

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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

For a workers' government

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## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

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

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# Fight anti-Roma hysteria!

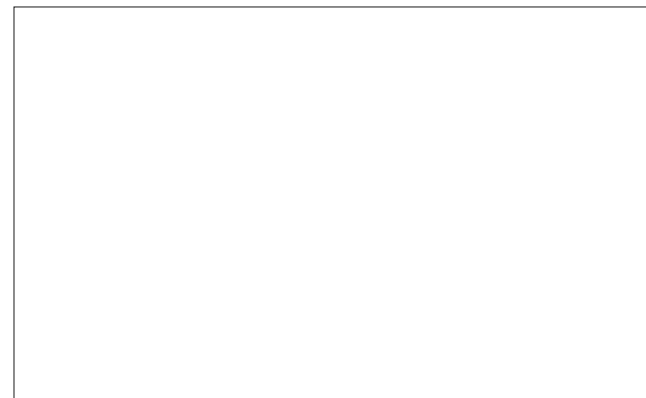
By Charlotte Zeleus

**The case of a young girl named Maria living in a Roma community in Greece has caused a disturbing outcry.**

She was noticed by the authorities because "she looked unusual... lack of resemblance between the blonde-haired, green-eyed, pale-skinned little girl and her parents"<sup>1</sup>.

The subsequent outcry seems to centre on the idea that it is awful that a "blonde-haired, green-eyed, pale-skinned" girl who appears to be of northern or eastern European origin is begging on the streets as part of the Roma community. The concern for her welfare seems to be limited to her appearance (and therefore ethnicity).

This brought to mind similarities with the case of a Mexican girl in America last year<sup>2</sup>. The blonde, pale skinned child had been photographed begging with her "brown mother" and the photographer labelled this as unusual and suspicious.



This resulted in the mother being detained and the child being removed from her until it was proven they were in fact related. The case sparked questions about the way race is viewed in America.

The case in Greece is different in some ways. The parents that Maria was living with have been unable to provide correct documentation for the girl. Apparently documentation they have provided has been flawed, and their story has changed.

That is however not unusual for Roma communities, who are often without

correct papers in various countries, and fear reprisals.

There are fears that this girl may have been trafficked or abducted. I do not wish to delegitimise these fears, and they may well prove to be true. However the original identification of this girl, the media response, and the treatment of the Roma community she was living in, smack of racism.

As with the case of the Mexican girl begging, it was only the fact that Maria is pale-skinned and appears to look like a North or Eastern European that roused suspicion.

No similar concerns are heard about the fate or poverty that falls upon Roma children from the same community. Given that trafficking does happen and is a threat to children, it is odd that we should apparently only be concerned that this should happen to a pale-skinned child.

The vast majority of women who are trafficked in the world are not white. In fact, within Europe, Roma communities are disproportionately affected by trafficking<sup>3</sup>. Nothing has been reported about the relationship between this child and the adults she was living with, good or bad.

**The case will give the green light to police forces in Europe to raid Roma communities, looking for "suspiciously pale-skinned children". Indeed as we go to press there are reports of police in Dublin having taken into care a child living with a Roma family.**

1. [bbc.in/18Gd6aA](http://bbc.in/18Gd6aA)
2. [bit.ly/1abxoJr](http://bit.ly/1abxoJr)
3. [bit.ly/1gBgzND](http://bit.ly/1gBgzND)

# 50,000 march in Rome, but...

By Hugh Edwards

**In Rome on Saturday 19 October, 50,000 workers and militants from a range of political organisations and movements marched through the city to its historic Piazza della Repubblica, celebrating the launch of a new campaign against Italy's current coalition government.**

The march was the first national manifestation of the "Defend the Constitution" initiative, bringing together Maurizio Landini, the leader of FIOM (the metalworkers' union), a number of prestigious Italian jurists, the radical newspaper *il Fatto Quotidiano*, and sundry "personalities" from the academic and media world.

The record of the last decade or so is one of one campaign after another, opposed to the various regimes of Silvio Berlusconi, sinking into oblivion after a few public demonstrations. That record would, no doubt, have been in the minds of those

in the square.

Landini angrily declared his opposition to the Letta/Alfano government, and its continuation of the austerity measures begun by the previous Monti government. But while lambasting the accommodating role of Berlusconi's party to those measures, neither Landini, nor any of the other platform speakers, mentioned the even more compliant role of Letta's Democratic Party, which since the Coalition was stitched together has lost a third of its membership!

Furthermore, not a word was uttered by anyone about the role of the president of the country, and former DP leader, Napolitano. Napolitano was a key architect of the foundations of the "emergency" constitutional conditions currently licensing the wage of attacks on living standards and democratic rights.

Grotesquely, when the first mention of his name by one of the illustrious jurists was greeted by a spontaneous volley of abuse from the crowd, the sage

turned his anger against the crowd, asserting, as if it were in doubt, "we are not extremists here, but moderates seeking dialogue".

The guiding principle of this new initiative, described by Landini as "revolutionary", is that the Italian bourgeoisie and its state and government institutions will be confronted in a dialogue about the failure, so far, to implement the progressive principles of the 1948 Constitution — the right to work, the right to a home, the right to an education, and so on.

**REVOLUTIONARIES**  
**Revolutionaries do indeed believe that such progressive features should be defended, especially if under threat of extinction.**

But revolutionaries have duty to point out that the 1948 Constitution was not just a cynical compromise between the Stalinist Togliatti and the Christian Democrat de Gasperi, but also the means to guarantee, protect and maintain the capitalist social order in a

period of crisis.

To challenge that order needs a struggle for an alternative system, a different state, a different constitution, a different democracy — in which the workers and the overwhelming majority of the masses, not the markets, truly decide their collective and personal destiny. It requires a fight to realise the goal of a workers' republic in Italy.

The surreal events in Rome last Saturday reflect the depth of defeat and demoralisation across the country. While the trade union confederations, including Landini's once-militant FIOM, are lined up with the bosses' federation to beg from the government measures needed by the federation to "protect" business (and, of course, the workers), the scorched earth policies — another €4 billion cuts in the health budget just announced by Letta — continue.

**The Italian Constitution, is all too safe in the hands of its begetters.**

## “Help to buy” will push up house prices

By Kieran Miles

**The second part of the government's new “Help to Buy” scheme has been launched, three months earlier than planned.**

For houses up to a value of £600,000 the government will offer a new buyer a loan worth 20% of the value if the buyer puts up a 5% deposit.

The government claims that the scheme will help more people buy property.

Natwest, RBS, and Halifax have said they will offer mortgage loans for the remaining 75%.

Buyers won't be charged any interest on the government loan for the first five years, but from the sixth year, will be charged a fee of 1.75% of the loan's value, which will increase every year in line with inflation plus 1%, for up to 25 years or when the house is sold.

Housing charity Shelter warned that “if you take out a mortgage backed by a government guarantee and are repossessed, you will still have to pay back any money you owe the bank.”

The government has pledged loans worth up to

£12 billion, for £130 billion of mortgages. This is equivalent to about 18% of the UK's GDP, or the NHS's entire annual budget. The average house now costs £164,654 — an increase of 1.3% since last year. House prices in London leapt 10% in just a month to October 2013, with the average price in the capital at over £500,000.

Most first-time buyers will struggle to find the 5% deposit necessary to get onto the “Help to Buy” scheme. This, and the fact that the maximum house price that the government will give a help to buy loan to is £600,000 (well over the average price of a house), suggests the scheme may

mostly help inner-city property speculators looking to buy up.

The scheme does nothing to ease the housing shortage. All it will do is speed a rise in house prices, by boosting demand where supply is inflexible. Some may gain. More will lose out because house prices and rents will spiral even further out of reach.

**HOUSING CRISIS**  
In London alone there are 380,000 households on local authority waiting lists for social housing.

Nearly 41,000 households with children were still in temporary accommodation at the end of 2012, waiting for social housing. There

were 10,206 mortgage and landlord possession orders in the first quarter of 2013 (courts orders evicting people for not paying their mortgage or rent).

Only 500 new council houses are expected to be completed by the end of 2013. In contrast, 1,000 council houses have been sold through the “Right to Buy” scheme this year.

There are an estimated 800,000 vacant houses and 1.5 million empty sites in Britain. The labour movement must fight for a mass building project of affordable council housing.

We should demand rent caps on private housing, and an interest cap on mortgages, with increasing rates of housing benefit and local housing allowance that meet the rising cost of living.

Vacant houses used for property speculation should be seized and used to re-house people, and we should fight militantly against the use of the “Right to Buy” and “Help to Buy” schemes to give a housing subsidy to the better-off.

**We need to resist evictions for mortgage or rent arrears, particularly as the bedroom tax hits.**

## Unions predict 25,000 job losses in Welsh councils

By Dave Pannett

**The public sector union Unison predicts 25,000 jobs will be under threat from recently announced budget cuts in Welsh councils, to take place over the next three years.**

Cuts in Wales have been slower than in England, but thousands of jobs have already been lost over the last three years — a 5.8% cut in real terms.

Cardiff council plans £50 million cuts next year out of a £500 million budget, of which 60% is spent on statutory functions. English councils have already warned that they may be unable to meet statutory functions by 2015-16.

Unison is opposed to compulsory redundancies, and is demanding that councils to draw up “parallel” budgets based on communities' needs. While this opposition is welcomed, Unison should also be acting on its conference policy to encourage Labour councillors to defy the whip and



vote against cuts, working with the Councillors Against Cuts network.

If Welsh councils do pass on cuts, this will mean axing youth services, care services, funding for the arts and voluntary sectors, closures of libraries etc.

Once gone, these services will be hard to rebuild.

Communities and workers should unite to resist these cuts. Occupations, direct action, strikes, marches, and setting illegal budgets should be considered.

**The cuts are not necessary. The government wants to direct blame away from the bosses, and prepare to privatise local services to make profit where possible and end services altogether where not.**

• More: [councillorsagainstcuts.org](http://councillorsagainstcuts.org)

## Students: no rents above £100 a week!

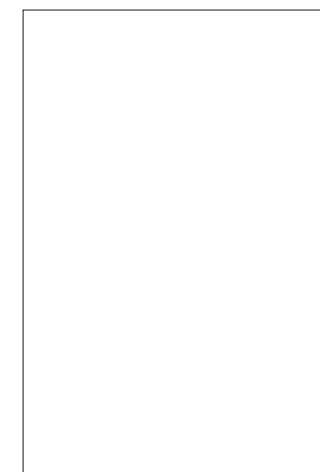
By Michael Johnson

**Students are the victims of a growing rent scandal which threatens to price all but the wealthiest out of UK student accommodation.**

Students starting their first year at university, often in unfamiliar cities, are easy pickings for developers and institutions wanting to make a killing. This is even before they move out into the under-regulated private rented sector, with its unscrupulous landlords and parasitical letting agents, charging exorbitant fees for vague and unspecified services.

According to the specialist website Accommodation for Students, the average rent has risen 3.1% from £77.04 per week per bedroom in 2012 to £79.42 in 2013.

Rents for student accommodation in London have shot up to £129 per week, followed by Egham (home to Royal Holloway Univer-



**UCL's New Hall: a £730 a month view of a brick wall**

sity of London) at £115.

And this is usually for a single room, not even a flat, and often without en suite facilities. Students in Ramsay Hall at University College London (UCL) are paying £192.50 a week for a box with a bed in it. The recently-built UCL New Hall has been crowned the “UK's worst building” because its residents are paying up to £730 a month to

look straight out on to a brick wall that obscures the sunlight.

To put things into perspective, the maximum student loan for maintenance for those in London is £7,675 (out of London you can get up to £5,500), not including grants. Many students receive much less. This works out at about £169.79 for each of the 39 weeks that UCL students are required to pay rent, leaving little or nothing to actually live on.

About 25% of uni students now work part-time, though opportunities are scarce, pay low, and conditions often terrible. Students' unions must do more to inform student workers of their rights in the workplace, and help to organise them into trade unions.

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts is demanding that no student should pay more than £100 per week for accommodation. This demand aims to set a new maximum social standard, for a commodity

whose price has become inflated to the extent that most students see rents above this level as “reasonable”. They are not.

Yet, the National Union of Students (NUS) leadership got a motion on students rents voted down at the 2013 conference, using the bizarre argument that rents are expensive. That's the point!

The NUS, students' unions, and activist groups on campuses should agitate around a £100 maximum weekly rent, and build for rent strikes in university halls if institutions are unresponsive.

They should demand more affordable accommodation be built in order to undercut the private sector cowboys who see the student accommodation market as “one of the most attractive yield classes for property investment.”

**The growing crisis in student rents is an opportunity to mobilise large numbers of students around winnable aims.**

## Three months to campaign

By Martin Thomas

**The civil court hearing in which construction giant Abigroup, part of the Lend Lease empire, is claiming damages over the Queensland Children's Hospital construction site strike of August-October last year, has been postponed to 4 February 2014. It will run for ten days.**

The case was due to come to court on 21 October, but has been postponed because of a legal argument relating to another case, raised by the CEPU union.

Abigroup's claim is for many millions in damages — to cover its losses from the strike — against the CEPU, the CFMEU and BLF unions, and also against Bob Carnegie, an individual trade-unionist and socialist (and Workers' Liberty Australia member) who helped as a community activist in the workers' dispute.

Earlier this year Bob faced contempt-of-court charges over the nine-week dispute, in which the workers won their de-

mand for a union-negotiated site agreement, after a nine-week stoppage.

After a strong campaign, in which construction sites in Brisbane and other Australian capital cities were twice shut down by protest strikes, Bob was acquitted on the contempt charges. But in the civil case the test of evidence is “balance of probability”, not “beyond reasonable doubt”. Unless we organise a strong campaign to alert the labour movement and public opinion to the issues, Bob could face crushing fines and damages.

The point of suing Bob is not that Abigroup has any chance of getting millions of dollars out of an individual worker. It is to inflict exemplary punishment which will deter other activists in future from helping workers in dispute.

**The legal delay gives us three months to organise and campaign. Supporters are asked to begin by downloading and distributing the new campaign leaflet on [bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com](http://bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com).**

# “Blurred Lines”, playlists, bans, and debate

## Letter



**A number of student unions have decided they will not allow Robin Thicke’s number one single “Blurred Lines” to be played in their commercial venues.**

The trend began at Edinburgh University Students’ Association (EUSA) where the song was removed from playlists in line with their “End Rape Culture and Lad Banter on Campus” policy. This policy was democratically approved at an open meeting of around 600 students. According to the union’s Vice President, and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts member, Kirsty Haigh, the song “promotes an unhealthy attitude towards sex and consent”.

When other unions followed suit, some decisions were taken in mass meetings or union councils, some by executives or lone officers. The difference between the two could not be greater.

Deciding to boycott “Blurred Lines” at a well-advertised Union Council, or better still General Meeting, is great. It encourages the entire student population to discuss big political ideas like consent, women’s liberation, freedom of expression, and heteronormativity.

If the campaign is run with strong political slogans it can help raise the consciousness of the student population.

Moreover the decision taken will have an effect on students outside the bubble of those who usually participate in student union activities: the students who use the union as a bar and nightclub and nothing else. If the issue gets a lot of attention it is possible that hundreds or thousands of students could begin discussing political issues which they would not normally give a second thought to.

A boycott like this teaches students an important lesson about what students’ unions are: democratic and political entities that fight for students’ rights and to change the world around them.

The main right-wing criticism of the campaign is that it violates freedom of expression. But it does no such thing. Students’ unions decide to play or not play songs, and to stock

**The lyrics and video for Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines” have provoked subversion and parody, but also boycotts.**

or not stock products every day. These decisions tend to be taken by unelected managers, DJs or staff. No one argues that it’s a violation of anyone’s freedom when a DJ refuses a request, why would it be when students make the decision democratically? No one is being stopped from listening to the song at home, or even at the union with their iPod. (Which, incidentally, is why I think that describing the campaign as a “ban” is unhelpful).

However some unions have boycotted the song on the say-so of a single officer or a small executive body (or even Trustee Board!). None of the benefits of a boycott is achieved if the song is removed from playlists without a wider debate

and discussion. And if the decision is not publicised properly, no one learns anything. It will make it easier for the boycott to be dismissed as out-of-touch union officers exploiting their power in an authoritarian manner.

And actually, it is union officers acting in an authoritarian way. We should want to encourage democracy in unions because we should want more democracy in society as a whole. Teaching people that students’ unions should be democratic helps to convince them that the world should be more democratic. In contrast, addressing issues with bureaucratic-authoritarian methods undermines that struggle.

## BANS?

**Describing the boycott as a “ban” is worse still and legitimises bans as a general tactic.**

Aside from the big political ideas about democracy and socialism, relying on bureaucracy and bans is a terrible idea tactically. Students’ unions are unique institutions in that so many are run by the left. The overwhelming majority of institutions with this kind of bureaucratic-authoritarian power are run along very right-wing ideas.

Giving legitimacy to top-down bans surrenders a huge amount of terrain to the right — and when the right ban things it is always the oppressed, exploited and radical who lose out.

In judging the merit of the “Blurred Lines” campaign the critical point comes down to how boycott decisions are taken. So far in the debate around the issue this distinction does not seem to have come out very much at all.

Boycotts of the song are done with good intentions, and the criticism of the campaign has thus far been predominantly rightwing, but that does not mean that the ideas around the boycott do not matter.

Students unions should encourage debate and genuine democratic participation in decision-making in all areas, including commercial services. There is no shortcut to achieving this.

*James McAsh, London*

• Statement from NUS Women’s Campaign: [bit.ly/bl-nus](http://bit.ly/bl-nus)

# JFK: what Marxists should remember

## Eric Lee



**In about a month, the world will remember the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy fifty years ago — on 22 November 1963.**

It’s easy to predict how the media will play this — people will talk about where they were when Kennedy was shot, there will be some speculation about what might have been had he lived, the old conspiracy debate will resurface, and there will be lots of film footage of the American Camelot, with the President’s photogenic family once again put on display.

The Left is likely to engage in a bit of myth-busting and no doubt articles will appear about the dark side of Kennedy, his role in starting up the Vietnam war, his ruthless opposition to the Cuban revolution, and his relatively weak commitment to civil rights.

Both accounts will leave something to be desired because the reality is, as always, a bit more complex than that.

While all the negative criticism of the Kennedy administration will be based on fact, one almost needed to be around in 1963 to get why everyone was so upset when he died.

I should qualify that: not everyone was upset. The far-right lunatic fringe in America, including the terrorist Ku Klux Klan, was not upset at all. They considered Kennedy to be a Negro-loving liberal from the north, someone who was “soft” on Castro and who was willing to sign a nuclear test ban treaty that would weaken the “Free World” in its fight with Communism.

But the people who today we’d consider essential for any progressive coalition politics in America — the Blacks, Hispanics, young people, union members — were all deeply affected by the killing.

It wasn’t just the horror of seeing a relatively young man (with an even younger family) cut down brutally in his prime, though that played a role — as it did a generation later when Diana died. There was more to it.

## SOFT SPOT

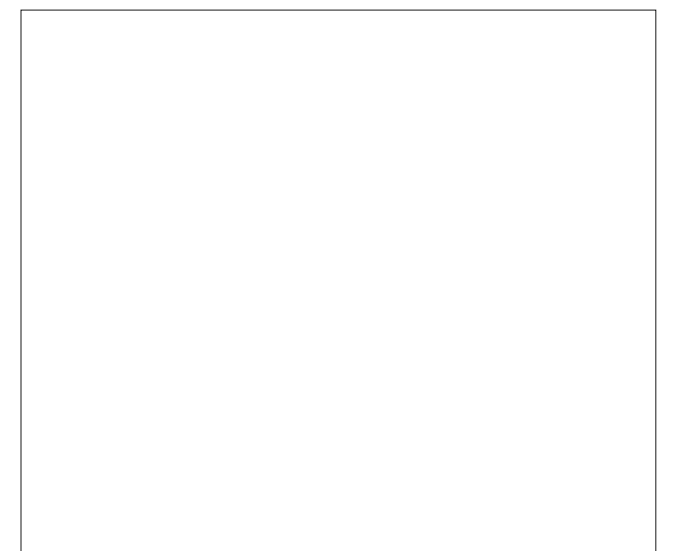
**The American folk singer Phil Ochs, who famously trashed mainstream liberalism in some of his songs, had a soft spot for Kennedy. In his song “That Was the President” he writes of the assassination, “it seemed as though a friendless world had lost itself a friend.”**

In the liner notes to the album that song appeared on, Ochs wrote that his Marxist friends couldn’t understand why he’d write such a song. And he added — that’s why he couldn’t be a Marxist.

It would be a pity if Marxists fifty years on can’t understand what Phil Ochs could about the tragedy of Kennedy’s death.

The point is not that Kennedy would have stopped the Vietnam war from getting any more serious, or that he would have wound down the Cold War a generation earlier, or that he would eventually have passed the civil rights laws that his successor, Lyndon Johnson, got through.

Oliver Stone and others imagine a different decade, with a second Kennedy administration taking on the Military-Industrial Complex and the white racist Southern politicians, in a way that he hadn’t done in his first term. I don’t think these fantasies help us understand the Kennedy years at all.



Instead, it’s important to remember the context in which Kennedy was elected, the tremendous sense of relief progressive Americans felt at the end of eight years of the Eisenhower-Nixon administration, with the McCarthy era now fading into memory. The March on Washington with Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech took place only weeks before the killing in Dallas. Millions of people thought that, as another folk singer of the time put it, “the times they are a changin’”

**It was a time of enormous hopes, hopes that would be dashed by the end of the decade. But those hopes were very real in November 1963.**

# Beat back Gove

**Workers at some schools, like Montgomery Primary School in Birmingham in 2012, have struck against plans to turn their schools into Academies.**

**The Lib Dems were bound to seek to put distance between themselves and their Tory coalition masters as the general election in May 2015 approaches. Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg has chosen to make the sharpest differentiation so far on Tory schools policy.**

Tory education minister Michael Gove is the least popular minister in general opinion polls, and (according to the ConservativeHome website) by far the most popular among Tories.

He wants to turn schools into a sort of market system, rather as the Tories also want to turn health care into a market system. In Gove's education market, the commodity offered is "education" as measured by exam scores based on testing stilted, stereotype, uncritical knowledge.

Gove also wants to use market mechanisms to force teachers into line with his market scheme, regulating their pay by performance as measured by students' results in those stereotype tests.

He has pushed academies and free schools, so that schools become competitors in the market-place, rather than cooperating units within each local network of schools.

## ACADEMIES

**Academies are schools funded directly by central government, bypassing the elected local authority, which seek private sponsors, can go outside the general terms and conditions of teachers' employment, and are obliged to follow the national curriculum only in maths, English, and science. They can set their own rules, within certain limits, for which students they admit.**

Free schools are ultra-academies which have no obligation at all on the national curriculum, and (as Clegg complained), no obligation to hire qualified rather than unqualified teachers, yet are funded by the government.

As of the May 2010 general election, there were no state-funded free schools and 203 academies. As of October 2013, there are 174 free schools and 3,364 academies. Over half of England's approximately 3,500 secondary schools are academies, and increasing numbers of the 17,000 primary schools are becoming academies. Over a quarter of all teachers in state-funded schools are in academies.

Academies and free schools get extra funding from government, theoretically to compensate for the services which community schools get from the local authorities which regulate them.

In the later years of the Blair-Brown government, the number of teachers in schools rose steadily, and the number of teaching assistants soared, from 66,000 to 179,000. Since 2010, numbers of teachers and teaching assistants have still risen, but more slowly, while student numbers have risen again (after decreasing slowly, year by year, up to 2010). Pay rises have been blocked.

Gove's policy is based on using the grinder of market-type mechanisms to get more "education" (measured in his terms) out of fewer resources. As a result, about 10% of teachers quit

the trade each year, and about half the people who complete teacher training are out of teaching within five years of their training.

Michael Wilshaw, head of the schools inspectorate Ofsted and a former flagship academy head teacher, sums it up: "If anyone says to you that 'staff morale is at an all-time low', you will know you are doing something right" (*Times Educational Supplement*, 2/12/11).

Back in 2008, a study of school systems across different countries found that "English primary schools remain uniquely preoccupied with testing..." And in secondary schools too, "what distinguishes assessment policy in England is the degree to which it is used as a tool to control what is taught and police how well it is taught".

It means "teaching to the test". It means cramming. It means stress. It means students labouring to get snippets of knowledge which they need for the exam, but which they can and indeed should forget as soon as the exam is over. In many subjects, it means that if students go on to university studies, or jobs which use knowledge from the subject, they pretty much have to start all over again to learn properly.

The crescendo in English schools of petty discipline, arbitrary uniform codes, and elaborate systems of punishment, is all part of the same system.

## BLAIR-BROWN

**The Blair-Brown government started the academies programme, and gave a huge push to the focusing of schools on exam results and league tables.**

Now Labour hints at schemes to bring back academies into local authority control, but no more than hints, and says that free schools would continue under a Labour government.

Back in 1965, John Holt wrote: "Most children in school fail... Many complete their schooling only because we have agreed to push them up through the grades and out of the schools, whether they know anything or not. Almost all fail to develop more than a tiny part of the tremendous capacity for learning, understanding, and creating with which they were born and of which they made full use during the first two or three years of their lives..."

"They fail because they are afraid, bored, and confused. They are afraid, above all else, of failing... They are bored because the things they are given and told to do in school make such limited and narrow demands..."

In the 1960s and 70s, efforts were made, and some successes were registered, in changing schools to orient them more to learning than to demarcating failure. Gove is taking schools backwards at a gallop. More and more, schools are being converted into a machine for dividing students into (a few) successes and (many) failures. What even the successful learn is almost incidental.

**Gove's huge unpopularity shows the potential for building a coalition of teachers, other school workers, students, parents, and the labour movement to beat back these regressive education policies.**

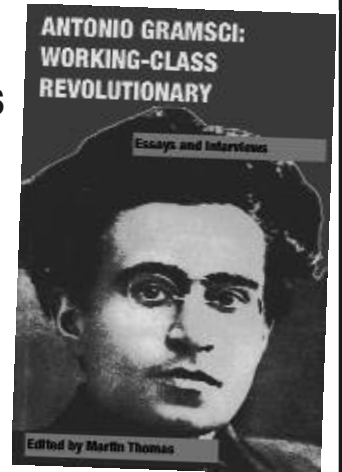
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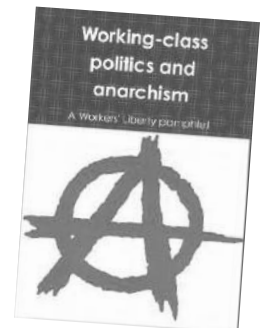
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# “Blurred Lines”, playlists, bans, and debate

## Letter



**A number of student unions have decided they will not allow Robin Thicke’s number one single “Blurred Lines” to be played in their commercial venues.**

The trend began at Edinburgh University Students’ Association (EUSA) where the song was removed from playlists in line with their “End Rape Culture and Lad Banter on Campus” policy. This policy was democratically approved at an open meeting of around 600 students. According to the union’s Vice President, and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts member, Kirsty Haigh, the song “promotes an unhealthy attitude towards sex and consent”.

When other unions followed suit, some decisions were taken in mass meetings or union councils, some by executives or lone officers. The difference between the two could not be greater.

Deciding to boycott “Blurred Lines” at a well-advertised Union Council, or better still General Meeting, is great. It encourages the entire student population to discuss big political ideas like consent, women’s liberation, freedom of expression, and heteronormativity.

If the campaign is run with strong political slogans it can help raise the consciousness of the student population.

Moreover the decision taken will have an effect on students outside the bubble of those who usually participate in student union activities: the students who use the union as a bar and nightclub and nothing else. If the issue gets a lot of attention it is possible that hundreds or thousands of students could begin discussing political issues which they would not normally give a second thought to.

A boycott like this teaches students an important lesson about what students’ unions are: democratic and political entities that fight for students’ rights and to change the world around them.

The main right-wing criticism of the campaign is that it violates freedom of expression. But it does no such thing. Students’ unions decide to play or not play songs, and to stock

**The lyrics and video for Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines” have provoked subversion and parody, but also boycotts.**

or not stock products every day. These decisions tend to be taken by unelected managers, DJs or staff. No one argues that it’s a violation of anyone’s freedom when a DJ refuses a request, why would it be when students make the decision democratically? No one is being stopped from listening to the song at home, or even at the union with their iPod. (Which, incidentally, is why I think that describing the campaign as a “ban” is unhelpful).

However some unions have boycotted the song on the say-so of a single officer or a small executive body (or even Trustee Board!). None of the benefits of a boycott is achieved if the song is removed from playlists without a wider debate

and discussion. And if the decision is not publicised properly, no one learns anything. It will make it easier for the boycott to be dismissed as out-of-touch union officers exploiting their power in an authoritarian manner.

And actually, it is union officers acting in an authoritarian way. We should want to encourage democracy in unions because we should want more democracy in society as a whole. Teaching people that students’ unions should be democratic helps to convince them that the world should be more democratic. In contrast, addressing issues with bureaucratic-authoritarian methods undermines that struggle.

## BANS?

**Describing the boycott as a “ban” is worse still and legitimises bans as a general tactic.**

Aside from the big political ideas about democracy and socialism, relying on bureaucracy and bans is a terrible idea tactically. Students’ unions are unique institutions in that so many are run by the left. The overwhelming majority of institutions with this kind of bureaucratic-authoritarian power are run along very right-wing ideas.

Giving legitimacy to top-down bans surrenders a huge amount of terrain to the right — and when the right ban things it is always the oppressed, exploited and radical who lose out.

In judging the merit of the “Blurred Lines” campaign the critical point comes down to how boycott decisions are taken. So far in the debate around the issue this distinction does not seem to have come out very much at all.

Boycotts of the song are done with good intentions, and the criticism of the campaign has thus far been predominantly rightwing, but that does not mean that the ideas around the boycott do not matter.

Students unions should encourage debate and genuine democratic participation in decision-making in all areas, including commercial services. There is no shortcut to achieving this.

*James McAsh, London*

• Statement from NUS Women’s Campaign: [bit.ly/bl-nus](http://bit.ly/bl-nus)

# JFK: what Marxists should remember

## Eric Lee



**In about a month, the world will remember the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy fifty years ago — on 22 November 1963.**

It’s easy to predict how the media will play this — people will talk about where they were when Kennedy was shot, there will be some speculation about what might have been had he lived, the old conspiracy debate will resurface, and there will be lots of film footage of the American Camelot, with the President’s photogenic family once again put on display.

The Left is likely to engage in a bit of myth-busting and no doubt articles will appear about the dark side of Kennedy, his role in starting up the Vietnam war, his ruthless opposition to the Cuban revolution, and his relatively weak commitment to civil rights.

Both accounts will leave something to be desired because the reality is, as always, a bit more complex than that.

While all the negative criticism of the Kennedy administration will be based on fact, one almost needed to be around in 1963 to get why everyone was so upset when he died.

I should qualify that: not everyone was upset. The far-right lunatic fringe in America, including the terrorist Ku Klux Klan, was not upset at all. They considered Kennedy to be a Negro-loving liberal from the north, someone who was “soft” on Castro and who was willing to sign a nuclear test ban treaty that would weaken the “Free World” in its fight with Communism.

But the people who today we’d consider essential for any progressive coalition politics in America — the Blacks, Hispanics, young people, union members — were all deeply affected by the killing.

It wasn’t just the horror of seeing a relatively young man (with an even younger family) cut down brutally in his prime, though that played a role — as it did a generation later when Diana died. There was more to it.

## SOFT SPOT

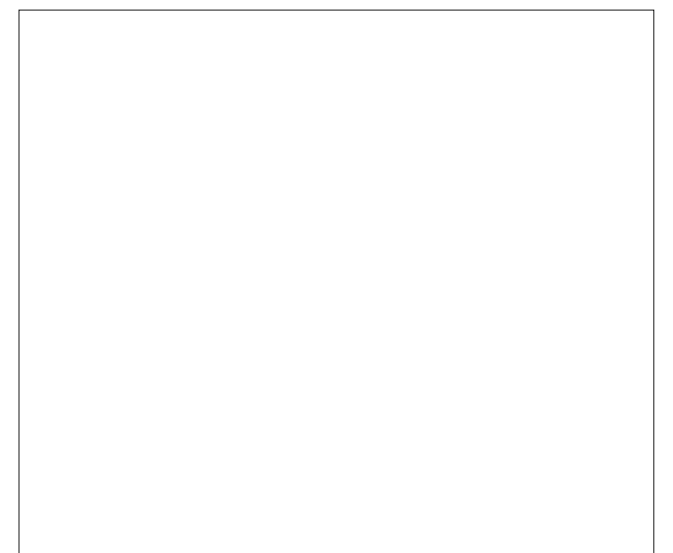
**The American folk singer Phil Ochs, who famously trashed mainstream liberalism in some of his songs, had a soft spot for Kennedy. In his song “That Was the President” he writes of the assassination, “it seemed as though a friendless world had lost itself a friend.”**

In the liner notes to the album that song appeared on, Ochs wrote that his Marxist friends couldn’t understand why he’d write such a song. And he added — that’s why he couldn’t be a Marxist.

It would be a pity if Marxists fifty years on can’t understand what Phil Ochs could about the tragedy of Kennedy’s death.

The point is not that Kennedy would have stopped the Vietnam war from getting any more serious, or that he would have wound down the Cold War a generation earlier, or that he would eventually have passed the civil rights laws that his successor, Lyndon Johnson, got through.

Oliver Stone and others imagine a different decade, with a second Kennedy administration taking on the Military-Industrial Complex and the white racist Southern politicians, in a way that he hadn’t done in his first term. I don’t think these fantasies help us understand the Kennedy years at all.



Instead, it’s important to remember the context in which Kennedy was elected, the tremendous sense of relief progressive Americans felt at the end of eight years of the Eisenhower-Nixon administration, with the McCarthy era now fading into memory. The March on Washington with Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech took place only weeks before the killing in Dallas. Millions of people thought that, as another folk singer of the time put it, “the times they are a changin’”

**It was a time of enormous hopes, hopes that would be dashed by the end of the decade. But those hopes were very real in November 1963.**

# Beat back Gove

**Workers at some schools, like Montgomery Primary School in Birmingham in 2012, have struck against plans to turn their schools into Academies.**

**The Lib Dems were bound to seek to put distance between themselves and their Tory coalition masters as the general election in May 2015 approaches. Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg has chosen to make the sharpest differentiation so far on Tory schools policy.**

Tory education minister Michael Gove is the least popular minister in general opinion polls, and (according to the ConservativeHome website) by far the most popular among Tories.

He wants to turn schools into a sort of market system, rather as the Tories also want to turn health care into a market system. In Gove's education market, the commodity offered is "education" as measured by exam scores based on testing stilted, stereotype, uncritical knowledge.

Gove also wants to use market mechanisms to force teachers into line with his market scheme, regulating their pay by performance as measured by students' results in those stereotype tests.

He has pushed academies and free schools, so that schools become competitors in the market-place, rather than cooperating units within each local network of schools.

## ACADEMIES

**Academies are schools funded directly by central government, bypassing the elected local authority, which seek private sponsors, can go outside the general terms and conditions of teachers' employment, and are obliged to follow the national curriculum only in maths, English, and science. They can set their own rules, within certain limits, for which students they admit.**

Free schools are ultra-academies which have no obligation at all on the national curriculum, and (as Clegg complained), no obligation to hire qualified rather than unqualified teachers, yet are funded by the government.

As of the May 2010 general election, there were no state-funded free schools and 203 academies. As of October 2013, there are 174 free schools and 3,364 academies. Over half of England's approximately 3,500 secondary schools are academies, and increasing numbers of the 17,000 primary schools are becoming academies. Over a quarter of all teachers in state-funded schools are in academies.

Academies and free schools get extra funding from government, theoretically to compensate for the services which community schools get from the local authorities which regulate them.

In the later years of the Blair-Brown government, the number of teachers in schools rose steadily, and the number of teaching assistants soared, from 66,000 to 179,000. Since 2010, numbers of teachers and teaching assistants have still risen, but more slowly, while student numbers have risen again (after decreasing slowly, year by year, up to 2010). Pay rises have been blocked.

Gove's policy is based on using the grinder of market-type mechanisms to get more "education" (measured in his terms) out of fewer resources. As a result, about 10% of teachers quit

the trade each year, and about half the people who complete teacher training are out of teaching within five years of their training.

Michael Wilshaw, head of the schools inspectorate Ofsted and a former flagship academy head teacher, sums it up: "If anyone says to you that 'staff morale is at an all-time low', you will know you are doing something right" (*Times Educational Supplement*, 2/12/11).

Back in 2008, a study of school systems across different countries found that "English primary schools remain uniquely preoccupied with testing..." And in secondary schools too, "what distinguishes assessment policy in England is the degree to which it is used as a tool to control what is taught and police how well it is taught".

It means "teaching to the test". It means cramming. It means stress. It means students labouring to get snippets of knowledge which they need for the exam, but which they can and indeed should forget as soon as the exam is over. In many subjects, it means that if students go on to university studies, or jobs which use knowledge from the subject, they pretty much have to start all over again to learn properly.

The crescendo in English schools of petty discipline, arbitrary uniform codes, and elaborate systems of punishment, is all part of the same system.

## BLAIR-BROWN

**The Blair-Brown government started the academies programme, and gave a huge push to the focusing of schools on exam results and league tables.**

Now Labour hints at schemes to bring back academies into local authority control, but no more than hints, and says that free schools would continue under a Labour government.

Back in 1965, John Holt wrote: "Most children in school fail... Many complete their schooling only because we have agreed to push them up through the grades and out of the schools, whether they know anything or not. Almost all fail to develop more than a tiny part of the tremendous capacity for learning, understanding, and creating with which they were born and of which they made full use during the first two or three years of their lives..."

"They fail because they are afraid, bored, and confused. They are afraid, above all else, of failing... They are bored because the things they are given and told to do in school make such limited and narrow demands..."

In the 1960s and 70s, efforts were made, and some successes were registered, in changing schools to orient them more to learning than to demarcating failure. Gove is taking schools backwards at a gallop. More and more, schools are being converted into a machine for dividing students into (a few) successes and (many) failures. What even the successful learn is almost incidental.

**Gove's huge unpopularity shows the potential for building a coalition of teachers, other school workers, students, parents, and the labour movement to beat back these regressive education policies.**

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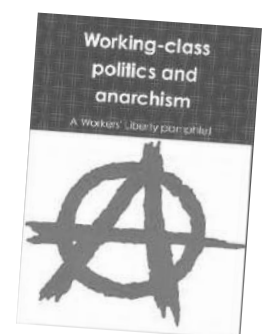
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# A man of action

**Our Movement**  
By Michéal MacEoin



**Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881) was a French socialist whose conspiratorial breed of revolutionary politics has a complex and controversial relationship with Marxism.**

Born in Puget-Théniers in south-eastern France, Blanqui studied law and medicine, but gave it up for active politics. Joining the secret Carbonari society in 1824, Blanqui was involved in republican conspiracies during the reign of Charles X. He took part in the 1830 July Revolution which saw the fall of the Bourbon monarchy and the elevation of Louis Philippe of the House of Orléans to the French throne.

Blanqui became involved with the Amis de Peuple society, which provided an important link to Jacobin-communists of the generation involved in the French Revolution. Among its leading members was Philippe Buonarroti, a veteran of the Conspiracy of Equals of 1796.

The conspiracy was a planned proto-communist insurrection against the Directory regime. It failed, having been thoroughly infiltrated by the police, but represented the last gasp of the radical egalitarian wing of the French Revolution.

Bonarroti's account of the conspiracy, published in 1828 (and translated by the Irish-born Chartist leader Bronterre O'Brien in 1836), had a profound impact on Blanqui's conception of revolution. It was, as Hal Draper has argued, one of the first texts grappling with the problem of the "transitional revolutionary regime" — with the political arrangements immediately following a revolutionary overthrow of the existing system of government.

Blanqui's answer to this problem was a sort of "educative dictatorship", which he described as a "plan to replace the existing government by a revolutionary and provisional authority, constituted in such a way as to forever shield the people from the influence of the natural enemies of equality, and give it the necessary will for the adoption of republican institutions."

This is a pure distillation of "socialism from above". The people, living in a society corrupted by poverty and degradation, were not yet able to create for themselves an egalitarian social republic. They must therefore be guided and educated by a revolutionary elite of "wise and courageous citizens" who would seize and wield power over them.

In this perspective the mass of the people were relegated to the position of barricade-fodder.

In many ways, this was one of few choices available to those who wished to realise a form of communism in the face of the under-developed productive forces and social classes of eighteenth-century France.

However by the mid-nineteenth century this conception of revolution became outdated. The rapid growth of capitalism was creating an increasingly combative working-class. Already in the 1830s France saw widespread revolt by silk weavers (the "Canut revolts" of 1831 and 1834). In the decade after the 1838 "People's Charter" a tremendously strong working-class movement for political reform would rise up.

In Germany in 1844, a revolt of weavers spread from Silesia to embrace large parts of the country. In the Chartists' newspaper *The Northern Star*, Engels wrote: "It is from the very heart of our working people that revolutionary action in Germany will commence...The movement of the proletarians has developed itself with such astonishing rapidity, that in another year or two we shall be able to muster a glorious array of working Democrats and Communists..."

Learning from these events Marx and Engels imagined and argued for a different conception of revolution — as a crowning moment of class struggle, based on the growing organisation and consciousness of the working-class. Symbolic of the growing popularity of this new conception was the merger of the League of Just — alongside which Blanqui had



organised an insurrection in 1839 — with Marx and Engels to form the Communist League. It took as its programme the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which identified the cause of the Communists with that of the working-class, to the extent that Communists "have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole."

For Blanqui, for the rest of his life, revolution remained synonymous with violent insurrection by a minority. Arrested in 1840, he was released after the revolution of 1848. Continuing his attacks on the new republican régime, he was arrested again in 1849, and once again in 1865 under the Empire of Napoleon III.

Though elected President of the Paris Commune in 1871, Blanqui was prevented from taking an active part in the world's first workers' government, having been arrested by the government of Adolphe Thiers shortly before it was established. He would die of a stroke on 1 January 1881.

Blanqui was a brave and uncompromising revolutionary, which put him at odds with many republicans and reform socialists of his day. His concern for the revolution itself over and above the form of society which would follow from it, distinguished him from the Utopian Socialists who had blueprints for a better future but thought the revolutionary overturning of existing society unnecessary or undesirable.

## WORKING CLASS

**Yet his elitist conception of revolution was different from the emphasis on working-class self-emancipation central to the socialism of Marx and Engels. Engels summed up the difference, writing in 1874 that:**

"Blanqui is essentially a political revolutionist. He is a socialist only through sentiment, through his sympathy with the sufferings of the people, but he has neither a socialist theory nor any definite practical suggestions for social remedies. In his political activity he was mainly a 'man of action', believing that a small and well organised minority, who would attempt a political stroke of force at the opportune moment, could carry the mass of the people with them by a few successes at the start and thus make a victorious revolution..."

"...From [this] follows of itself the necessity of a dictatorship after the success of the [revolution]. This is, of course, a dictatorship, not of the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of the small minority that has made the revolution, and who are themselves previously organized under the dictatorship of one or several individuals."

When Marxists speak of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" it is not of an individual or of individuals, but of a class, organised through its democratic organisations, i.e. workers' councils. In the same sense that capitalist democracy is the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie", a workers' state under socialism, embodying the political rule of the working-class, would be the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

A "Blanquist" organisation, the CRC, continued after Blanqui's death. It eventually merged with the Marxist POF in 1902 to form the PSF, which in turn merged into a broader unified Socialist Party, the SFIO, in 1905.

After the death of Marx and Engels a myth of the identification of Marxism and Blanquism thrived. Eduard Bernstein advocated a "revisionist" reformist doctrine which initially presented itself as a "new and improved" Marxism; to do this he sought to use the myth of Marx's alleged Blanquism to explain away Marxism's revolutionary content. Charges of Blanquism were leveled at the Bolsheviks by the Russian Mensheviks.

**Part of the task renewing revolutionary and democratic Marxism is studying the real history and clearing away the half-truths and mystifications heaped upon it by generations of falsifiers.**

# Lewisham

**In July, after a strong campaign and big demonstrations in Lewisham (south London), a judicial review blocked the plans of a Special Administrator, backed by the Government, to close major services at Lewisham Hospital. Jill Mountford, an activist in the campaign, reviews its successes and prospects.**

**The government is appealing against the High Court decision. The hearing takes place on 28 and 29 October.**

The Government wants to overturn our legal victory, to clear the way for more closures and downgrades on recommendations from Trust Special Administrators (TSA). But it thinks it is on a loser with their appeal and so is rushing through Parliament right now an amendment to the Health and Social Care Act giving the government or Monitor (the official overall regulating body for health services) the right to order any hospital they like to "reconfigure" or close with little consultation.

Health minister Lord Howe says this amendment will "put beyond doubt" that closures will in future be lawful.

But, one year on, there is a growing shared understanding in the community that a victory for Lewisham hospital is a victory for the whole of the NHS. SLHC's high court victory challenged the first use of legislation that will be used to close down and downgrade hospitals all over England. We are determined to sustain that victory.

Our strategy document notes: "A successful outcome of the Lewisham case will have far-reaching implications for the hospitals and trusts all over England, leaving the government's policy of using the Unsustainable Provider legislation to close hospitals unworkable..."

"We recognise that Lewisham Hospital cannot be safe unless the NHS is safe; that the threats to Lewisham Hospital are part of a wider attack on the NHS (cuts, privatisation, PFI); that a victory in one area is a victory for all; that solidarity with campaigners in other areas is vital; and that we have to take up and campaign on the wider issues that threaten Lewisham as much as the rest of the NHS..."

"[SLHC's] strength is our focus is on Lewisham: success in Lewisham will inspire campaigns elsewhere to fight on to defend their hospitals and services. The direct threat to Lewisham Hospital is the reason thousands have come out onto the streets to support it".

Our strategy document says: "Regardless of the outcome of the Government appeal, there are likely to be further attempts to close the hospital. The TSA process was not the first attempt and won't be the last."

"There was a serious attempt to close Lewisham Hospital as a district general hospital in 2008 with 'A Picture of Health', which was a reorganisation of services across South East London and which led to the creation of the South London Healthcare Trust of Queen Mary's, Queen Elizabeth and Princess Royal Hospitals.

"Lewisham was earmarked for downgrading during that period but, due to local campaigning, which included Lewisham Council and the Lewisham healthcare community, involving local health activists and Lewisham GPs, this plan was abandoned.

"Nevertheless this was always seen as unfinished business — a point made by NHS London and also implied in the letter from Matthew Kershaw (TSA) to Jeremy Hunt in April 2012.

"If we win the appeal and the TSA legislation is deemed unlawful the Government could come back again to try to close Lewisham using the standard reconfiguration process that is currently being applied in North West London, South West London and other areas of the country.

"Lewisham could be included in proposals to try to close nine London hospitals that were announced in a document published in the summer by NHS London (an organisation



# our plans to go on winning

that was abolished under the NHS reforms but already resurfacing in a new form and likely to continue to push these plans).

"If we lose the appeal, we will continue a mass campaign protesting against the decision, involving the whole community and hospital staff, and liaising closely with other campaigns against hospital and service cuts and closures across London and England.

"Regardless of the outcome of the appeal we will stay vigilant and ready to oppose any plans that lead to downgrading or loss of our hospital or other NHS services locally".

We will continue to build locally. We will work to develop the campaign across the newly merged Lewisham and Greenwich Healthcare Trust, involving greater numbers of hospital staff and community campaigners across two boroughs rather than one.

More than 120 people attended the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign (SLHC) meeting to discuss strategy on Tuesday 8 October. The eight-page strategy document quoted above, looking back at the successes over the past year and forward to the next six months, formed the basis of the evening's animated discussion.

## BROAD-BASED

**SLHC is a strikingly successful broad-based campaign, united to defend Lewisham Hospital against closure.**

It combines many talented people, some new to campaigning and others well-seasoned, some with well-formed political perspectives and others with quite loosely formed and fluid political views, all united to stop the Government from closing our hospital.

Over the past year we have had consistently big campaign meetings. Initially they were weekly; now, monthly, we still regularly have 70 or 80 people filling and overflowing the room at the local health centre.

The campaign meetings now alternate with a steering committee meeting of around 25 campaigners. Those who have been around a long time and or are part of the organised left have had to learn to tolerate each other or they have stopped attending.

For some it's their first time being involved in a genuine broad based campaign, for others it's the first for a long, long time. People have had to agree to disagree on many issues in the interests of the broad aims of the campaign, or simply stop taking part.

A genuine broad-based campaign like this requires a different approach from the one that some on the organised left have grown used to. Packing meetings and shouting loudest

really only works when the left is isolated from the broad movement.

Some of the local organised left groups have dipped in and out of the campaign over the past year, usually pursuing small sectarian goals without any overall perspective on why or how they think the campaign should develop. They tend not to see the difference between a genuine broad-based campaign and a self-proclaimed "broad" campaign which is in fact no more than a "front" organisation for one group or another.

In SLHC no one left group has been allowed to dominate simply by numbers or volume. Some left groups disappeared to plough their narrow sectarian furrows elsewhere; others retreated to muddle through the difficulties of their own organisation; one or two stomped off petulantly when the campaign failed to take on "their position".

AWL locally took a different approach. For the past year

we have consistently and constructively intervened in SLHC, playing a central role in developing strategy and tactics, and putting in the groundwork required to build a broad-based campaign.

We have our own ideas and arguments, but they are geared to building the broad-based campaign essential to push back the government and rally people to save the NHS.

People Before Profit, a small but active local group of campaigners with roots in the Communist Party and similar, have until recently played a useful role in the SLHC.

But with local elections in mind, and a rabid and subjective blanket hatred of the Labour Party locally and nationally, they have made a sectarian lurch in recent weeks. They have called for the SLHC to make a national initiative on PFI at the expense of fighting locally to defend Lewisham Hospital. They have attempted to get the campaign to focus its efforts on opposing a merger between Lewisham Hospital and Queen Elizabeth Hospital into the Lewisham and Greenwich Healthcare Trust, despite the fact that the merger was already a legal entity.

They have claimed, dubiously, that opposing the merger is the only left-wing position, and insisted that anyone who doesn't support their lurches is right wing and implicitly supports PFI or even the Health and Social Care Act itself.

They have put their desire to manufacture a left profile in opposition to the Labour Party for the local elections next year before the interests of the broad campaign.

In the 8 October meeting, aligned with some ultra-lefts who have done very little in the campaign, People Before Profit attempted to steer the campaign into national work against PFI, but failed to make headway. They lost their amendments by around 35 to 85 votes.

**The strategy document recognises that the campaign's "existence is contingent on the support of a spectrum of people and groups with different opinions. There should be room for all those views within the campaign as long as we stay focused on the primary aim of the campaign, which is opposition to the closure of Lewisham A&E, Maternity and other acute services".**

**How capitalist power ties us down — cartoon by Laura Gray from *The Militant* (USA), 25 November, 1944. "Jim Crow" was the system of racial segregation; KKK was a far-right racist organisation, mostly in the southern USA, founded after the US Civil War, which had maybe five million members at its peak (and still exists on a much smaller scale).**

# Why I joined Workers' Liberty

By Andy Forse

Two years ago, on 15 October 2011, was the date when a certain plan went into action. About 45 of us, who had mostly never met before, and with varying degrees of experience, had come together to organise around an idea.

That idea was simple: "Occupy the London Stock Exchange", and join in action that was occurring around the world. I don't think any of us could have predicted the impact it would have.

Before Occupy came along, I had mostly been an armchair activist, reading a lot of Chomsky, watching a lot of lectures, and going to the odd demonstration.

In many ways, Occupy was deeply inspiring, and in some ways also, quite frustrating. That Occupy never embraced a politically coherent agenda was a point of discontent for me; how could a movement that sat so deeply in the conscience of society, with so much good will, fall so far short in articulating a set of demands, and a basis on which to move forward?

One night at the encampment I saw AWL activist Ed Maltby demonstrating "The Great Money Trick" from *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Ed was on site with a few others who were fomenting vigorous debate around the camp about the stance of Occupy in relation to capitalism. Ed pursued his arguments with a fierce logic and genuine passion. Most of all, the politics that he espoused had a coherence that strongly resonated with me, especially in view of Occupy's muffled voice on such significant matters.

At first I was apprehensive about the very concept of left or socialist organisations. I had an ingrained perception of them all being like the Socialist Workers Party, whose paper I had once picked up, only to be disappointed when I found it to be unconvincing and sensationalist material that didn't appeal.

My mental imagery of such groups conjured up boring images of bearded men bickering about anachronistic nuances of politics, but here was a group that challenged that picture:

## Cultural exchange

### Songs of Liberty and Rebellion



An extract from "Cultural Exchange", by Langston Hughes, from *Ask Your Mama* (1961)

Dreams and nightmares!  
Nightmares, dreams, oh!  
Dreaming that the Negroes  
Of the South have taken over—  
Voted all the Dixiecrats  
Right out of power—

Comes the COLORED HOUR:  
Martin Luther King is Governor of Georgia,  
Dr. Rufus Clement his Chief Adviser,  
A. Philip Randolph the High Grand Worthy.  
In white pillared mansions  
Sitting on their wide verandas,  
Wealthy Negroes have white servants,  
White sharecroppers work the black plantations,  
And colored children have white mammies:  
Mammy Faubus  
Mammy Eastland  
Mammy Wallace  
Dear, dear darling old white mammies--  
Sometimes even buried with our family.  
Dear old  
Mammy Faubus!

Culture, they say, is a two-way street:  
Hand me my mint julep, mammy.  
Hurry up!  
Make haste!

### AWL members involved in Occupy argued for revolutionary working-class anti-capitalism

young and vibrant personalities armed with knowledge and strategies that were impressively well thought out.

Debate with Workers' Liberty provided clarity about the nature of Occupy and similar social movements, and why they rise and fall, or dissipate into single-issue campaigns that don't seem to penetrate the bottom line. I remember quite suddenly all the loose strands of intrigue that I had been following for years came together to form a single thread, and I realised why socialists placed the labour movement at the centre of the struggle. Obvious though it seems now, you don't learn these things in school.

The culture of the AWL places a tremendous weight on to the value of education and debate, and they pursue their tactics and targets with rationality and co-ordination that carries strength greater than their numbers would suggest. They have a constitution and a clear democratic structure within the organisation that means rights, accountability and elec-

tions, and their activists are inspiring individuals who are involved in struggles all over the country, and internationally as well.

Being with the AWL while they push forward campaigns like the one at Lewisham Hospital has steepened my learning curve and developed me as an activist. There is a lot to be gained from having a solid network of people who meet regularly, support each other and share their experience.

If you have come at politics from a similar angle to me, or if you roam the fringes of the activist movement waiting for the right moment to get involved, I would really recommend you get in touch with Workers' Liberty or turn up at one of their meetings.

**For me, doing so has allowed me to contribute in a more focused and powerful way to changing the world. That's why I joined.**

# Doctors of the Dark Side

By Les Hearn

Levels of violence in human societies have fallen drastically since Stone Age times, as shown by Steven Pinker in his excellent but gruelling exposition *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (Penguin, 2011).

This includes the infliction of torture by the state. By mid-19th century, judicial torture had been abolished in major western countries. This also applied to inhumane treatment of enemies. In the American War of Independence from 1776, George Washington ordered that prisoners of war (soldiers from the British side) be treated humanely, while Abraham Lincoln forbade torture or cruelty to prisoners in the American Civil War in 1863. This was the model for the Geneva Convention of 1929.

However, torture still continued, particularly in fascist and Stalinist dictatorships but also, unofficially, in countries where it had been outlawed. Hypocritically, the USA exported torture techniques and training to right-wing dictatorships that it supported, for instance in Latin America in the 1980s. The UK also applied torture and other inhumane treatments, mostly overseas (during the "Mau Mau" uprising in Kenya, in Aden, Northern Ireland, and Iraq). This is despite "cruel and unusual punishment" being outlawed by the 1689 Bill of Rights.

The US explicitly banned torture and harsh treatment by military interrogators after the Vietnam war. However, in recent years, the US has subjected captives to treatment which had previously been recognised as torture or, at least, as inhumane.

A particularly disturbing aspect has been the involvement of medical professionals, doctors and psychologists, in advising or agreeing to such treatment. This is the subject of the

### Still from the Doctors of the Dark Side

documentary film (by Martha Davis) *Doctors of the Dark Side*.

This important film is receiving its first UK showing at 6pm on 29 October at University College London. A discussion follows, including contributions from Philippe Sands and other human rights activists.

The event is free but already fully booked. There is a waiting list or interested people could turn up and see if there are any untaken seats.

**Doctors of the Dark Side will be reviewed soon in Solidarity.**

• [www.doctorsofthedarkside.com](http://www.doctorsofthedarkside.com)

# Thailand: free Somyot, free all political prisoners!

By Riki Lane and Maureen Murphy

**Somyot Pruksakasemsuk, a long time left-wing union and democracy activist in Thailand, has been in prison since 30 April 2011 and faces a further ten years jail under the repressive “lèse majesté” law.**

Somyot became active in the democracy movement as a secondary student in the 1970s, and in the 1980s became a key figure building genuine, democratic unionism. He is the founder of the Center for Labour Information Service and Training (CLIST), which led high-profile campaigns in the 1990s for workers’ rights, particularly among women workers in the textile and garment industry. Through CLIST he played a key role in building regional cooperation among workers’ organisations across Asia, including with garment worker trade unions in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Somyot is chair of the Union of Democratic Labour Alliance, former coordinator of the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers’ Unions in Thailand, part of the Thai Labour Campaign and the leader of 24 June Democracy Group, which was formed after the military coup in September 2006. That coup overthrew the democratically elected populist government of Thaksin Shinawatra and banned his Thai Rak Thai party. Thaksin fled into exile, and was convicted of various charges whilst overseas.

Since the coup, Somyot has been a leading pro-democracy activist in the “Red Shirts” movement and has concentrated on journalistic activities, including since 2007 editing the magazine *Taksin*. The magazine was banned in 2010 and replaced by *Red Power* magazine. The case against him was that two articles in 2010 that made negative references to the monarchy were published in his magazine.

## ARTICLE 112: “LÈSE MAJESTÉ” LAW

**Somyot was arrested on 30 April 2011 days after launching a petition for a parliamentary review of Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code, known as the “lèse majesté” law.**

Article 112 states: “Whoever defames, insults or threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent, shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years.” On 23 January 2013, he was convicted and sentenced to ten years in jail.

The lèse majesté law is widely criticised for being used by the Thai authorities to suppress free speech and silence political opposition. Activists charged under the law have risen from the dozens to, it is estimated, the hundreds since 2006, and people charged have routinely been denied bail during trials and appeals — Somyot has had 16 bail applications turned down.

While the numbers of people charged is rising, the reasons for arrest and conviction are becoming increasingly flimsy. One of Somyot’s co-prisoners was convicted in April this year for distributing copies of an Australian current affairs program segment which featured a number of high profile cases under Article 112. His sentence was three years and four months.

## THE “RED SHIRTS”?

**The Red and Yellow Shirts movements arose after the 2006 coup. The Yellow Shirts supported the coup, and identified strongly with the monarchy, taking on the royal colour of Yellow as their sign.**

The Red Shirts opposed the coup and were politically diverse: initially composed of many small groups, not dominated by the forces around Thaksin. Groups such as the Thai Labour Campaign and the June 24th group were important in organising protests. However, as Keng, a long time union activist explained to us: “Thaksin came to dominate the movement for two reasons.

“First, his party had the structures to organise on a large scale. Secondly, his government had a lot of support amongst the rural and urban poor, especially for reforms to provide universal health care. The election of his government was a big shift in Thai politics, where for the first time poor Thais saw that they had elected a government that bought significant change. This created much greater engagement with politics.”

“The labour movement split between Red and Yellow shirts. For example, state enterprises unions supported the

Yellow shirts because of Thaksin’s program of privatisation. Many NGOs also supported the Yellow shirts, because Thaksin was a big capitalist with a globalising (neo-liberal) program.”

By June 2011 the Red Shirts had succeeded in pushing for a new election, won by the Red Shirt-backed Pheu Thai party, led by Thaksin’s sister Yingluck Shinawatra. Before the election, they promised to abolish 112. Somyot’s wife, Joop, who is a key figure in the Free Somyot campaign, thinks that the new government backed down due to pressure from elites linking the royals and the military. The government states it is a criminal issue, not a political issue.

## ORGANISING FROM PRISON

**October 14 marks the 40th anniversary of a student uprising in Thailand against the military junta that took power in 1963.**

A demonstration in excess of 200,000 was taking place at the Democracy Monument in central Bangkok when the army moved in firing on students and a massacre ensued. To mark the 40th anniversary Somyot wrote from prison to his supporters calling for a “democracy of the people”.

Somyot continues to organise while incarcerated for the repeal of 112, freeing political prisoners and for improvements in prisoner conditions, including the removal of leg irons.

## THE CAMPAIGN

**The campaign has received trade union support in Australia and elsewhere, including by some international union organisations, such as the IndustriALL Global Union.**

The Victorian Trades Hall Council in Australia endorsed a resolution on 23 September 2013: “VTHC Executive Council supports the release from detention of Somyot Pruksakasemsuk. VTHC supports a workers right to organise and to speak out against injustice. The VTHC calls on the Government of Thailand to reform oppressive laws that prohibit labour activists from organising and campaigning for workers rights. The VTHC supports the release of labour activists who have been arrested for standing up with workers.”

The Australian workers’ rights organisation Australia Asia Worker Links has been campaigning for Somyot’s release and are hoping to soon host a visit by Thai labour activists.

Elsewhere, the campaign has been strongly supported by the Clean Clothes Campaign and other organisations opposing sweatshop labour. Amnesty International has declared Somyot a “Prisoner of Conscience”, and his case has been raised at the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Labour Organisation by Joop on a recent trip to Geneva.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay expressed her deep concern about the verdict and extremely harsh sentencing, “I am disturbed that Somyot has been denied bail and presented in court on several occasions wearing shackles – as if he were some kind of dangerous criminal. People exercising freedom of expression should not be punished in the first place”.

## UK ORGANISING

**The campaign has received some mainstream labour movement support in the UK, but there is no main group organising around it.**

After the verdict in January, TUC secretary Frances O’Grady sent a letter to the Thai ambassador, and Kerry McCarthy asked questions in Parliament.

There is much more that unions in the UK can do to support Somyot. The key points to include in motions of support are to call for:

1. An amnesty to release from detention Somyot Pruksakasemsuk and all political prisoners.
2. Pending an amnesty, ensure that prisoners accused and being tried at the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court under Article 112 are granted bail without discrimination and with respect to basic human rights.
3. Abolition of Article 112: modify the Criminal Code and the 2007 Constitution to prevent discrimination and violation of the rights to bail.
4. A fact finding mission to Thailand by Global unions

- [thaipoliticalprisoners.wordpress.com](http://thaipoliticalprisoners.wordpress.com)
- [bit.ly/free-somyot](http://bit.ly/free-somyot) (Facebook group)
- [freesomyot.wordpress.com](http://freesomyot.wordpress.com)
- [bit.ly/cc-somyot](http://bit.ly/cc-somyot) (Clean Clothes Campaign)
- You can write to Somyot in prison, where he is prison librarian: Somyot Pruksakasemsuk, Bangkok Remand Prison, 33 Ngamwongwan Rd., Lay Yao, Chatuchak, Bangkok 10900 Thailand. Email: [thelibrarianofbangkokprison@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:thelibrarianofbangkokprison@yahoo.co.uk)

**Riki Lane, Maureen Murphy, and Lillian Murphy travelled to Thailand in August-September 2013 and visited Somyot in prison on two occasions and met with Thai activists. Maureen worked with Somyot in Thailand for two years in the mid 90s.**

## Against the coup, but not for Thaksin

**Riki Lane spoke to Somyot in the Bangkok Remand Prison in September 2013**

**S:** Our magazine was not the *Voice of Thaksin* [as in Thaksin, the former prime minister] but *Taksin*, which means “south” or “oppressed”. After the 2006 coup, our group organised protests and initiated a united front alliance against dictatorship and for democracy. I was invited to be the editor of *Taksin* by its supporters.

Our union was one of the most active against Thaksin before the coup. However the military coup made things much worse. What happened was different to previous coups with the Red shirts versus Yellow shirts divide. Some NGOs were pro-Thaksin, while some unions supported the Yellow shirts, because Thaksin was a major capitalist.

We were the first labour movement group to organise for democratic demands, such as to bring back the previous constitution. There were many cases of labour movement activists being imprisoned under 112. So we proposed abolition of the law and launched a petition campaign to collect one million signatures to overturn the law. Five days later I was arrested by the military and sent to a special police wing.

**RL:** So was your approach similar to in Egypt, where to be against the dictatorship does not mean you have to be for the Muslim Brotherhood?

**S:** Yes, against the coup, but not for Thaksin.

# Unions rally round sacked organiser

By Tony White

**A mailing was sent out last week to all Trades Union Councils in Scotland, calling on them to adopt policy condemning the dismissal of Stan Crooke as the Transport Salaried Staffs Association's (TSSA) Scottish Regional Organiser and demanding his reinstatement.**

The TSSA is a small union mainly based on the railways, with 22,000 members (but four Assistant General Secretaries). Stan Crooke was summarily dismissed in July of this year, although he was not informed of the outcome of his appeal until September.

The mailing, sent out by his Unite union branch, was the latest step in a campaign which has already won support from Unite and GMB branches in Glasgow, the Glasgow/Renfrewshire Unite Area Activists Committee and Glasgow Trades Union Council.

The motion passed by Glasgow TUC committed the Trades Council to:

- Write to the TSSA General Secretary and all members of the TSSA Executive Committee, condemning Stan Crooke's dismissal and demanding his re-instatement.
- Circulate to all Trades Council affiliates and delegates the leaflet about his dismissal produced by his Unite branch.
- Write to the STUC General Secretary, asking for the issue of Stan Crooke's dismissal to be an item on the next meeting of the STUC General Council.

Last week also saw solicitors submit an Employment Tribunal claim for Stan Crooke for unfair dismissal.

This means that despite the pro-employer bias built into employment law, the solicitors (retained by Unite to represent Unite members in Scotland) are of the opinion that it is more likely than not that a Tribunal will conclude that Stan



Crooke was unfairly dismissed by the TSSA.

According to a leaflet produced and circulated by Stan Crooke's Unite branch, headlined "A Summary Dismissal That Demeans Trade Unionism and All We Stand For":

"Any trade union activists experienced in representing members would rightly condemn this treatment (of Stan Crooke) as a catalogue of abuses of disciplinary procedure and employment law by the employer."

"We share the concerns of TSSA members that the behaviour of their union as an employer is at odds with the role TSSA reps play in defending their members against similar behaviour by their employers."

"We call on activists in Unite and throughout the trade union movement to support the demand of TSSA members for the reinstatement of their Scottish Regional Organiser."

## STAIN

**"For any employer to behave in such a manner is bad enough. But when the employer is a trade union, it is a stain on our movement as a whole."**

The ongoing campaigning in opposition to Stan Crooke's dismissal coincides with difficulties faced by TSSA leaders on other fronts.

In September the planned merger between the TSSA and Unite collapsed. (Strictly speaking, given the disparity in size

between the TSSA (22,000 members) and Unite (1.4 million members), it was to have been a "transfer of engagements" rather than a merger.)

This was the third time in eighteen months that attempts by the TSSA to merge with another union have failed — with the RMT in March of 2012, and with Community in early 2013.

Then, earlier this month, the *Sunday Times* published an article (headlined: "'Chauvinist' Union's Lap-dancing and Lies") in which the TSSA's last President alleged that the TSSA suffered from a culture of misogyny and bullying:

"She claims she was repeatedly browbeaten by an overbearing baron who was unhappy in his well-paid role, pressurised not to stand for re-election to her post to clear the path for male colleagues, and subjected to a whispering campaign designed to derail her attempt to get re-elected."

"Her most serious allegation, though, relates to an attempt by union cronies to secure a substantial pay-off for a disaffected male colleague"

A succession of failed merger talks. A string of public denunciations by a former President. A pending unfair dismissal claim which has already received widespread publicity in the local trade union movement. And possible job cuts after the latest failed would-be merger.

This sorry record makes it all the more important that TSSA reps and members receive support from their counterparts in other unions: the failings of the TSSA leadership cannot be allowed to become an opportunity for employers to undermine trade unionism in the workplace.

**For more information about the reinstatement campaign and/or copies of the leaflet produced by Stan Crooke's Unite branch, e-mail: reinstatenow@yahoo.co.uk**



## Marxism At Work: Marxism, Trade Unions, and the Workplace

Saturday 7 December,  
11am-5pm, London (venue tbc)

**A day of discussion, skills training, and education.**

**If you're a socialist or radical in your workplace, and want to become a better one, this school is for you! Or, if you're not yet convinced of socialist ideas, but want to learn more about them, it's for you too.**

**Themes for the day will include:**

- Our fantasy union
- The Marxist critique of trade unions
- What is "the bureaucracy"?
- What is "the rank and file"?
- The role of Marxists
- Workplace bulletins: how, and why, to produce them

**www.workersliberty.org • awl@workersliberty.org  
0207 394 8923**

# Firefighters' strikes on hold

By Darren Bedford

**The week 14-20 October was a tumultuous one for the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), with a successful demonstration in London. However the second pensions strike, due on 19 October, was postponed after last-minute movement from employers and the government.**

Firefighters marched through the rain on Wednesday 16 October in a national demonstration against cuts and the pensions attack. The mood was positive and there were large delegations from across the UK, with sizeable numbers of younger firefighters. Going past Downing Street, a section of the demo rushed the gates shouting "you don't know what you're doing" at Number 10.

Most were anticipating taking strike action on Saturday 19 October. However the FBU's executive received a letter from the employers on 17 October setting out similar principles on fitness and capability to the Scottish government document produced last month.

The shift on the part of national (i.e. UK-wide) employers and endorsed by the Westminster fire minister, is significant.

It recognises that the "no job, no pension" issue raised by the FBU for firefighters beyond 55, is real. It also suggests ways firefighters could retire at 55 with an unreduced pension.

The leadership favoured postponing strikes because employers and government moved on a central strand of the dispute, namely the implications of working longer. FBU members in Scotland voted not to strike on a similar fitness and capability formula last month. The new promises do not include the additional protection pledged in Scotland, nor does it deal with wider issues like contributions.

However, the FBU reports that at a meeting with employers on Monday 21 October, no guarantees were provided because of the way the pension regulations are framed. That puts the ball back in the court of the Westminster government to change the law. The dispute is far from over.

Shelving the strike has started a debate within the union. On Monday, the London FBU regional committee unanimously criticised the decision and called for the immediate announcement of at least a 24-hour strike.

**A meeting of the union's local officials this Friday will discuss the situation and the strategy for further action.**

# Autumn's mini strike wave

October and November 2013 saw and will see a flurry of strikes in a variety of sectors.

Higher Education workers will strike on 31 October, postal workers will strike on 4 November. School teachers struck regionally on 27 June, 1 October, and 17 October.

In this week's *Solidarity*, we feature a symposium of contributions from activists involved in the strikes on how those disputes can win, and how they can link up.

## Unis: fight 13% pay cut

By a UCU activist

Members of Unite, UCU and Unison on university campuses will be striking on 31 October in a dispute over pay, following an offer of just 1% from management and a real-

terms pay cut of 13% over the past four years.

The following day, members of UCU — lecturers and higher-grade admin, library and professional staff — will begin a work-to-contract. If management still fail to budge, there'll be further strikes in November and plans are in place to escalate the action after the Christmas break.

This is a vast step forward from isolated one-day strikes that simply lose members a day's pay and leave them demoralised when no concessions are forthcoming from management.

It raises the possibility of co-ordinated action with other unions — most obviously with the other education unions, who also have a live dispute.

The strategy, however, needs to be matched by local action to build the strike and ensure members feel able to get involved. Regular open members' meetings, and joint meet-

ings between members of the different campus unions, are essential.

University managers will be aiming to pick off weaker branches. They may try intimidation, and may try to buy them off with local pay deals.

There's already some evidence of this at Exeter, where management have unilaterally abolished the bottom points on the pay scale in order to pay the living wage, meeting one demand of the dispute. Holding out against local offers, however tempting, is essential. Pay is already unequal enough thanks to the individualised salaries received by professors. Local offers will make that situation worse.

With management sure to try and play off students and lecturers, student activists have a vital role to play in building solidarity. This might be picket line visits and stunts on strike days, but talking to classmates and convincing them of the reasons for the strike is just as important.

**Success in this dispute will give university workers a great deal more confidence in tackling the wider issues of marketisation in education — and that's in students' interests too.**



## Industrial news in brief

• Rail cleaners strike  
[bit.ly/fgw-strike](http://bit.ly/fgw-strike)

• Cinema workers' living wage battle  
[bit.ly/curzon-fight](http://bit.ly/curzon-fight)

• ITV workers demand pay rise  
[bit.ly/itv-pay](http://bit.ly/itv-pay) (from the *UnionNews* website)



## Postal workers' strike set for 4 November

Postal workers will strike on 4 November, in the Communication Workers Union's (CWU) first national strike since 2009.

The immediate industrial fight is over workplace issues including pensions, but the wider context is the fight against the privatisation of Royal Mail.

Postal workers should

seek maximum coordination and joint support with other striking unions, including joint demonstrations, rallies, and mutual picket line support.

**Probation workers in the NAPO union also recently voted by an 84.4% majority for strikes, and could join the autumn strike wave.**

row at the whim of the leadership, with no counterbalancing force in the unions to stop that happening.

We need to be tactically imaginative enough to recognise that "co-ordinated" action doesn't just mean everyone striking on the same day. It means cross-union committees bringing activists into close and lasting contact with one another. Perhaps trades councils could do this, or perhaps we need something new. For example, cross-union committees are meeting in many universities before the 31st, also opening themselves out to student activists.

**Should we be aiming to make such committees more permanent?**

## Link up in HE fight

By a Unison member in Higher Education

Staff across universities will be going on strike over pay on 31 October. There is a significance to the fact that academic staff (UCU) and non-academic staff (Unite, Unison) are coming out on the same day.

It brings us closer to the idea that we are all workers, and that we have the capacity and duty to support one another.

Cue the calls from the left for co-ordinated strike action, the idea that we should link up with other workers who are coming out — posties and teachers, now that the firefighters' strike seems to be on hold — as part of their own disputes.

I'd love to go on a strike demo with people from other sectors. But that in itself won't help any of us win our respective disputes, just as "more people going on strike" won't in itself topple the Coalition government. Sometimes the call for co-ordinated action seems just like a repackaged version of the "24 hour general strike" slogan. As with that slogan, it raises the question — where should the co-ordination come from?

The problem, and we should learn this from the pensions dispute in 2011, is that each of these disputes could be called off tomor-

tunity: "Please talk to us so we can compromise". It shows that the leadership's militant-sounding slogan "Gove must go" is just hot air.

Members want a reinstatement of the national pay scale, a repeal of their pension cuts, and changes to conditions which will make their workload manageable. If we can also do some damage to Michael Gove's political career then so much the better. None of these things have been won, or even partially won. We won't win with hollow slogans and occasional protest strikes.

A national strike was promised before Christmas, but it looks as if it may not happen until next term. To allow the momentum of the regional strikes to dissipate without the next steps being clearly and concretely outlined is a waste.

We must raise slogans about the substantive issues of the dispute and explain how Gove's attacks will damage children's education. Putting our actual demands front and centre will also allow the rank-and-file some control over negotiations.

The left needs to step beyond incremental arguments about nudging the NUT and NASUWT leaders into a slightly quicker sequence of "one-day-strike-and-then-we'll-see" action, though we should make those arguments too.

The left should organise, and press the unions to organise, to build up organisation and confidence in school-by-school disputes on workload and local pay policy.

On paper, the unions' workload campaign continues from last year, and the current ballot mandate will also cover local strikes on workload and pay policy. It should be relaunched as a campaign in which the union publicises, benchmarks, builds, and spreads disputes, developing the capacity for ongoing and rolling action.

**Instead of decisions being made, effectively, by negotiations between small groups of top NUT and NASUWT officials, we should demand a full joint meeting of the unions' executives.**

## Teachers' next steps

By Jessica Hamm

On Thursday 17 October, thousands of teachers in London, the South East, the South West, and the North East struck in the latest of a series of one-day regional strikes over pay, pensions, and conditions.

More than half the schools in London were shut, with 3,500 schools closed across the country.

12,000 teachers demonstrated in London. The mood was militant and the demonstrators diverse. The vibrant presence of young teachers was particularly noticeable. Unlike on previous demonstrations and rallies, anger and energy was palpable. Homemade placards, bagpipes, and waves of cheers added to the atmosphere.

This is the third well-supported strike that NUT and NASUWT have organised since June. The members are clearly ready for a proper fight, but it would seem the leadership are not so sure. Despite the industrial action, no actual concessions have been won.

The unions' official demand is singly for "serious talks" with education minister Michael Gove. That is no demand at all. It is signalling to Gove that we are willing to concede on our demands at the first oppor-



# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Occupy Grangemouth!

By Dale Street

**On the morning of 23 October, Ineos bosses at the Grangemouth oil refinery in Scotland announced that the petrochemical plant within the complex is to close.**

Workers at the plant are already engaged in battles over the victimisation of shop steward Stevie Deans, and attacks on terms and conditions, including a pay freeze, pension cuts, and attacks on collective bargaining. Ineos had previously said it was prepared to invest more money into the site, but only if workers agreed to the new contracts.

The bosses' plan is "a blueprint for attacking ... all workers", according to union activists. A speaker at a recent 1,000-strong rally said that, if Ineos gets its way, "it will open the door to casualisation, zero-hours contracts, and a race to the bottom. It will be open house for union-bust-

ing employers across Scotland."

The proposed new contracts were sent to employees' homes at the end of last week, with a covering letter demanding that they be signed and returned by six o'clock on Monday 28 October.

The issue of Ineos's victimisation of Unite convenor Stevie Deans remains unresolved.

**PUBLIC  
Unite has run a high-profile public campaign against Ineos bosses, both in support of Stevie and against their proposed attacks.**

But although Unite says its "leverage" strategy, of putting public pressure on companies through leafletting, demonstrations, press coverage, and so on, is not a replacement for industrial action, the 48-hour strike due to take place on 20-21 October, in opposition to the victimisation of Stevie Deans, was called off by Unite.

Unite's calculation was that, by calling off the strike, they would "expose" the fact that the plant was being shutdown by management's intransigence rather than their members' action. But they have gone even further, giving a commitment to call no more industrial action as long as negotiations about a "survival plan" for the plant continue, provided that the threat to sack employees is also withdrawn. This attempt to outsmart Ineos risks severely weakening Unite's bargaining power.

And the justified focus on the "big picture" of the plant's future should not be at the expense of sidelining the defence of Stevie Deans against Ineos' victimisation.

On Monday 22 October, Unite announced it had received forms from 665 members rejecting the new terms and conditions. (Unite has over 1,000 members in the Grangemouth workforce of 1,350).

Ineos, on the other hand,

claimed that it had received "about [read: a lot less than] 300 positive returns".

Although Ineos is conducting its own war to win over the public, in reality it can afford to ignore public opinion. Ineos sells nothing directly to the public. As one journalist has put it, "Ineos is the largest company you've never heard of".

Smart thinking and appeals to public opinion should be complementary to, not a substitute for, collective power and industrial strength.

With closure now imminent, tactics like an occupation must be considered. If Ineos cannot, or will not, invest the funds to keep the workplace operational, workers should demand that the government steps in and takes the plant into public ownership, something which it has so far refused to consider.

**Sit-down strikes and an ongoing occupation of the plant could force the issue.**

## Mark Duggan and the disappearing gun

By Tom Harris

**Witnesses at the inquest into Mark Duggan's shooting by police have contradicted the version of events provided by police.**

The inquest has been set up to establish the facts around the killing of Mark Duggan by police in Tottenham in 2011. The killing sparked a protest then a riot in Tottenham, leading into nationwide rioting on a scale unseen in the UK for decades.

In 4 August 2011, unmarked police cars surrounded the minicab that Duggan was travelling in. Police say he then got out of the car. According to the officer who killed him, Duggan was holding a gun. The officer said he believed Duggan was about to open fire, so shot him twice. However, after the shots were fired, the officer says "the gun was not there."

Police say that a gun was later found 10 to 20 feet away from where Duggan fell.

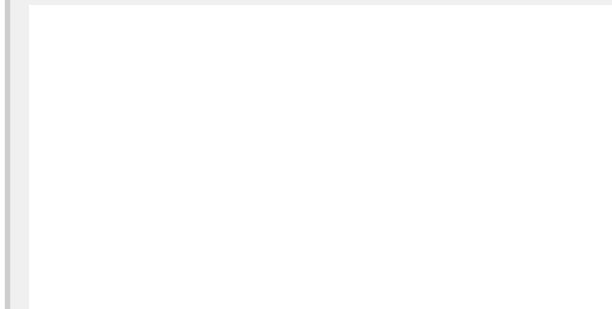
However, two wit-

nesses have cast doubt on this version of events. The driver of the minicab says that he did not see Duggan carrying a weapon either in the cab itself or when he got out and was shot. Another eye-witness testimony seems to contradict the police's version of events.

The witness, unnamed, says that she saw an officer emerging from the car carrying a gun in a piece of cloth, with an expression "like he'd found gold". The witness remembers being startled to see a gun in broad daylight, and asking her daughter if she had seen it as well.

Some have argued that these testimonies suggest that the police are, at best, providing a garbled version of events, or at worst, planted the gun themselves.

**The family of Mark Duggan have spoken out at the secrecy surrounding the killing, and the length of time the police have taken to clarify the events of that day.**



**The killing of Mark Duggan by police in 2011 was part of the context to the summer riots.**



**Israeli  
military  
refuser Noam  
Gur tours  
Britain**

**12-24 November**

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