

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 279 20 March 2013 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

For a workers' government

**SWP: time to
rethink**
page 5

Join the fightback
**Join the
Socialist
Workers
Party**
if you agree with us get involved!



**The threat from
Golden Dawn**
pages 6-7

**The origins of the
'united front'**
pages 9-10



**SECTION 75: TORIES TRY TO
PRIVATISE BY BACK DOOR** **See**
page 3

**Public health,
not private
profit!**

**LOBBY: HOUSE OF LORDS,
TUESDAY 26TH MARCH**

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!

Contact us:

- 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

The editor (Cathy Nugent), 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

- Printed by Trinity Mirror

Get Solidarity every week!

- Trial sub, 6 issues £5
- 22 issues (six months). £18 waged
£9 unwaged
- 44 issues (year). £35 waged
£17 unwaged
- European rate: 28 euros (22 issues)
or 50 euros (44 issues)

Tick as appropriate above and send your money to:
20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG
Cheques (£) to "AWL".

Or make £ and euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub.

Name

Address

I enclose £



Anti-cuts councillors meet

By Tom Vickers

Around 60 activists and councillors met in Birmingham on 16 March to discuss the Councillors Against Cuts campaign.

The event had four sessions:

- Supporting unions and campaigns fighting against the cuts this year
- Defending Labour councillors fighting against the cuts from victimisation
- Winning the arguments over the coming years, building a united labour movement campaign to stop further cuts and to reverse those already enacted.

Each of these was accompanied by short statements for voting, which all passed. The level of the debate was good and focused on the role of the Labour Party, the affiliated unions, and where the campaign can go next.

Various speakers observed that the cuts haven't hit everyone yet. The question was asked: despite the overwhelming majority of councils passing on the cuts, where do we go from here as even tougher cuts come through?

The role of the unions has so far been contradictory.

On the one hand unions are helping to run local campaigns, but nationally their leaderships are advising union-backed councillors to vote for the cuts or failing to defend them, other than formally, when they face disciplinary procedures for voting against them.

PRESSURE

It was agreed that we should continue to put pressure on unions, especially those affiliated to Labour, to defend the councillors who have voted against cuts and to raise their opposition to councils voting through cuts budgets.

Josh Jones, a councillor from Birmingham (who abstained on his council's cuts budget) also highlighted the need for a strong campaign to push councillors into defying the whip and educating them politically on the importance of the fight against cuts.

Gary Wareing from Hull spoke about the importance of getting councillors who have defied the whip to

speak to meetings in their community, to local government union branches, and local Labour Parties.

Some activists thought it was highly likely councillors could be expelled, in which case they should just continue to act as Labour councillors regardless. Gary stressed that he would do this and he felt that, with enough support and a real fight being waged inside the Labour Party, it was possible to avoid expulsion from either the Labour Party and also, hopefully, the Labour group on the council.

The poisonous atmosphere facing many councillors was discussed. In Hull, portfolio holders flooded one CLP meeting to argue against the "Defend the Hull Three" motion. The leaders of the Labour group

on the council are clearly agitated. It was agreed that the councillors should continue to share their experiences and work with local campaigns. The conference also agreed on the importance of not splitting local anti-cuts campaigns by insisting they stand candidates against Labour.

EXCLUDE

These discussions immediately split campaigns and exclude not only Labour Party activists but anyone not persuaded of the case for running in elections.

Our campaigns should be built on organising direct action against the cuts and defending councillors who have voted against the whip. Within Labour Party selection contests, we should back candidates who pledge to vote against cuts.

We need to politicise both our local Labour Parties and anti-cuts campaigns to think about what we need from elected representatives.

- councillorsagainstcuts.org

"One Barnet" on trial

on will be cut even more severely than at present.

Her fears have received vindication in the last month as the Council has had to step in to bail out "Your Choice Barnet", the arms-length organisation set up to provide care and support services for disabled adults. YCB was supposed to make a surplus, a repugnant idea in itself! In fact, it has operated at a loss and now needs £1 million from the Council.

The management are trying to impose drastic cuts on the pay and conditions of the workers, and reduce service levels, in order to balance the books. YCB was set up under the auspices of One Barnet.

On Saturday 23 March we are holding our "Barnet Spring" march to protest against One Barnet and the cuts. Assemble: 11am, Finchley Central tube; march sets off at noon to Friern Barnet Community Library.

There is a bus available for those who prefer not to walk.

- More: barnetalliance.org

By Vicki Morris

"One Barnet", Barnet Tories' plan to privatise most of Barnet Council services (probably in two contracts worth up to £1 billion to Capita), is being scrutinised in the High Court this week.

Disabled resident Maria Nash has made an application for a Judicial Review. Day one on Tuesday 19 March involved her barrister, Nigel Giffin, outlining the lack of consultation of residents over the plan. Maria is also bringing her case because she worries that if One Barnet fails to deliver promised savings, council services she relies

Defend Don MacDonald

By Ed Whitby

On Saturday 16 February Michael (Don) MacDonald took part in the 1,500-strong anti-cuts march in Newcastle.

Don has been a key activist in organising this and other protests opposing the £100 million budget cut to services. He is a local resident and a youth worker, facing 100% cut to youth and play services.

At the end of the demonstration at the rally point in the city centre, the Council Leader Nick Forbes walked past and Don approached him to challenge him on what he thought about the cuts. Nick Forbes and his partner threatened to call the police saying they knew who Don was and where he worked. The incident lasted less than a minute, and Don was not angry or threatening.

Six hours later as Don was at home with his six year old son asleep in bed, the police came and arrested him under Section 4 of the Public Order Act,

and kept him in custody for four hours; a friend had to be contacted to look after Don's son.

The charge was reduced to Section 5 of public order act (causing alarm or distress). Don agreed to pay a fixed penalty fine as he wanted to get home to his young son.

Don as a youth worker doesn't believe he should have such a "crime" on his record, and has decided to contest the charge.

A campaign has been launched to demand the charge is dropped and that activists, residents and workers are not victimised for fighting the cuts or publicly criticising local councillors.

An open letter in support of Don has already been signed by many trade unionists and labour movement activists including John McDonnell MP, and RMT general secretary Bob Crow.

- defencecampaign.wordpress.com
- Online petition: bit.ly/Wy6xmR

Public health, not private profit!

By Gerry Bates

The government is continuing its attempts to formally privatise the National Health Service by stealth.

It was forced into a climb-down on implementing Section 75 of the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, which would have forced "commissioners" to open up every aspect of health-care provision to tender by private companies. But widespread opposition, including from Labour MPs, forced the government to redraft the law.

But the new version, due to come into force on 1 April, is described by the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign as "the same wrecking ideas spruced up, cowardly repackaged." Shadow Health Secretary Andy Burnham hailed the redrafting as a "U-turn", but the changes are cosmetic. The government's attempt to impose the law without any Parliamentary scrutiny is also, even by the government's low standards, deeply undemocratic.

The Save Lewisham Hospital campaign and Unite are organising a lobby of Parliament at 12pm on Tuesday 26 March. The

Marching to stop the cuts at Whittington Hospital, north London, 16 March

lobby follows the Lewisham campaign's successful "Born in Lewisham" event on Saturday 16 March.

The day also saw thousands of people march in north London against massive cuts at Whittington Hospital in Archway. The Whittington faces reduced maternity services, ward closures, fewer beds for the elderly, 570 job cuts, and no on-site accommodation for nursing staff. Recent months have also seen action against hospital cuts and closures in Ealing, west London, and Bolton in Lancashire.

A coalition of campaigning groups has called a London-wide demonstration for Saturday 18 May. Each local campaign

must be fought on its own terms and on the basis of clear, winnable demands, as well as linking up across cities and regionally.

Unions should call a national demonstration in defence of public healthcare, which opposes the Coalition's attacks and demands that Labour reverses them if it wins the next election.

Activists from local Labour Parties and unions will attend a meeting called by the NHS Unity Network on Saturday 23 March at the headquarters of Unite to discuss how the fight for public healthcare and against PFI can be taken up inside the labour movement.

Demanding Labour fights for the NHS does not mean waiting until 2015 or

having blind faith that the Labour Party, run by people just as committed to cuts as the Tories and Lib Dems (only "slower" and "shallower" cuts), will undo the damage.

It means letting the Labour Party, which retains the affiliation of the biggest trade unions, know that its government will face industrial and civil direct action if it does not challenge the Tory agenda.

- savelewishamhospital.com (Save Lewisham Hospital campaign)
- dwhc.org.uk (Defend the Whittington Hospital Coalition)
- NHS Unity Network meeting: on.fb.me/15YfqXs

Labour backs up Tory unpaid labour scheme

By Gerry Bates

Labour MPs helped get the coalition off the hook over the "workfare" scandal that saw three appeal court judges rule that the work-for-free-or-lose-your-benefits schemes to which over 200,000 unemployed workers have been subjected are unlawful.

The February ruling meant that the government could have had to pay £130 million in benefits rebates to up to 231,000 people, but a new law, rushed through Parliament on Tuesday 19 March, overturns the appeal court's decision and prevents similar appeals

being made in future, in order to "protect the national economy".

Most Labour MPs abstained in the vote on the law (57 voted against). The Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, Liam Byrne, has attacked government "incompetence" over workfare, but not opposed the schemes on principle.

Boycott Workfare, the grassroots direct action network whose regular high-street demonstrations have shamed some firms into pulling out of the schemes, called the move "unbelievably disgusting".

- More: boycottworkfare.org.uk

Reporting rape and police lies

By Charlotte Zalens

"Police Sapphire teams strongly encourage women to drop rape cases... Police failed to believe victims", reported the BBC news at the end of February.

The report was linked to the case of a woman who reported a rape to Southwark police but was encouraged to drop the charges, the man later went on to murder his two children.

A truly shocking case, but the many other times rape cases get dropped and police fail to believe victims do not make it into the mainstream news.

It is a reality which won't be unfamiliar to many women who have experienced reporting rape cases to the police, or who have supported those who have. It is well documented that only about a third of reported rape cases are considered by the Crown Prosecution Service, only 20% make it to court and of only 6% of all reported cases end in a guilty verdict.

These statistics have been the subject of feminist attention for a long time.

In the Southwark case the media concentrated on the second crime, even though as we know the odds were against the rape case getting to court anyway. It was as if there were no other issues involved apart from police efficiency.

However, the case also raised some worrying trends in police attitudes to detection. The Independent Police Complaints Commission looking into the case claimed that "Southwark Sapphire unit in south London 'encouraged' victims to withdraw allegations to boost detection rates".

The implied scenario is that the police select the cases most likely to get to court and get a conviction in a bid to apparently improve detection statistics.

Already women face probing and unnecessary

questions at all stages of the process; a victim-blaming culture means women are questioned on their clothing, how much they had to drink, their sexuality, behaviour, past relationships and many other things.

As socialists we have many reasons to distrust the bourgeois courts, and given the accounts of the experience many women reporting rape have had at the hands of the police, it is understandable why many choose not to report it. Reporting rape to the police should always be the choice of the person involved. However we can't stand aside from the issues involved here. We should have something to say. We recognise that the treatment of rape cases in the criminal justice system affects those who have suffered from rape and reflect broader issues.

The questions that have been put to complainants in rape cases reflect a very deeply ingrained vein of discrimination, not only against women but of class, race and sexuality.

I have been unable to find data about rape broken down by ethnicity but the CPS data on violence against women shows that of domestic violence cases that made it to court 92.7% of these involved white women, with 7.1% being Black and Minority Ethnic women.

We do know that when women have spoken out about their experience about police attitudes to rape reports they say that if they didn't fit the category of a white, middle class woman their claims are dismissed.

• Editor's note. The CPS have recently produced a report that shows false allegations of rape are very rare. Another already well-known but under-reported reality.

The CPS are now indicating that they will become more robust at prosecuting rape cases. But will they? We welcome discussion on this issue.

Gove's got to go

By an East London teacher

On Wednesday 13 March, NUT members marched to the Department for Education to tell Gove he's "got to go".

Around 600 education workers battled blizzards to be there and were joined by members of PCS who left their department offices in solidarity.

Teachers gathered to protest against the privatisation of the education system, the fixing of exam results, the proposed changes to the curriculum and attacks on our terms and conditions.

These changes are felt as cynical attacks on teachers and the comprehensive state education system so many of us are proud to work in.

Chants of "Gove must go" progressed into a vocal demand for strike action. While the demonstration brought people together from across London to make our voices heard, it is not one man we are fighting but a whole ideology. Isolated protest actions that will not win what we want.

We need a fast moving campaign of activities that has a serious programme of escalating industrial action at its centre.

Make solidarity on May Day



Would you like to build support for your dispute or campaign? Why not send a message to trade union and socialist activists by placing a May Day message in *Solidarity*? On Wednesday 1 May we will be publishing the May Day issue of our paper.

We hope you would like to see your trade union logo and message printed there, amongst those of a variety of other trade union and campaigning organisations.

Our prices and instructions:

2 columns — £15 (78mm x 84 mm, 10-30 words)

3 columns — £25 (78mm x 174mm, 50-70 words)

Please do not send us artwork but a copy of your logo or graphic you would like to use (preferably electronically, or camera-ready) and the text of your greetings/message. The deadline for this issue is Monday 29 April.

The funds will go directly to the Workers' Liberty/*Solidarity* fund appeal. We want to raise money to expand our activities and publish new books in 2013.

Help us raise £15,000 by May Day 2013. You can contribute in the following ways:

- Taking out a monthly standing order using the form below or at www.workersliberty.org/resources. Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.

- Making a donation by cheque, payable to "AWL", or donating online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

- Organising a fundraising event.

- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.

- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL. More information: 07796 690874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.



Total raised so far: £8,266

We raised £165 this week from sales of literature (thanks to Sheffield AWL) and an anonymous donation.

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

Don't exaggerate the UKIP threat

Dave Osler



British parliamentary contests are described as first past the post for a reason, and the reason is that coming second does not get you a seat at Westminster.

Yet somehow UKIP is basking in a spectacular degree of favourable publicity through the simple expedient of losing the Eastleigh by-election.

One factor at work is that many rightwing pundits have a vested interest in bigging up UKIP's "triumph" — if one wishes to call it that — by way of a weapon in what they see as a war to recapture the Conservative Party for Conservatism.

The parallel that immediately springs to mind is Roy Jenkin's not-quite-good-enough campaign in Warrington in 1981, likewise hyped up by commentators determined to see Labour step back from its radicalism of the period.

If I were Nigel Farage, I wouldn't find the analogy too comforting. After all, 32 years ago the Gang of Four were boasting that the SDP would "break the mould"; in the event, the show was all over just seven years later.

While the UKIP leader is similarly predicting an earthquake at the next general election, all we have seen so far is a tremor that objectively comes in towards the lower reaches of the Richter Scale. UKIP remains an MP-free zone, and there is no guarantee that it will supersede this status in 2015.

Remember that even though the space between liberalism and the place where authoritarian imperialist rightism gives way to overt fascism is vast, Tory hegemony within it has not been subject to any sustained challenge since the Conservative Party emerged in modern form around 180 years ago. For UKIP to carve out a permanent niche in this territory would represent an unprecedented achievement.

That said, just because something has never been done before does not mean it cannot be done. Where once David Cameron was able casually to dismiss UKIP as "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists", this collection of misfits, oddballs and space cadets has now shown itself a more attractive

proposition to Hampshire voters than the Tories.

And while the Liberal Democrats did win in Eastleigh, Nick Clegg will be well aware that UKIP regularly place third in nationwide opinion polls, ahead of his party. Even Ed Miliband must be mindful that it has shown itself able to secure backing from a layer of former Labour supporters.

In many ways, UKIP is a classic rightwing populist project, articulating the anger of "the people" and pitting it against an out of touch "elite", without specifying the class composition of either set of parameters. All that is missing is a charismatic leader, with Farage selling himself on his regular blokeishness rather than outstanding oratorical skills.

Untainted by direct fascist association, and seemingly sincere in its determination to forestall far-right entryism, it has the capacity to act as a focal point for nationalist sentiment.

Precisely because it is constitutionally opposed to racial discrimination, and because it has fielded black and Asian electoral candidates, its opposition to immigration can be passed off as respectable.

Its platform does have undeniable appeal to a fair old chunk of the electorate, as the 2.7 million votes it picked up in the 2004 Euro attest, or even its 900,000 tally in the 2010, surely illustrates. None of the myriad recent electoral challenges to Labour have even been able to dream of getting into such territory.

In short, UKIP may pick up a handful of seats in 2015, or it may not. Either way, the mainstream party leaders would be foolish to start basing entire manifestoes on a perceived threat that isn't there.

Can't place demands on M5S

Letters



I was puzzled, and indeed rather shocked, by Hugh Edwards' concluding paragraphs in his article "What is the 5 Star Movement" (*Solidarity* 277, 6 March) in which Hugh argues: "M5S has to widen its demands, political, economic and social".

This makes the assumption that M5S is broadly analogous to a social democratic formation or perhaps a heavily bureaucratised trade union; in short, a body rooted in the workers' movement on which we can place demands either in the hope of pushing it further left or, perhaps, in order to expose its leaders in the eyes of their own rank and file.

In the Italian context this tactic might be legitimate in relation to the CGIL, Rivoluzione Civile, SEL and, perhaps, even to the PD. M5S is not such a phenomenon.

Indeed Martin Thomas in "Another new mood" (*Solidarity* 277) brackets it with the reactionary Islamists arguing "demagogic hyping-up of miscellaneous 'new moods of anger' — Hamas, Hezbollah, Muslim Brotherhood, Grillo, you name it — is no service to working-class politics".

The dominance of M5S's two leading figures, millionaire comedian Beppe Grillo and the rather mysterious businessman Gianroberto Casaleggio, who have been accused by the Italian news magazine *Espresso* of having links with off shore companies in the manner of Berlusconi and neither of whom are remotely left wing, make a nonsense of M5S's horizontalist pretensions.

M5S has exploited a climate in which other more horizontalist social media-based phenomena — such as Popolo Viola and the campaigns against nuclear power and water privati-

sation and for rather more leftwing mayors in Milan, Naples and Palermo in May-June 2011 — did pull a large section of the younger generation, particularly in the large urban centres, to the left and counteract years of conditioning by Berlusconi's television channels.

In contrast, Grillo only uses the web in a top down fashion, using his blog to issue virtual fatwas. He is not interested in negative feedback and ignored the clamour on the net for M5S to make a deal with the PD on a programmatic basis around Bersani's "eight points" all of which are in M5S's own programme and most of which are supportable, particularly the points about dealing with the "conflict of interests" (Berlusconi's combination of a media monopoly with a major political role) and the need for a new, more serious, anti-corruption law.

Obviously the left needs to appeal to sections of M5S's electorate, particularly workers, students and the unemployed, and it may well be that some of Grillo's parliamentarians will break with him — the rebellion of about a dozen, mainly Sicilian and Southern, M5S senators who refused to take a neutral stance when faced with a stark choice between the former anti-Mafia magistrate Pietro Grasso and Berlusconi's former Justice Minister Renato Schifani (a Sicilian who has on occasions been the object of judicial investigations into alleged Mafia connections) for the Presidency of the Senate is a hopeful sign. Grillo has talked about expelling them but seems to retreating from doing so.

However, to engage with M5S in the way Hugh suggests reminds me of the KPD at its very worst — episodes like the Schlageter line, the Berlin transport strike or the "red" referendum against the Social Democratic government of Prussia in 1932. "After Grillo, us" is not the way to go.

Toby Abse, south London

How not to argue

Some ridiculous things have been said during what passes for debate inside the now much-degraded and damaged Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

For example, in their drive to crush internal opponents, the leadership denounced them as “feminists”. The opposition have, apparently, been “contaminated” with ideas from the movement around them, including nasty feminism.

From a distance, the AWL has watched supporters of the SWP Central Committee argue something along the lines of: “I used to be a feminist, but then I realised the SWP was right, and what we really need is a socialist revolution”. How stupid is that? As stupid as, say, “I used to be a militant trade unionist, but I’ve junked all that because I realised the SWP was right, and what we really need is a socialist revolution”. On the face of it, the SWP’s world is a place where two ideas can’t complement or supplement each other.

But it is not quite as simple as that. These are political people who haven’t chosen to fight against their opponents’ “feminism” for no reason. The demonisation of feminism is an attempt to answer — or at least to have something to say back against — the charge facing the leadership, that they have not taken seriously an allegation of rape made by a young woman against one of their leaders. “Object to that, do you? You nasty little feminists, standing outside our tradition, putting yourself outside our ranks...”

The SWP leaders’ attempt to kick into the long grass an inconvenient allegation of rape is just another example — albeit of an unusual type — of the SWP subordinating political principle (or indeed human decency) to the practical organisational needs of their party.

The shoddiness, and crudeness, of the leaders’ drive against their opponents is a measure of the weakness of their case. It is also an indication of a habitual distrust of opposition by a bureaucratic regime with a complete disdain for accountability. It also underlines the point we’ve made countless times to the SWP over decades: an organisation built in this bureaucratic way will, in the end, self-destruct; certainly it has the wrong specifications to do the job of fighting for socialism.

Bureaucratic administration of the machine, above political principle, runs counter to what revolutionary socialists are about — winning the battle of ideas. Members of left groups must be able to learn to think and argue freely, test ideas, speak our minds. If we are constrained by petty rules, intimidated into silence, battered, trained to subordinate principles to organisational needs, we undermine our ability to act as effective socialists inside the workers’ movement.

Take another shameful example of how not to argue — the SWP’s disputes committee (which dealt with the rape allegation) wrote a report to the their January conference the fol-

“We used to be feminists, but now we only serve a party-sanctioned idea of the socialist revolution”...

lowing paragraph:

“We ... thought it was important to be clear that the disputes committee doesn’t exist to police bourgeois morality, so we agreed that issues that weren’t relevant to us were whether the comrade was monogamous, whether they were having an affair [and] the age differences in their relationship, because as revolutionaries we didn’t consider that should be our remit to consider issues such as those.”

Buried in the report here is an oblique reference to a central issue: an SWP leader, close to 50 years of age, had been accused of rape by a party member who, it turns out, was of school age. Seemingly everywhere we turn — the Liberal Democrats, the Savile scandal, Chetham’s School of Music in Manchester — there are older men using positions of authority and power to abuse women. According to the SWP machine, to believe this abuse of power is disturbing and wrong is “bourgeois”.

If it is, good for the bourgeoisie! The left can probably learn from the best practice of bourgeois institutions which have rules and structures in place to obstruct opportunistic and predatory sexual behaviour.

Dismissing “bourgeois morality” in this way is cynical, and evasive. It is demagoguery which aims to shut people up.

People in the SWP opposition have just been put through the SWP grinder. They have found themselves lied about and the victims of abuse and bureaucratic tricks. Maybe the shock might help them rethink the ways in which they themselves have behaved in the past. For instance, towards the AWL!

One example from last year — the SWP supported a motion to the student National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts conference which opposed war against Iran. The motion con-

tained no criticism of the regime, nor support for the struggles of workers, women, or students inside Iran. The AWL proposed an amendment to the motion that added a clause supporting democratic and working-class opposition to the Iranian regime. Our amendment did not alter the motion’s opposition to war and sanctions, and we made it plain in our speeches that we opposed a American, British, or Israeli attack on Iran.

We won the argument and the amendment was accepted by the conference. But the SWP then voted against the substantive motion, because, they said, the AWL supported a war against Iran and the inclusion of our amendment made the motion pro-war. This, despite the text, the speeches we’d made, and a headline in the issue of the paper we were selling at the conference which read: “Iran: no to war and sanctions”.

ORGANISATION BEFORE POLITICS

There are several issues here. One: the SWP actually supports Iran against the west but isn’t brave enough to say so openly for fear of losing potential recruits (organisation trumps political honesty and clarity).

Two: even if the SWP was right to support Iran against the west, it would be wrong to stop criticising its anti-working class government and supporting its working-class opponents.

Third: the SWP machine would be a lot less likely to get away with this sort of nonsense if the SWP students had, for example, thoroughly educated themselves in the Trotskyist tradition many of them now say they want to renew. And we don’t mean Cliff’s opinion of what Trotsky would have said if Trotsky had been as unprincipled as Cliff, but Trotsky himself, and others.

SWP students might do well to read Trotsky on the rise of German fascism and try to think about how that squares with the politics and practice of UAF; or Trotsky on the united front and think about the way SWP members behave in the unions; or Trotsky on Palestine and square that with what the SWP says on Israel-Palestine. Just because Trotsky said something doesn’t necessarily make it right, but SWP members and ex-SWP members whose education in Marxism has consisted in reading Marxist ideas of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and others as filtered through the work of Cliff, Harman, and Callinicos would do well to do some independent self-education and reading of the real thing.

Recent ex-SWPers have been part of a party that has, for example, regularly called AWL racists, Muslim haters, “Islamaphobes”. Why? Superficially, because we opposed boosting the conservative right-wing of the Muslim community (as the SWP did through its alliance with the Muslim Association of Britain in the Stop the War Coalition and Respect), because we advocate a two-states settlement in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and because we oppose the Muslim Brotherhood in places like Egypt.

The hatred generated towards us — regularly denouncing us as “Zionists” — has an organisational function, shoring up a sect and sealing young SWPers off from us.

It is impossible to deal rationally with people who simply assert that we hate Palestinians, or that we are “pro-imperialist”. But let’s suppose a two-states position does imply a reactionary attitude towards the Palestinians (and ignoring the fact that the majority of Palestinians themselves favour two states), then the linkage has to be *argued*, not simply asserted. Shouting “racists” across a room doesn’t make a case, it simply makes the person doing it look deranged, and prevents a rational exchange of views.

Those oppositionists now leaving the SWP have been on the receiving end of the same method. Hopefully they will abandon it in their own politics.

We want to discuss with others on the left, including the fragments of the SWP, because without such an open exchange of ideas it will be impossible to rejuvenate our movement and make Marxism a mass force again. We say that the movement needs to read, think, educate, and debate clearly, openly, and honestly. There is an opportunity to do that now.

Let’s call an end to politics which serve party machines.

The rank-and-file alternative

Many comrades leaving the SWP are students; but many are trade union activists, and as time passes, more will be.

Their break from the SWP is a chance to rethink the negative aspects of the SWP’s work in the labour movement, and think about how to do something better.

The SWP’s approach has been to create fronts such as Unite the Resistance and Right to Work, with no real structures or independent life, through which they can establish a relationship with some of the more left-wing union bureaucrats. Far from putting pressure on these bureaucrats from the left, the effect is to pull the SWP to the right and prevent it from making adequately sharp criticisms. At times SWP members on national executives have been sucked into siding with their union leadership (in the case of the CWU’s Jane Loftus even leaving the SWP as a result).

Despite the good work done by many SWP members in their workplaces and unions, the organisation is fundamentally a disorienting, disorganising force.

Fronts such as Unite the Resistance also serve to divide and weaken the broad anti-cuts movement. In Lambeth, for instance, the SWP repeatedly tried to split the Save Our

Services campaign and set up its own front, losing many members as a result.

The alternative is shown, in rudimentary form at least, by what is being done by left and rank-and-file activists in the National Union of Teachers (NUT) — who have created the Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC), a network of branches and school groups organising around the key issues facing teachers independently of and in opposition to the NUT’s “left” leadership. The SWP has stood aside from this new organisation and in part defended the NUT leaders against it.

At a time when working-class anger is running high but working-class confidence is low, there are no easy answers to how socialists can rebuild and renew the labour movement. But the question cannot even be thought about without a different approach from the SWP’s — one which focuses on rank-and-file organisation, develops unity in struggle and is militantly independent of all factions of the union bureaucracy.

We urge ex-SWP comrades to change course and work with the AWL and other socialist trade unionists to develop this approach.

Left and unions must u

By Theodora Polenta

Racism is a key component of Greece's three party coalition government. This was emphatically confirmed when last summer the Minister of Public Order, Nikos Dendias, launched a fierce attack in Parliament on "illegal immigrants".

He claimed that "an incredibly large number of immigrants are involved in serious crime". He forgot to say that the vast majority of "foreign immigrants" are EU citizens, not "illegal", and that the overall involvement of "Greeks" in crime has increased rapidly since 2010, due to widespread impoverishment.

Dendias promised to accelerate the construction of the fence in Evros (along the Greek-Turkish border) and strengthen Frontex (the EU's border management agency). As with his predecessors, he has prioritised construction of new refugee concentration camps which he has elegantly called "reception centres for illegal immigrants".

Upon becoming prime minister, one of Antonis Samaras's priorities has been taking away citizenship rights from children of immigrants and restricting political rights to a very small number of immigrants.

CITIZENSHIP

At the same time, the "Independent Greeks", and the neo-Nazi "Golden Dawn", submitted bills for the repeal of the laws which grant some immigrants citizenship.

Yet only 7,000 immigrant adults or minors have acquired Greek citizenship since 2010 when this law came in because of racist conditions and restrictions of the law.

Despite governmental assurances that Golden Dawn would be marginalised in Parliament, 41 MPs voted a Golden Dawn MP into the position of the seventh Vice President in Parliament, although Golden Dawn has just 18 MPs. The ultra-right MPs of New Democracy, essentially Greek Tories, must have been responsible.

From mid-July until late August 2012 there were more than 100 attacks on migrants, with serious injuries, and a handful of murders. It was an escalation of already serious racist violence (500 were seriously injured from January-June 2012). This violence has been complemented by increasing racist and fascist commentary in the media. Golden Dawn is welcome on all the TV channels. In supposedly objective journalism, the media promotes and advertises their ideas and actions.

The outbreak of racist violence in August followed the government-orchestrated police operation "Xenios Zeus." "Xenios Zeus" initiated a more authoritarian form of governing,

Golden Dawn in numbers

- **Vote in last election (17 June 2012):** 426,025 (6.92%)
- **MPs:** 18
- **Number of local offices:** 28
- **Current support (in an opinion poll conducted on 22 February 2013):** 12.3%.
- **Estimated support amongst the Athens police in the May and June 2012 elections:** 20-30%
- **Approval rating for the leader of Golden Dawn, Nikolaos Michaloliakos:** 15%

There is a poisonous interrelation between state racism against immigrants and the growth of the far right

going on the offensive against the left wing and coinciding with a re-introduction of the "theory of the two extremes" (where the far left is equivalent to the far right).

"Xenios Zeus" was conducted at a unique moment — when the economic and political crisis was dangerously out of hand, the capitalist oligarchy lacked any serious support in the population for its programme, and thus the only weapon left to the government was the disorientation and the division of workers. Immigrants were the perfect scapegoat.

"Xenios Zeus" rested on a particular ideological foundation. The "excuse" was not just "law and order", but many other fascist beliefs. Samaras, Dendias, and the media have backed up the "Xenios Zeus" project by calling for "reoccupation of our cities from foreign invaders" and saying "immigration is the bomb at the foundation of society, the state, and our culture."

The attack was also well coordinated. It started with immigrants, but quickly moved onto Syriza and the left.

"Xenios Zeus" began with the "cleaning" of central Athens and a few other cities, concentrating in Athens on arresting immigrants who collect the recyclables from the trash. They did not touch the tourist areas, which continued to be filled with "black slaves" in hotels and other tourism businesses.

Golden Dawn has run campaigns which have complemented the state's violence against immigrants. It started a noisy campaign against the so-called "dragon of Paros" (a Pakistani man accused of sexual assault) and passed quickly on to a campaign against the provisional detention of undocumented immigrants in the buildings of the Police Academy in Komotini. They mobilised around a similar issue in Corinth and ended with a "show of strength" demonstration at a "Spartan" monument in Thermopylae at the end of August.

In Parliament, the Interior Minister Stylianidis responded to the racist question of Golden Dawn MP Panayiotaros about the number of immigrant babies and toddlers that "occupy" places in free council run kindergartens. Stylianidis dutifully rushed to demand municipalities release data for such children, implying that priority should be given to Greek babies and toddlers!

More recent restrictions have been placed on citizenship law. To qualify for citizenship, children's parents must have been resident for eight years (up from five). They must also have successfully attended school for nine years (up from six). Children who acquire citizenship now have to choose between their Greek citizenship and that of their home country when they become adults. The same goes for adults applying for naturalisation. Adults now have to be resident for 10 years (up from seven) before applying for citizenship.

84 members of New Democracy tried to celebrate the return to the "law of blood" by submitting a Parliamentary amendment which denied the right of membership in the police and military academies to "allogeneic [genetically-different, transplanted] Greeks". The amendment had to be (temporarily) withdrawn after public and political outcry, especially after it was revealed that the idea had originated with Golden Dawn.

Dealing with racism must be an urgent priority for the left. Every neighbourhood needs anti-fascist and anti-racist committees that can confront Golden Dawn.

Immigrants are an integral part of the Greek working class, not a risk or threat. Either the left organises our fight in a united front to crush fascism or we will allow it to continue to grow with incalculable consequences.

Golden Dawn is not an ephemeral phenomenon. It is not going to disappear by wishful thinking or passive calls for democracy. Fascism, in all its forms across Europe, is fuelled by deep crises, the impoverishment of wide layers of society, and by the inability of the left to face up to the threat.

SYRIZA

Although the leadership of Syriza refer to the need for anti-fascist action in texts and leaflets, overall it has not taken any organised initiative on the formation of an anti-fascist front.

Syriza's anti-fascist actions have been initiated by Syriza's components (mainly the youth of factions within Syriza such as Synaspismos, Kokkino, DEA, Akoa, and Roza).

In Antarsya, a left-wing political coalition outside Syriza, it is mainly SEK, the Greek sister group of the British SWP, and OKDE Spartakos (the Greek section of the Fourth International) that make anti-fascist initiatives. But SEK does this in a sectarian way against other forces of the left. In some neighbourhoods and cities (such as Kallithea, Zografou, Thessaloniki, and Volos) anti-fascist initiatives have been created, mainly by left activists, including anarchists.

Emphasising physical or "military" confrontation against Golden Dawn squads is a political dead end. The fascists are not just a gang of thugs, but an obscurantist and barbaric movement, aiming at destroying the working-class movement, the left, and the unions.

On the other hand, we cannot effectively confront Golden Dawn by legalism and putting our faith in parliamentary democracy or allowing the police force to "do its job" — because that "job" is rounding up immigrants. Neither can we form "democratic fronts" with enlightened or progressive bourgeois politicians. So we should not downplay the necessity of confronting Golden Dawn thugs in the streets.

Syriza's proposals for "social welfare homes" that offer legal assistance, basic medical care, free tuition to needy students, etc., although positive, cannot in themselves be the answer to the fascists nor the response to the crisis. Syriza does not have the resources to fill the void created by the dismantling of the welfare state.

Our response to the fascist threat should comprise of three things. Firstly, organise the left and unions to lead mass struggles to address the critical problems of ordinary people:

nite to fight racism

the spread of unemployment and the dismantling of the welfare state.

We need to stubbornly impose at the centre of political life issues of poverty and unemployment of workers, pushing aside so-called “illegal immigration” and crime.

Secondly, we need immediate relief for victims of the crisis via social networks of solidarity. Anti-fascist groups should link up with neighbourhood community movements and left councillors to organise soup kitchens and other mutual and social aid for working-class people, regardless of their nationality or immigration status.

Thirdly, we need mass, militant, anti-fascist mobilisations to paralyse the fascist bullies and isolate loose supporters of fascists from the hardcore.

A robust and combative working-class movement that leads the struggle against austerity measures, poverty, and unemployment also enforces and strengthens the unity of the working class against racist prejudices and has the potential to stop the growth of the fascists. But it is a mistake for some sections of the left to underestimate the necessity of building up a specific political front against the fascist and racist threat.

This kind of logic can lead to abstention from any political fight to defend the refugees against specific racist attacks or to stop the fascists from parading and spreading their racist poison in our streets. Equally, the heroic, “military”-type efforts of anarchists, who regard it as their personal and ethical responsibility to deal with the fascists, are ineffective and counterproductive, isolating them from the mass of society. They are portrayed by the mainstream media as fights between two extreme sections in the margins.

We should learn from the refusal of the German Communist Party leadership to co-operate with the Social Democracy and mobilise the majority of the organised German working class in the 1930s against the rise of Hitler. When confronting fascists, numbers — big numbers — matter. This fight should involve the whole of the working class. We can only defeat fascism if we form a robust united front of all working-class organisations, of all left parties, of all trade unions, and youth movements — independent of their leaderships if necessary.

The actions of the revolutionary left now will determine whether the crisis is going to open up the road for the overthrow of the capitalist system that carries with it economic crisis, poverty, racism, wars and fascism, or if it is going to lead society back into the darkest parts of the history.

Golden Dawn's racist terror

The recent history of the rise of Golden Dawn is a record of terror against migrant communities, the left, and the labour movement.

In June 2012, Golden Dawn thugs carried out murderous attacks on immigrants in Messinia. They also broken into the house of some Egyptian immigrants in Perama and attacked them with wooden and metal sticks. The perpetrators were arrested, but released on bail. An anti-fascist demonstration in Perama in response mobilised 1,000 people.

Golden Dawn members distributed homophobic leaflets at the Athens Pride march. In Veria, Golden Dawn members, including Parliamentary candidate Ioannis Sahinidis, stormed a coffee shop associated with the left, attacking customers and the owner. The police arrested eight Golden Dawn thugs, but also the coffee shop owner!

In summer 2012, a YouTube video was released showing Golden Dawn thugs stabbing an immigrant in the metro at Attiki Square. The station security guard watched from a distance. There was no arrest.

In October, Golden Dawn organised alongside Christian fundamentalists to harrass actors, crew, and audience at the Athens premier of Terrence McNally's play *Corpus Christi*, which Golden Dawn claimed was an affront to “Christian Orthodox” values. In the same month, they ransacked a Tanzanian community centre.

In December 2012, Golden Dawn members attacked Syriza MP Dimitris Stratoulis at a football match. In January 2013, a Pakistani immigrant was murdered as he cycled to work. When two men were brought to trial for the crime, the judge refused to describe the murder as racially motivated.

In February 2013, Golden Dawn members attacked a prominent member of the PAMA trade union because they were “annoyed” by the “subversive” music he was listening to in his car.

Other Golden Dawn activity has included:

- Protesting against uninsured “illegal” immigrants receiving medical treatment, and organising mobs to enter hospitals and threaten to kick out all immigrants.
- Targetting kindergartens attended by immigrant toddlers in working-class areas, sometimes even targetting parks

and playgrounds where immigrant mothers and toddlers are playing.

- Attacking small shops and market stalls run by migrants.
- Assisting old ladies in the streets, organising food kitchens and food distribution for “Greeks only”, in areas where the left is traditionally strong. (This phenomenon is not new. In the American south in the 1920s, the Klu Klux Klan combined pogroms against blacks with assistance programmes to poor whites.)

- Launching “Greek-only” job agencies, mainly in central Greece, bringing workers to local factories; in Pieria, recruiting farm labourers.

- Performing regular visits to workplaces to check on the racial purity and immigration status of all workers and the compliancy of workers to the demands of the capitalist bosses, i.e. staying unionised.

- Organising mobile blood donation units that will only take donations from, and donate to, Greeks.

- **Organising “Sunday schools” and “cultural events” for primary school children in deprived areas, indoctrinating them at a very early age with ideas about racism, fascism, and racial purity.**

Greek footballer Giorgos Katidis' Nazi salute showed fascist ideas and images are penetrating the mainstream of Greek society.

Seventy percent probation privatisation plan

By Gayle Heaney

The government plans to privatise 70% of the entire national probation service by 2015, leaving just “high-risk offender management” to public probation trusts.

The proposals are not evidence-based; there is not a single shred of evidence to suggest the service will be more effective with a privatised, payment-by-results system. The probation service has in fact been successful in reducing re-offending rates year on year, so there is simply no reasonable argument to privatise. It's purely ideological.

In my office, many workers of all grades are no longer content with their position within the service, and many people are talking about leaving because they are sick of the constant threat of redundancy. I've spoken to plenty of workers over the last few years, and the same themes keep coming up: “We're getting sold to Serco aren't we?” “I might just take redundancy and get another job somewhere else.”

It's plainly obvious that people are angry and fed up, but these emotions are not resulting in greater organisation or the desire to stand up and fight for jobs and conditions. There's a growing sense of despair, and many people seem almost ready to pack up and find somewhere else to work.

UNIONS

The National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) and Unison are the two main unions within the service, both officially recognised by all probation trusts.

At London Probation there isn't a lot of unity between the unions and they often have very separate agendas. For example, NAPO are still very much a craft union, openly priding themselves on being a “professional association”. NAPO runs a national “Public protection not private profit” campaign, which has seen an Early Day Motion (essentially a petition of MPs) against privatisation and monthly campaign bulletins distributed to members. NAPO has demonstrated and lobbied at Parliament in support of its EDM.

The Unison probation branch in London has a better general approach to trade unionism, and opposes compulsory redundancies, but the branch leadership seems preoccupied with picking bizarre fights with management on side-issues that most members couldn't care less about. I remember the two branch secretaries of Unison spending an entire morning disputing the title of a single advertised job and communicating this to members, while NAPO were preparing placards for a demo outside Parliament! I wish the Unison branch could see the bigger picture sometimes.

Unison nationally is opposed to the privatisation, but there's not a lot coming from head office regarding an effective fightback. There's talk of a national NAPO strike — for any action to be effective, Unison and NAPO need to link forces and ensure workers of all grades take part.

Community Payback was privatised last year and one unit privatised is one unit too many. The key here is turning workers' despair into something bolder.

A public probation service is an integral part of both the welfare state and the justice system, and we cannot sit back and allow this disgrace of a government to take that away.

England's first Marxist?

Our Movement
By Micheál MacEoin



George Julian Harney (1817-1897) was a radical Chartist leader who became a pioneer of English revolutionary socialism.

Born in Deptford, Harney decided against following his father's maritime career and became a shop-boy for Henry Hetherington, editor of the *Poor Man's Guardian*. Hetherington, whose paper advocated the “cause of the rabble... the poor, the suffering, the industrious, the productive classes,” refused to pay the 4d. stamp duty on each paper sold. In the early 1830s, twenty-five of his forty paper sellers went to prison for selling the unstamped publication.

One of those arrested was Harney, and his imprisonment had a radicalising impact. Harney was a member of the London Working Men's Association but became impatient at its failure to achieve universal suffrage. He became influenced by the more militant ideas of Fergus O'Connor who advocated physical force, to the horror of more moderate Chartists such as Hetherington and William Lovett.

On 28 January 1839 Harney argued that: “You will get nothing from your tyrants but what you can take, and you can take nothing unless you are properly prepared to do so. In the words of a good man, then, I say ‘Arm for peace, arm for liberty, arm for justice, arm for the rights of all, and the tyrants will no longer laugh at your petitions’. Remember that.”

However, against the advocates of physical force, such as O'Connor — the son of a member of Wolfe Tone's United Irishmen, whose outlook was shaped by the Irish revolutionary traditions — Harney and William Bronterre O'Brien combined a fascination with the French revolutionary legacy of Gracchus Babeuf with an increasing appreciation of the growing English workers' movement.

Along with O'Connor, Harney became a founder of the openly republican East London Democratic Association and became convinced of William Benbow's argument that a Grand National Holiday, or general strike, was the means to change the political system. At the Chartist Convention in the summer of 1839, Harney and Benbow convinced the delegates of this and toured the country to attempt to persuade workers to join in the strike.

Harney was arrested and charged with sedition, and the strike was called off. He moved to Scotland and married Mary Cameron, but before long was back in England as the Chartist organiser in Sheffield.

During the strikes of 1842, Harney was one of the fifty-eight Chartists arrested and tried at Lancaster in March 1843. After his conviction was overturned on appeal, Harney became a journalist at O'Connor's *Northern Star* and within two years became the editor. He became increasingly interested in the international struggle for universal suffrage and founded the Society of Fraternal Democrats in 1845, developing closer links with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

LABOUR

In 1848 Harney explained the ideals behind the Society: “I appeal to the oppressed classes in every country to unite for the common cause... the cause of labour, of labour enslaved and exploited.”

“Do not the workers of all nations have the same reasons for complaint and the same causes of distress? Have they not, therefore, the same just cause?”

Harney persuaded Marx and Engels to write for the *Northern Star*, and when the revolutions broke out across Europe in 1848, he travelled to Paris to meet members of the revolutionary Provisional Government.

By now a socialist, Harney's political beliefs strained his relationship with O'Connor, who persuaded him to stand down as editor of the newspaper. He founded his own paper, the *Red Republican*, with the help of Ernest Jones, and attempted to educate his working-class readership about socialist ideas. It was in this paper that the first English edition of the *Communist Manifesto* was published in 1850, prompting a *London Times* leader of September 2, 1851 on “Literature For The Poor” to worry about the “evil teachings” in Chartist newspapers.

In 1851 Harney joined with Marx, Engels and French followers of August Blanqui to found the Universal Society of Communist Revolutionaries. However, the defeat of the 1848 revolutions and the stabilisation of the economy in the 1850s took their toll on Chartism. Harney's paper was not a commercial success and soon folded. Demoralised, Harney found himself politically isolated after having fallen out with Jones and Marx, and suffered a further blow when his wife died in 1853.

In 1863, Harney moved to America and worked as a clerk. His only contact with politics was writing articles for the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*. When he returned to England in 1881, unlike many old Chartists Harney did not join Henry Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation (SDF), though he did send messages of support to the striking dockers in 1889 and attended the May Day demonstration in 1890.

According to Terry Little's pamphlet *Deptford's Red Republican*, “shortly before his death Harney was interviewed for the SDF's *Social Democrat* by Edward Aveling. Aveling wrote: ‘I see in this old man a link between the years and the years. I know that long after the rest of us are forgotten the name George Julian Harney will be remembered with thankfulness and tears’.”

Ideas for Freedom 2013

Marxist ideas to turn the tide

Friday 21 — Sunday 23 June

University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY



A weekend of socialist debate, discussion, and education organised by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. More info on workersliberty.org soon.

How German revolutionary workers wrote the “united front”

In this second part of a review article looking at the themes of John Riddell’s new book of documents* from the early communist movement, Paul Hampton discusses the concepts of transitional demands and the united front.

The first three congresses of the post-Russian revolutionary Communist International (Comintern) had not elaborated a programme of demands, although they had issued manifestos and declarations.

Previous Marxist programmes had included the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), the Erfurt Programme (1891), various versions of the Russian Social Democratic programme, and the Spartacus programme (1918). A weakness of previous programmes was elaborating a link between the minimum, immediate demands for reform and the maximum goal of socialism — that is to say, a lack of “transitional” demands.

The debate was particularly important in Germany, where the German communists (the KPD) sought to grapple with its strategic responsibilities. For example, as the Marxist historian Pierre Broué has pointed out, transitional slogans were a favourite idea of KPD leader Heinrich Brandler. In mid-1922, the Comintern executive began to develop a programme for the International. However disagreements emerged about what should be included. At the Third Congress in 1921, the resolution “On Tactics” summed up what became the conception of transitional demands:

“In place of the minimum programme of the reformists and centrists, the Communist International proposes a struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for a system of demands that, in their totality, undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, organise the proletariat, and mark out stages in the struggle for its dictatorship; each of these demands gives expression to the needs of the broadest masses, even if they do not yet consciously set the goal of proletarian dictatorship.”

DIFFERENCES

Although the Fourth Congress did not adopt a formal programme and all sides agreed it was premature to do so, the discussion revealed important differences of interpretation.

The main reporter, Bukharin, disagreed with having tactical issues in the programme. He said: “Questions and slogans like the united front of the workers’ government or the seizure of material assets are slogans founded on a very fluid basis, one of a certain decline in the workers’ movement.” On 18 November he warned: “I will fight against that in every possible way. We will never permit such concepts to be built in to the programme”.

He was opposed by Thalheimer from the German party, who along with Brandler had been utilising transitional demands to build united fronts between the KPD and other workers’ organisations. Thalheimer confessed that he had “a sharp disagreement with Comrade Bukharin... [over] the question of transitional demands, demands for stages, and the minimum programme”. He said that “the specific disagreement between us and the reform-socialists is not the fact that we put demands for reforms, demands for a stage, [but that we have] demands and slogans very tightly [linked] with our principles and goals. This linkage is, of course, no guarantee in itself, any more than having a good map guarantees that I will not lose my way”.

The matter was discussed at a meeting of five Russian Communist party central committee members (Lenin, Trot-

sky, Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin) on 20 November 1922 and concluded in favour of Thalheimer’s proposal. Bukharin was given the unenviable task of moving a resolution at the Congress against the perspective he had himself taken just two days previously. The resolution vindicated the use of transitional slogans and was adopted unanimously. It stated:

“3. The programmes of the national sections must motivate clearly and decisively the need to struggle for transitional demands, with the appropriate proviso that these demands are derived from the specific conditions of place and time;

“4. The overall programme must definitely provide a theoretical framework for all transitional and immediate demands. At the same time, the Fourth Congress strongly condemns efforts to portray as opportunism the inclusion of transitional demands in the programme”.

But this conception was never further developed within the Comintern. Although Thalheimer continued to defend transitional demands, Bukharin had had his way by the time of the sixth congress in 1928. The programme adopted at that congress eschewed the transitional approach.

It was Leon Trotsky who rooted out this crucial flaw in the Stalinised Comintern’s programme and went on to develop the conception, notably in his *Action Programme for France* (1934) and the *Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (1938). Despite the misuse of transitional demands by many post-Trotsky Trotskyists, it is part of a priceless heritage from the early Comintern which, applied and adapted to current realities, retains its vitality for our politics.

UNITED FRONT

The united front is one of the most common expressions in the Marxist lexicon today. It concerns the way in which revolutionary socialists work with and alongside reformist workers for action around specific goals.

It is premised on the fact that revolutionaries are in the minority, but can fight for reforms alongside other workers in order to develop the class struggle in a socialist direction.

The Fourth Comintern Congress was the largest meeting to discuss how to implement the united front tactic. However, the idea of the united front did not originate with the Comintern. It was the product of the actual experience of revolutionary workers, particularly in Germany, working out how to operate in the post-war circumstances.

The once million-strong German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which had once contained all socialist tendencies before 1914, had shattered under pressure from the war. In 1916 the left and centre formed the Independent USPD. After the creation of workers’ councils, the SPD and USPD formed a government in November 1918. The Spartacus group around Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches formed the KPD. However, the party was severely repressed and many of its leaders killed.

In November 1920, KPD activists in Stuttgart, notably including Clara Zetkin, decided to launch a campaign for workers’ unity in action. They proposed in a local metal workers’ union that the union should petition their national leadership and other unions for united action. The Stuttgart metal workers adopted five demands reflecting workers’ most urgent needs: reduce prices for necessities of life; produce at full capacity and increase unemployment benefits; reduce taxes paid by workers and raise taxes on the great private fortunes; establish workers’ control of supply and distribution of raw materials and foodstuffs; and disarm reactionary gangs and arm the workers. Karl Radek’s comment on the initiative: “If I had been in Moscow, the idea would not even have crossed my mind”.

On 29 December 1920 the KPD leadership decided to initi-

German revolutionaries such as Paul Levi helped develop the revolutionary movement’s understanding of working-class power and how to fight for it

ate a wider movement for united working class action.

Paul Levi and Radek drafted an open letter, published 8 January 1921. The demands were:

1. United wage struggles to defend all workers and employees.
2. Increased pensions.
3. Reorganisation and increases in unemployment allowances.
4. Government provision of food ration cards at reduced cost.
5. Seizure of housing space for the homeless.
6. Measures to provide food and other necessities under the control of factory councils.
7. Disarmament and dissolution of armed bourgeois detachments and formation of workers’ self-defence organisations.
8. Amnesty for political prisoners.
9. Immediate establishment of trade and diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia.

Although the KPD initiative was rebuffed by the SPD and USPD, the idea was further developed at the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921.

The resolution “On Tactics” stated: “At the present moment the most important task of the Communist International is to win a dominant influence over the majority of the working class and involve the more active workers in direct struggle” — a strategy summed up in the slogan, “To the masses”.

At the end of November 1921, the Bolshevik Party’s political bureau decided to support the extension of the German united-action policy to the Comintern as a whole.

On 4 December 1921, a Comintern executive (ECCI) formally adopted the united front as policy. Riddell argues that the theses bore the mark of Zinoviev’s thinking, motivating the united front on the basis of the current conjuncture — “an unusual transitional period” — marked by worsening capitalist economic crisis, a shift to the left among the masses and “a spontaneous striving for unity” among workers. The theses proposed that the Communist parties “strive everywhere to achieve unity...in practical action” and “take the initiative on this question”.

A slogan focused on the idea of a “workers’ government” [a projected outcome of the united front tactic] was endorsed, although only for Germany. The discussion also included a debate on whether transitional demands should be included in the Comintern programme between Radek (yes) and Bukharin (no).

The new policy continued to provoke debate. And Russian communists continued their discussion at a party confer-

Continued on page 10

* *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International* (Haymarket, 2012)

Continued from page 9

ence. Zinoviev and Bukharin presented united front policy as short term and stressed its role in exposing social democratic parties.

Trotsky, however, warned against “fatalistic conceptions” that Europe was experiencing the final run-up to the establishment of workers’ rule.

Within the Comintern, the French and Italian parties opposed the united front policy and the Norwegian majority believed it did not apply to their country. In Czechoslovakia and Germany significant minorities resisted the policy.

The Comintern executive did not force member parties to apply the policy. However, through a succession of discussions and experiences in the national sections, acceptance of the united front policy was widened.

At the Fourth Congress, debate focused on *how*, not *whether*, to apply it. Zinoviev explained the meaning of the united front in his executive report at the beginning of the congress. He said that “the united front is established by the overall situation of capitalism, by its economic and world political situation, and by the situation inside the workers’ movement”. The united front tactic was “the most effective means to win this majority of the working class. It must be stated clearly that the united front tactic is no mere episode in our struggle. It is a tactic that will endure for an entire period, perhaps an entire epoch”. He added: “We are against reformism, but not against bettering the lives of the working class... We can only organise the working class if we fight for its partial demands”.

UNITE

Radek argued that workers must “unite at least for the struggle for bare existence, for a crust of bread”.

Communists should “conduct a struggle around questions that have the greatest immediate relevance to the broad working masses: questions of wages, hours of work, housing, defence against white danger, against the war danger, and all the issues of working people’s daily life... Only by broadening, deepening and heightening these struggles will a struggle for [proletarian] dictatorship arise”.

But Bordiga continued to oppose the tactic, arguing that “the danger exists of the united front degenerating into a Communist revisionism”.

Edwin Hoernle compared the united front with “a narrow mountain ridge”: it is “slippery and the way is narrow”. But “when we stay put, merely philosophising as to whether we have reservations or run risks, we do not advance. In order to learn anything at all about applying the united-front tactic, we must take steps”.

Radek also explained what it meant in practice. He told the congress that the Communist Party of Great Britain would apply its united front tactic by seeking to affiliate to the Labour Party, and in the next election: “Vote for it and prepare for struggle against it”.

Zinoviev warned that the desire for unity had great attractive power in the ranks of the working class because “the working masses need unity as we need the air”. However, he warned against an attitude of “the more the better” in any situation, on the wrong demands and without action, which turned unity into a fetish and an idol.

Today, when the number of Marxists is tiny and largely in small groups, it would be aridly sectarian to refuse to work alongside other workers and in specific campaigns where action can be organised around clear but limited goals. The united front is not a trick or a deception: it is an honest attempt to tackle the problem of heterogeneity within the working class. The activity of Marxists is vital to galvanising and directing these struggles, as a lever seeking to transform the wider organised labour movement.

This “minimal” application of the method of the united front applies to the trade union movement, on the political front and in specific campaigns around feminism, climate change, wars and international solidarity.

But we should not deny the ambition of the early Comintern — as long as class-conscious Marxists do not have the support of a majority of workers, the united front is a burning necessity.

A moment of possibility

Tom Harris reviews Zinoviev and Martov: Head to Head in Halle, edited and translated by Ben Lewis and Lars T Lih,

In 1920, the German workers’ movement stood at a crossroads. The Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) had split from the pro-war SPD in 1917.

In 1918 a revolutionary upsurge of workers, soldiers, and sailors forced German surrender, the deposing of the Kaiser and the end of the war.

Radicalised by this struggle, and disgusted by a leadership which had sided with the ruling class to save capitalism, even to the extent of having revolutionaries Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht murdered, thousands streamed into the ranks of the USPD.

The left of the USPD took inspiration from the revolution in Russia, and favoured affiliating to the new, revolutionary Communist International (Comintern). The right of the party preferred a reformist course, to become a more palatable version of the SPD. Others wavered, were not quite reformist, not quite revolutionary.

The question of how to relate to the question of revolution in general, and the Comintern specifically, was to be decided at the party conference in Halle. Grigori Zinoviev, the Bolshevik chair of the Communist International, was to address the conference in favour of affiliation. Julius Martov, the old (left) Menshevik opponent of the Bolsheviks, was to speak against.

REMARKABLE

Zinoviev and Martov is a fascinating examination of a remarkable moment in the history of revolutionary socialism. Here are the speeches of both Zinoviev and Martov, commentaries describing the historical context, and a diary entry from Zinoviev describing his “twelve days in Germany”.

The diary entry not only gives the reader a feel for the intense public interest and government suspicion toward the conference, but is also funny.

For example, the captain of the boat carrying the Bolshevik delegation was mystified to discover that 75 passengers had boarded a vessel designed to carry 30. It was soon realised that this was down to the enormous number of spies who had crowded on board. “There were at least 40 spies, an average of five to each communist!”, Zinoviev remarks. “Since spying on us could not occupy the whole of their time, they resorted to spying on each other.”

The speeches themselves are remarkable. Zinoviev’s, which stretched to four hours, were conducted in a language that was not his own, and, thanks to questions from hecklers, almost completely improvised.

Lewis points out that Zinoviev has come in for a very bad press from history — executed as a conspirator by the Stalinist bureaucracy, disliked by the Left Opposition for his earlier bloc with Stalin, and widely portrayed as an arrogant and opportunistic figure.

In this speech, however, he shines. As each shouted question is thrown at him from the right wing, he counters it in detail, and to great applause.

Zinoviev argues that the utter bankruptcy of the old social-democratic international necessitates a new one, committed to the spread of the revolution and a principled working-class politics. In response to hysteria generated about his arrival, he claims the vehemence with which the right of the USPD had denounced the left, as well as the readiness with which they slipped into the conservative vernacular of “com-

munists in disguise” and the “Moscow knout”, demonstrated their real anxiety — fear of the revolution they claimed formally to be fighting for.

Martov argues that the Russian revolution is “sick and cannot be cured by its own means”. It is isolated by hostile states, devastated by war and famine, and creaking beneath the contradictions involved in trying to develop a workers’ democracy in the midst of an underdeveloped peasant mass. These pressures, he says, have led the Bolsheviks to rule arbitrarily and brutally, clamping down too harshly on dissent in a bid to stave off counter-revolution. As such, the leadership of a new international should not be at Russia’s initiative, but from “Marxist tendencies of the worker parties of Western Europe”.

Even in 1920 there was some truth in Martov’s critique. With the benefit of hindsight we see that the Russian state did soon degenerate under the pressure of a bureaucratic counter-revolution; the prominence of the Stalinised Russian party in the international did have a distorting and reactionary effect on class struggle throughout the world.

But 1920 was not 1924, let alone 1928 or 1936. Zinoviev’s retorts win out. Though immensely serious problems existed in Soviet Russia, the Russian working class still ruled, through the Bolshevik party. This was not yet anything like the totalitarian nightmare of Stalinism. It remained the position of the Bolsheviks that the only salvation for the Russian revolution was for the revolution to spread and break its isolation — and revolutionary struggles in Germany were at the centre of their perspectives.

REALIGNMENT

The critical necessity was for the organisation of a radical, sincerely revolutionary realignment in the workers’ movements of the world. Working for that goal, as Zinoviev was, was the best guarantee of a revival of socialist democracy in Russia.

When the congress voted two to one in favour of affiliation, 400,000 workers — as well as a minority but substantial layer of parliamentary deputies, journalists, union officials and so on — joined the previously tiny Communist Party (KPD), which had earlier split from the USPD. The revolutionary Marxist left was now a major force in German politics.

In 1919, workers and soldiers had revolted en masse, but the number of socialists arguing and agitating consciously for revolution (as opposed to the reformism of the SPD) was still small. With the leadership of the SPD holding the decisive sway in the battle of the ideas, the ruling class was able to demobilise and turn back the revolution. With the merger of the USPD into the Communist Party, things were now, potentially at least, radically different. The next time a revolutionary moment occurred, the chances of success were greatly improved.

Zinoviev’s role in the German movement was not always so constructive. Indeed it would prove disastrous at decisive turning points.

In 1921, the new KPD tried to artificially provoke a revolution in an abortive uprising known as the “March Action” — with the encouragement of Zinoviev, among other Comintern leaders. It was a dismal failure, and many KPD cadres were arrested or killed. Then, as the crisis deepened, and revolutionary crisis gripped Germany again in 1923, German workers streamed into and around the Communist Party. That crisis was again bungled, and a revolutionary opportunity missed. Again, ironically given his “left” stance in 1921, with Zinoviev’s involvement. After these failures, the Stalinist bureaucracy consolidated itself, going on to strangle the Russian workers’ state and the Comintern. Later still the Stalinist leadership fatally hamstrung the KPD in its fight against the rise of fascism.

Yet the decisions made at the Halle Congress created a mass revolutionary organisation. This book is inspiring in the way it captures a moment when an alternative outcome to the struggles of an entire period were tantalisingly possible.

Barbican cleaners strike

By Ira Berkovic

Cleaners at the Barbican in the City of London will strike on Thursday 21 March, the day the antiquated body which runs the City of London Corporation (which owns the Barbican) elects its "Court of Common Council".

The Corporation has a London Living Wage policy, but has staggered its introduction across various contracts. It has told cleaners at the Barbican, who are employed by Mitie, that they must wait until 2014 to get the Living Wage of

£8.55 an hour. They are currently paid £6.19 an hour.

The City of London's "City Cash" account holds over £1 billion, and Mitie's own profits were at £52.9 million at the end of 2012.

As well as low pay, Barbican cleaners face bullying and harassment from managers. Their union, the Industrial Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), is pursuing an Employment Tribunal on behalf of one pregnant cleaner who was so badly treated that she was found bleeding in the work toilets after collapsing, and rushed to hospital.

Barbican cleaner Alex Viosotsky said: "We are fighting for our right to be respected and to live and work with dignity and a Living Wage."

"Mitie says they don't have enough money to increase our salary from a poverty wage to a Living Wage but they do have enough money to pay their managers big salaries in order to watch over us and treat us badly."

Cleaners will mount pickets at the Barbican from 5.30am on Thursday 21 March.

For more information, see iwgb.org.uk

Fire cuts fight steps up

By Jack Horner

The campaign to halt the cuts to 12 fire stations, 18 appliances, and over 500 firefighter jobs in London stepped up with a day of action on Saturday 16 March.

Despite miserable weather, several hundred people marched to Clapham fire station, one of the stations under threat and where probably the best campaign has been organised so far.

The demonstration was organised as the 12-week consultation on the London fire safety plan began this month. London mayor Boris Johnson wants to shave some money off council tax bills – mainly

to advance his own ambitions as a tax-cutter. But to do so means slashing vital services in the capital.

The campaign is already spreading. Two days before the Clapham demo, a public meeting was held on the threatened Westminster fire station. Further public meetings planned — around Belsize fire station at Hampstead Town Hall on 26 March and for Downham fire station on 22 April.

Every threatened fire station needs a campaign group, with twinning arrangements with other local fire stations and links to other local anti-cuts campaigns. The FBU in London is supporting these steps, providing leaflets and mobilising

firefighters to take to the streets. Johnson has been tripped up twice by the fire authority, with Labour, Lib Dems and Greens waking up to oppose the cuts. No closures can take place this year, so there is time to build a grassroots campaign with solid labour movement support.

This battle symbolises the Tory arrogance that any service, however essential for working-class communities, can be done away with. It is also a winnable battle, because no one wants to lose a fire station from their neighbourhood.

Socialists should join the campaign and argue for militant tactics that can win.

Bureaucrats block grassroots challenge

By Will Greene

Unison activists at the University of London are discussing the way forward after serious delays in releasing the results of this year's branch committee election.

This is the latest episode in an ongoing attempt by the Unison bureaucracy to clamp down on the campaign of outsourced workers at the University of London for sick pay, holiday, and pensions – the "3 Cosas" campaign, which is run by Unison members but, sadly, without the support of the branch.

Late last year there was an attempt by the region and some members of the existing branch committee to set up a parallel to the 3 Cosas campaign in order to remove initiative and control from the membership. The outsourced workers and sympathetic University of London staff ran in the branch committee elections on a platform of greater union democracy and workplace representation, reinvigorating interest in the union throughout their campaign.

Although many members requested the standard practice of holding elections at the branch AGM on 8 March, where attendance and participation could be maximised, the Greater London Unison regional office insisted on organising a postal ballot.

Either through incompetence or malice on the part of the region, there were serious problems in the way the postal ballot was carried out. Dozens of outsourced workers were disenfranchised when, despite many requests, they did not receive ballots before the deadline. This was compounded by the region erroneously sending out two different coloured ballots, and issuing the ballots in English only when around half the branch do not speak English as a first language. Many members turned up to the most lively AGM in recent memory, only to be turned away when officials told them that they were not members of the union.

The region has cited members' complaints as the reason for the announcement of results being delayed (it was not announced at the AGM, or by the new deadline of 15 March). A "statement regarding the outcome" is promised next week.

Meanwhile, 3 Cosas continues its campaign with a protest at Senate House on 10 April. For more, see on.fb.me/11dJDmA

Ambulance workers strike against derecognition

By Ira Berkovic

Ambulance workers in Yorkshire will strike on Tuesday 2 April after Unite was derecognised in the service.

Unite, which is a minority union in Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust, opposed a £46 million cuts plan and found itself derecognised by Trust bosses. The plan included proposals to have Emergency Care Assistants, with only six weeks' training, work in sensitive roles alongside more highly-trained paramedics. Unite raised concerns about the implications for patient safety.

Although the majority union, Unison, has not fought the cuts plan, many Unison members have vowed not to cross Unite picket lines, meaning the

strike could have a much wider impact.

Unite members will also impose a continuous overtime ban from Tuesday 26 March.

Tube workers fight two-tier workforce

Tube workers face a two-tier workforce after London Underground bosses announced that reintegrated Tube Lines staff will not be allowed to join the Transport for London pensions fund.

700 Tube Lines clerical staff are set to be fully reintegrated into direct employment by London Underground Limited, but barred from joining the same TfL pensions scheme as their colleagues.

A statement from Tube union RMT said: "These attacks will be resisted using industrial action if necessary."

Teachers' summer strikes

By Darren Bedford

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) have announced a programme of rolling strikes beginning on 27 June and continuing after the summer break.

The strikes, which are over pay, pensions, and workload, will begin in the northwest of England and will include a one-day national strike some time in the autumn term.

The unions are demanding that Education Secretary Michael Gove "responds positively" to their demands.

Rank-and-file activists in the teaching unions, particularly in the Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC), will be building to make sure strikes are as solid as possible. But they are also organising for an alternative strategy. Regional strikes in June and a possible national strike in September is far too little, far too late. By the time of any national strike, the new proposals for performance-related pay could already be in place.

LANAC members are fighting for national strikes to be brought forward.

• More: nutlan.org.uk

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Civil servants to strike on Budget Day Taking action against cuts to pay and pensions

By a civil servant

Working-class people can expect further attacks in George Osborne's 20 March budget in the form of cuts to benefits and a continued pay freeze for public sector workers.

However, the strike by PCS members across the civil service on Budget Day — over pay, pensions, and terms and conditions — should help raise our spirits!

The government's policies of pay restraint and pay freezes have seriously eaten into the living standards of the lowest paid civil servants over the past years. They face another hike in pension contributions this April with a further, final increase in April 2014.

The 20 March strike was announced as the beginning of a programme of action over the next three months. PCS members will walk out again from 1pm on Friday 5 April, as well as implementing a three-

month overtime ban. Regional and selective action is also due to take place between national strikes.

This is a significant step forward from PCS's previous "strategy" of occasional one-day strikes punctuated by months of inactivity. But PCS has

been slow to move into battle, with its leaders arguing for months that it could not act without the support of other unions.

But it is possible to take on the government on your own and win. There are 43 staff in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)

that will attest to this. They were issued compulsory redundancy notices over Christmas. DWP members voted for group-wide strike action, and the notices were withdrawn. This may look like a small victory but it is not insignificant to those 43 workers that faced redundancy.

Had the PCS leadership accepted earlier that it was possible for PCS to fight on its own, the union could have done the necessary preparation work to ensure a more convincing ballot result (the vote for the 20 March strike was 61% on a 28% turnout, low for the PCS), particularly around the issue of pay.

The Independent Left grouping in PCS, in which Workers' Liberty members are involved, will be arguing on the 20 March picket lines that a voluntary levy of all members is now necessary. This could fund sustained strikes.

Around clear industrial demands such strike action could force the government to back down.

Leveson drama glosses over the real scandal

By Colin Foster

The drama about the last-minute deal between Labour, Lib-Dems, and Tories over measures in response to the Leveson report on the phone-hacking scandal obscures the main issues in the scandal.

By controlling such a large part of the means of communication, through sheer wealth, Rupert Murdoch and his cronies play a large part in the public life of the country. They observe no social responsibility or accountability.

The police and Government advisers, if not ministers, were shown to be in cahoots with the Murdoch empire.

All that has been glossed over. Ed Miliband and the Labour leadership did decide that Labour had been slavish to Murdoch for too long. They did speak out. But they never proposed anything that would really call Murdoch to account.

The deal is as follows:

- A "Recognition Panel" will be set up to supervise and approve a new regulatory body, a souped-up version of the current Press Complaints Commission, which in turn was a souped-up version (from 1991) of the previous Press Council.

- The new regulator will be set up by a Royal Charter, with a proviso that the terms of the Charter cannot be changed except by a two-thirds majority in Parliament. (However, there is no absolute obstacle to a future parliament changing that proviso).

- The new regulatory body will be able to "direct" newspapers to make apologies, not merely "require" them. The nuance is said to make its legal position stronger.

- The press code of conduct will be written by a committee consisting of one-third newspaper editors, one-third journalists and one-third lay people.

- Newspaper bosses will choose one member to sit on the appointments panel for the regulatory body and loses its right of veto over regulator membership.

The Leveson recommendation that newspaper publishers who refuse to join the regulatory body (like *Solidarity* and other radical publications) may be subject to exemplary damages in libel cases will be implemented.

Already, the British libel law enables rich media companies to abuse with impunity poor people who cannot afford to bring libel cases, and rich people with a taste for it to go to law to suppress criticism of themselves.

The big media groups are not happy about aspects of the deal e.g. the ability of the new regulatory body to "direct" newspapers to make apologies and having "outsiders" draw up the code of conduct.

The labour movement should demand that the assets of the big media companies be taken into public ownership, under democratic control, and access to them be guaranteed for all currents of opinion above a certain minimum of support, with strong provisos for rights of reply and minority opinions.

Tories test water on strike bans

By Ira Berkovic

On 18 March Parliament began debating a new bill which could remove the right to strike for some civil servants.

The Crime and Courts Bill would prevent staff employed by the National Crime Agency (NCA) from striking. The ban would affect 3,500 members of the civil service union PCS.

Many of the workers affected are immigration and customs officers, people whose work frequently involves state violence against immigrants and asylum seekers. Their jobs are ones which socialists want to see radically reformed and repurposed entirely. But their right to withdraw their labour is what creates the potential for such transformations; to remove it will only entrench these workers further into a self-conception as state functionaries equivalent to police or soldiers.

The strike ban would also set a hugely dangerous precedent for the labour movement. Which essential public service workers are next in line? Firefighters? Health workers? Teachers?

Left-wing Labour MP John McDonnell proposed an amendment to the Bill at the Parliamentary Committee stage to remove the ban. He said: "This is an unnecessary and unwelcome political device that is being used by the government to test the water around their future policies on trade union and employment rights in this country.

"If the clauses are accepted by the House — and certainly if they are accepted by my party — on this occasion, this will be used as an example in other areas."

Labour MPs on the Committee shamefully abstained, rather than opposing the ban on the right to strike.

Affiliated trade unions must demand that Labour MPs vote against this Bill, and any other attempts to attack workers' rights to take industrial action.