Western civilisation has its origin not in the Greeks but in black African sources. Similarly the science of Newton

(and Einstein) is rejected in favour of “ethno-mathematics” and “feminist science”.

Now, it is certainly not my intention here to deny that mainstream education and culture has always downplayed the contributions of women and black people. In particular, the superiority of early Asian civilisation over European ones has been consistently ignored by most Western historians. And who knows what unrecorded contributions to culture and science were made in Africa over the centuries?

But that cannot detract from the fact (sorry to have to insist on prosaic old “facts”) that the highest achievements of art, literature, science, history and philosophy that we have on record tend to be the work of “DWEM”s. They are (or should be) everyone’s birthright.

To reject mainstream European culture because of racist, sexist societies that produced it, is to deny the working class and the oppressed their opportunity to arm themselves ideologically for the battle for a new, better society.

VICTIMS

Ironically, the chief victims of the PC movement are black students. According to the Marxist historian of slavery, Eugene Genovese, “we have transformed our colleges from places of higher learning into places for the technical training of poorly prepared young men and women who need a degree to get a job in a college-crazy society”.

Meanwhile, young black people are ghettoised into Afro-American studies and their educational achievements devalued accordingly.

The PC relativists no doubt disdain such formal categories as “left” and “right” but my guess is that they would not object too strongly to being called “left wing”. In fact they are profoundly reactionary.

The exiled Iraqi architect Samir al-Khalil recently published a book (*The Monument*) which examines the role of art and architecture in Saddam’s military dictatorship. Khalil is especially scathing about Robert Venturi, the “post-modern” architect presently in the news because of his National Gallery extension.

Venturi was one of many Western architects who tried to make money from Saddam’s huge programme of grotesque public works, climaxing in the infamous “Victory Arch” based on giant replicas of Saddam’s own arms holding sabres. Khalil accuses Venturi of something more than simple greed and opportunism: his artistic prostitution is the direct result of his relativism.

I didn’t follow this line of argument at first, but then it fell into place. For the likes of Venturi, Saddam’s regime and the requirements it places upon arts and culture is just as acceptable as any other commission. You want grotesque, militaristic kitsch? You’ve got it! For Venturi there are no objective standards, either in aesthetics or in politics.

This is a particularly extreme example of “relativism”, and it would obviously be unfair to bracket all the PC movement adherents together with this particular charlatan.

But they are linked by a common philosophical approach, and it’s one that Marxists should fight tooth and nail.

Jobs massacre at Remploy

By Darren Bedford

Remploy workers face a further wave of attacks as bosses plan to close an initial 36 factories and privatise a further 18, with a view to closure. Nearly 2,000 workers face compulsory redundancy.

The closures include the effective abolition of all Remploy employment in Wales, with just two of nine factories escaping the chop.

The move comes after the publication of a government-commissioned review into disabled workers' employment conducted by Liz Sayce, the director of Disability Rights UK, which argued that the government

should invest more into supporting individuals rather than subsidising protected employment. The report recommends redirecting money to the Access to Work fund, whose average spend per person is less than £3,000 and which has itself seen significant cuts. Sayce claims she wants to see loss-making factories turned round, but is clear that business and profit – not disabled workers' needs – are the key starting point: "I think it is really important that those factories should be given a chance to show if they can be viable. I really think there should be good business support, and if somebody has got a good idea for how to turn something



around and make a success of it, really go for it, good luck, and I really hope that works."

Although Tory welfare minister Iain Duncan

Smith has called protected employment "Victorian-era segregation", the government's plan for hiving off of welfare provision from government-run ini-

tiatives into the unaccountable charity sector (which is also seeing its public funding slashed) is the really "Victorian" aspect in the picture. It reduced disabled workers to victims who must rely on philanthropy for support rather than social provision to support them in leading independent lives.

Remploy was founded by the post-war Labour government in 1945 to offer protected employment for disabled workers. Remploy workers have faced a number of attacks, most focusing on factory closures, over the past period.

Phil Davies, GMB national secretary for Remploy, said "This decision to sack 1,752 people in 36

Remploy factories across the country is one of the worst decision that this discredited coalition government has taken since coming to office."

Leading union activist Les Woodward said: "Angry is too small a word. It's all part of the government cuts agenda. It's got nothing to do with looking after disabled people, there's no rhyme or reason to it. There are 54 Remploy factories employing 2,000 disabled people. All that is going to come out of this is that 2,000 disabled people are going to be added to the unemployment figures."

Remploy shop stewards will meet on 26 and 27 March to discuss their fightback.

Sheffield Unison: almost unleashed

By a Unison activist

The "Unison Unleashed" rank-and-file caucus in the Sheffield local government branch of the public sector union Unison has narrowly missed out on unseating the existing bureaucratic leadership of the branch in the branch's first election in two years.

The existing branch chair, John Mordecai, was re-elected, but by only 410 votes to Unleashed's 378 for that position. Similarly, for the Branch Communications Officer position there were just 100 votes in it, though Unleashed ran a brand new activist.

The branch has been

run by Unison's regional office due to the local bureaucracy's incompetence. It has not held an AGM, or elections, since 2010. Unison Unleashed was formed to fight for greater democracy and rank-and-file control in the branch, as well as to provide a strategy for fight savage local government cuts (which the existing branch leadership had so spectacularly failed to do, and indeed had blocked).

The members clearly responded to this.

Unleashed will continue to campaign, and this positive result will inevitably unsettle the right-wing leadership and provide more avenues for movement.

Support Thomson Reuters cleaners: demonstrate on 16 March!

Cleaning workers working for Thomson Reuters will demonstrate to demand living wages at their City of London offices on Friday 16 March, and at their Canary Wharf building on Tuesday 20 March.

The first protest will take place at 5pm at the Thomson Reuters building, 33 Aldgate High Street, London EC3N 1DL.

The workers, who are members of the Industrial Workers of the World, also accuse Thomson Reuters bosses of bullying, harassment and refusing to negotiate over pay and conditions.

London Troublemakers' Group

How can we organise to win power in our workplaces and our unions? Come and meet other rank-and-file trade union activists to discuss strategies for fighting back at work – and winning. We'll be using *Labor Notes' Troublemaker's Handbook* and will be joined by *Labor Notes* co-founder Kim Moody. This is our first meeting, and we hope to develop an ongoing programme of workshops and training. Anyone interested in worker organising, from any trade union, is welcome to attend.



Wednesday 28 March, 7-9:30pm, upstairs at the Exmouth Arms (Starcross Street, nr. Euston)

For more information, contact skillz_999@hotmail.com or ring 07961040618

Attacks ahead in lecturers' union

By a UCU activist

Sally Hunt, the right-wing incumbent, has been re-elected general secretary of the University and College Union.

She won 73% of the vote against Mark Campbell,

the candidate of the Socialist Workers' Party-led "UCU Left".

Hunt's leadership so far has been characterised by witch-hunts against the left and an eagerness to roll over on industrial issues such as pensions and pay.

Her post-election address to members, Hunt announced plans for a "review" into the union's structures.

A review conducted by a conservative bureaucracy can only end badly; rank-and-file UCU activists should fight it.

WHAT IS CAPITALISM? CAN IT LAST?

Ideas for Freedom 2012 — a weekend of socialist discussion and debate hosted by Workers' Liberty

Friday 29 June-Sunday 1 July Highgate Newtown Community Centre, Archway, North London

Ideas for Freedom combines a serious approach to Marxist ideas with a commitment to activism in the workers', student, feminist and other movements, emphasising accessibility, mutual education and free debate. This year's event will focus on how to understand what capitalism is and what kind of anti-capitalist politics are necessary to overthrow it. Sessions include:

- How do we make socialism a force again?
- Understanding the new anti-capitalism
- What's wrong with conspiracy theories?
- The NHS we had, the one we have and the one we want
- Why and how to read Marx's Capital
- The economics of the Eurozone crisis
- In the Diamond Jubilee year: 1649, when British revolutionaries established a republic
- Friday night: celebrating the class struggles of 1972, with film footage and speakers who took part

Weekend tickets bought before the end of April are £22 waged, £14 low-waged/HE students, £6 unwaged/FE and school students. Day tickets also available. Send a cheque to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, SE1 3DG or pay online at www.workersliberty.org/ideas

T&Cs not for sale!

By Darren Bedford

Members of the tube union RMT will consider an offer from London Underground Limited on Olympics working, which includes a £350 lump-sum bonus.

However, it also involves some changes to working agreements which could, for example, see some workers deployed to any station on the network at next to no notice.

Workers' Liberty members working on the tube will be arguing that working conditions and agreements are not for sale at any price. Meanwhile, the union is balloting members at TfL and TubeLines over Olympics working.

More: workersliberty.org/twblog

Packaging workers locked out

By Stewart Ward

Bosses at the Transfoods food packaging plant in Birkenhead, near Liverpool, have joined employers at the Mayr-Melnhof Packaging plant in Bootle in locking out hundreds of workers after employees' protests against redundancies.

Just 38 days after new management took over the factory, workers were told that work would be moving to a site in Bodmin, Cornwall. The plant was summarily closed and workers found themselves locked out. Unite, the workers' union, had agreed a redundancy package but it now looks as if bosses will renege on that agreement and pay the 218 workers likely to lose their jobs only the statutory minimum.

Locked-out workers demonstrated at the plant on Tuesday 13 March.

Unite officer Franny Joyce said: "The workers have been treated with contempt by Tulip, which is the UK arm of Danish Crown and took over the plant last December.

"After just 38 days of ownership, they announced the closure of this site and last Monday they locked out the employees and boarded up the plant."

If 2011 was the year of the use of mass sackings to undermine workers' organisation, 2012 may be seeing the return of the lock-out.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Turkey's role in Syria

By Rhodri Evans

The biggest influence in the outcome in Syria, if the Assad tyranny falls, is likely to be Turkey.

Turkey has a 910-kilometre common border with Syria, and an estimated 11,000 Syrian refugees from the recent repression, including armed groups of the "Free Syrian Army". It is also the biggest economic power in the region, with a GDP (2011) of \$798 billion, way ahead of Saudi Arabia (\$561 billion), Iran (\$451 billion), Israel (\$249 billion), Egypt (\$231 billion), or Iraq (\$108 billion).

Its 510,000-strong army is one of the big military powers in the region, though slightly smaller than Iran's armed forces (523,000).

With its application to join the European Union blocked for the foreseeable future, the Turkish government seems to have turned to establishing itself as the interlocutor of the region, balancing one connection against another.

PIVOT

It has projected itself as the pivot both for secularists and for Sunni Islamists; kept links both with the USA and Israel, on one hand, and Iran on the other.

In September 2011 Turkish prime minister Erdogan toured the North African countries of the "Arab spring". Despite the Islamist roots of his party, he pointedly distanced himself from local Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Ennahda in Tunisia.

"Turkey is a democratic, secular, and social state of law", he declared, presenting it as a model. "A secular state takes equal distance to all religious groups, including Muslims, Christians, Jews and atheists". He added: "This is not secularism in the Anglo-Saxon or Western sense; a person is not secular, the state is secular"; but that did not satisfy the local Islamists.

In Iraq, Turkey has openly backed the opposition Iraqiya party led by Iyad Allawi, which is also backed by the USA. Iraqiya is heavily based on Sunni Arab votes, though Allawi is a secular Shia. Turkey has cultivated good and lucrative relations with the secular-

Sunni rulers of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Turkey's alliances in Iran put it in conflict with Iran, which has openly supported the ruling Shi'a Dawa party of Nuri al-Maliki. And Turkey has also maintain its long-standing ties with the USA.

In September 2011 Turkey finalised terms for the siting of a US-designed NATO radar system on its territory. US officials were jubilant: "This is probably the biggest strategic decision between the United States and Turkey in the past 15 or 20 years". They explained that data from the radar system will be shared with Israel.

STRAINED

Turkey's traditional close ties with Israel have been strained.

Recently (26 February) Turkey began banning Israeli flights carrying "dangerous materials" (with "dangerous" defined so that this includes most Israeli cargo planes) from using its airspace. Yet the ties have not been broken. Israel-Turkey trade has continued to increase (about \$4 billion a year).

Turkey also, despite conflicts, keeps up its links with Iran. In February 2011 Turkey's president Abdullah Gul led a large delegation of 135 government officials and 100 businessmen on a visit to Iran, and declared, jointly with Iranian president Ahmedinejad, that he expected Iranian-Turkish trade to rise soon to \$30 billion a year (it is currently \$10 billion). Turkish prime minister Erdogan will visit Iran next month (April 2012).

Turkey's official statements on Syria have been guarded, limited to calls such as for access for humanitarian aid. Turkey's regional policy indicates a policy in Syria of trying to build a broad coalition, including but not controlled by the (Sunni-based Islamist) Muslim Brotherhood.

Independence from the Turkish government and its regional ambitions will be vital for any working-class or radical-democratic force hoping to make headway in Syria amidst the revolt against the dictatorship.

But to present that revolt as just a catspaw of "imperialism" is false.

Pensions fight: build for sustained action after 28 March!

The unions consulting their members on further action over public sector pensions will receive the results of their surveys, and take decisions, between 14 and 16 March.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), the National Union of Teachers (NUT), and the University and College Union (UCU) could strike on 28 March, along

with Welsh teachers' union UCAC and Scottish teachers' union EIS.

The fight in those unions now is to make 28 March the start of a programme of sustained industrial action

which includes rolling, selective and targeted strikes – supported by strike levies – as well as all-out one-day strikes.

• For more, see page 5.

The Afghan spiral

By Gerry Bates

According to the United Nations, 3,120 civilians were killed by US, British, other NATO, and Karzai government forces in Afghanistan between 2006 and the end of 2011.

A large chunk of those deaths are caused by aerial bombings — 187 in 2011.

Despite constant and increasingly hollow claims by US and NATO commanders that there is progress towards peace, the civilian deaths are not decreasing.

KILLINGS

The UN figure for civilian killings by pro-US forces has increased some years and decreased others, but in 2011 was almost twice what it was in 2006.

The figure for civilian deaths overall shows a steady increase.

The UN says that about

two-thirds of the civilian killings are the work of the Taliban. Although the UN's bias, and in a situation where hard facts are often difficult to pin down, is likely to be to minimise the responsibility of the US and its allies, and to maximise blame on the Taliban, the Taliban is known to be a clerical-fascistic force and to have ruled brutally in 1996-2001, so it is likely enough that the Taliban has killed most of the civilians.

RALLYING

The people of Afghanistan have not reacted by rallying to the US and its allies.

In 2001, Taliban rule in Kabul collapsed quickly. On the evidence, the Taliban was very unpopular in Kabul. However, even then the Taliban was probably not so unpopular in the countryside, where it was less aggressive in imposing its special version

of Islamic codes, and where broadly Islamist ideas had wide support.

Many people who dislike and fear the Taliban will be even more hostile to what they see as rule by an alien power or by the corrupt and incompetent local allies of that alien power.

DECADE

The nett effect of the decade of military intervention by the US and its allies has thus been not to finish off the Taliban, but to some degree to rebuild its support.

All these trends have been highlighted by recent events:

- The killing of 16 Afghan civilians on 11 March, by a US soldier gone berserk;
- The killing of six UK soldiers by a Taliban bomb on 6 March;
- The uproar (including the killing of two US soldiers by Afghan troops

they were working with) which followed Afghan refuse workers, on 22 February, discovering burned copies of the Quran at the US's Bagram base.

US government policy is to withdraw US troops from combat operations in 2014 (though the US will almost certainly try to keep some military foothold), and the UK government is looking to disentangle itself too.

Given the reality of the Taliban and the Karzai regime, US and UK withdrawal is unlikely to lead to peace, and may well trigger many horrors.

Only strong intervention by the labour movement in Pakistan, to undermine the base of the Taliban, can change that calculus decisively.

But the foreign troops are doing more harm than good, and making the probable sequels worse. The sooner they're gone the better, or at least the less-bad.