

For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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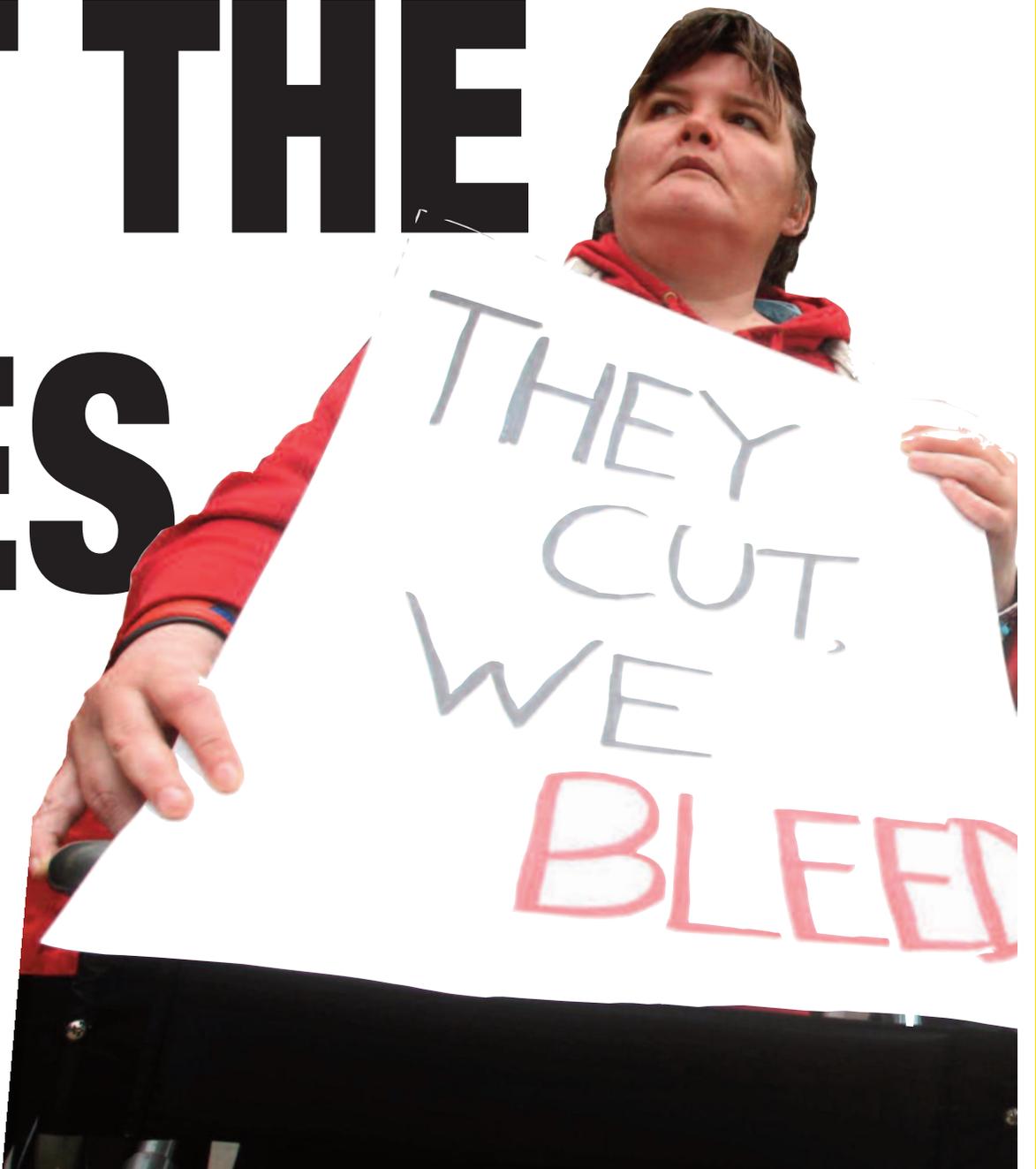
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**Miliband makes
promises, but
will continue cuts**

**FIGHT THE
TORIES
NOW!**

See page 3



What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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



We stand for:

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

Contact us:

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Right tries to overthrow Chavistas

By Pablo Velasco

Recent bloody demonstrations in Venezuela are part of a concerted attempt by the neoliberal right-wing section of the ruling class to destabilise and ultimately replace the Chavista government of Nicolás Maduro.

The Venezuelanalysis website says at least ten people were killed during the protests and the army are now on the streets. These mobilisations, it must be stressed, are led by reactionaries.

In the run up to first anniversary of Chávez's death, right-wing, free-market capitalist oppositionists have seized on popular discontent against economic

shortages, inflation at 50% and crime to call for the exit ("la salida") of the Maduro government.

Last April, Maduro narrowly defeated Henrique Capriles, leader of the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) opposition in the presidential elections. But the narrow margin and Maduro's mismanagement since have galvanised some right-wingers.

These demonstrations represent the convergence of two elements of the right-wing: the hard-right elements around Leopoldo López and the student opposition Juventud Activa Venezuela Unida (JAVU).

Lopez is aligned with those elements within the right-wing opposition who

supported the April 2002 coup and the 2002-03 lock-out against Chávez, such as Maria Corina Machado, who leads the civil society organisation Sumate. López played an active part in the coup attempts.

In December 2013 the PSUV defeated MUD candidates in municipal elections by 54% to 42%. Capriles is playing a long game and is more conciliatory with the Chavista regime, while the hard right want to oust Maduro more swiftly.

JAVU has staged previous protests in support of private media outlets and against the imprisonment of opposition supporters. According to British-based academic Julia Buxton, in recent years JAVU has focused on underfunding in the higher education sector and Cuba, where Chávez went for chemotherapy.

They also challenged the result of the April presidential election. They represent a small proportion of higher education students, in a sector that expanded massively under Chávez.

The right-wingers have been emboldened by Obama's criticisms of Maduro's government. The US government and some US NGOs and think tanks

have provided substantial funding to the Venezuelan right-wing over many years.

Just as in 2002-03, the Venezuelan working class should have no illusions about the right-wingers. For all their rhetoric about democracy and freedom, if they succeed in overthrowing Maduro, the neoliberals will make it much harder for the working class to organise.

Chavista rule has stifled the emergence of the Venezuelan working class as an independent actor, but union organisations like the UNT would almost certainly be shattered by an incoming right-wing government. Chavista rule may be Bonapartist, but it has a democratic mandate. The old elites do not have that.

Socialists and anarchists in Venezuela have rightly not joined these demonstrations, which suggests they understand the reactionary nature of the protests and the forces leading them.

An independent labour movement, implacably opposed to the old ruling elites but also critical of the Chavistas is a burning necessity to break out of the current impasse.



Egyptian government resigns

By Phil Grimm

On 24 February, the Egyptian Prime Minister Hazem Beblawi announced the resignation of the entire cabinet with immediate effect.

The announcement followed a wave of strikes in the industrial cities, black-outs, acute shortages in cooking gas and growing public dissatisfaction with the government.

Despite the government's unpopularity, many were surprised at the announcements, including, it seems, some of the cabinet ministers.

The surprise resignation may serve two purposes. First it is an attempt to appease popular unrest.

The regime, backed heavily by the military, is in a crucial phase leading up to presidential elections, and a rebirth of the enormous street demonstrations of 2013 would scotch their hopes of a smooth transition.

And strikes, including by rubbish collectors and public sector workers in key industries, have sharply increased; these have the potential to turn generalised anger into a direct confrontation with the regime.

The other potential reason for the resignation has to do with Abdul Fattah Al-Sisi, chief of the armed forces and the man who ordered last year's coup against the Muslim Brotherhood.

Al-Sisi is expected to announce his candidacy for president. However, current rules mean he is unable to do so until resigning his position as Defence Minister. The mass resignation may be a way of giving cover to his manoeuvre. If he is absent from a new cabinet, this will amount to a virtual confirmation that he will run for president.

The day after the resignation, former Housing Minister Ibrahim Mahlab told the press that he had been

asked by the current president to become prime minister and to form a new government, and that had accepted the new role.

Mahlab was formerly a senior figure in the National Democratic Party of Hosni Mubarak, as well as the chief of one of the Middle East's biggest construction firms, Arab Contractors Company. Whereas the former Prime Minister Beblawi was seen by many in the military and political establishment to be weak and indecisive, Mahlab is considered to be more reliable. Indeed, when informing the press of the new government, he stressed his intention to stop strikes and "crush terrorism in all corners of the country".

As the military-backed government moves to consolidate, the role of the resurgent, powerful independent union movement in Egypt will be crucial.

Italy: Renzi becomes prime minister

The eventual loss of faith [in the previous coalition government] by the major employers' confederation, followed by the march on Rome of the whole spectrum of forces of the small-business world that constitutes 95% of Italy's productive base, and added to Europe's and the markets' thumbs-down on the prostration of the government, opened the door to Renzi.

He has been backed by one platoon after another of what still has the effrontery to describe itself as the left — Vendola's SEL, the metalworkers' leader Landini, plus the washed-up remnants of the latest opportunist disaster Communist Refoundation...

● More: bit.ly/renzi-p

Fight the Tories now!

By Gerry Bates

It is hard to imagine many people being taken in by Tory party chair Grant Shapps saying: “The Conservatives are the workers’ party and we are on your side”.

Or by Tory MP Robert Halfon proposing that the Tories change their official name to “The Workers’ Party”.

Five of the six people drawing up the 2015 Tory election manifesto went to Eton, and the sixth went to an almost equally posh school, St Paul’s.

The Tories have slashed benefits on which many low-paid workers depend. They have pushed down public-sector pay. Having started cuts because, they said, a debt crisis made them necessary, the Tories now propose to continue them indefinitely.

Inequality has soared as bankers cynically get round a weak EU restriction on their bonuses by paying out similar amounts and calling it “allowances”.

That the Tories even try such a tack shows two things.

First, that they know there is a clash between those who live from labour and those who live off property and wealth, and that working-class people are angry about the increasing gap between us and the wealthy.

Second, that the Labour leaders’ offering to working-class people is so weak



Serving the rich

that even the Tories’ bizarre new pitch might rally a few voters.

On Saturday 1 March the Labour Party holds a special conference. Not, sadly, to plan campaigns to defend the Health Service. Or to win a Living Wage for all. Or to take the banks and high finance under public ownership and democratic control.

Rather, Labour leaders will ram through the conference plans to reduce trade-union weight in the party by “opting-out” all individual members of affiliated trade unions who do not in addition tick a box to say they want to “opt in”.

Little time at the confer-

ence is scheduled for debate. Much will be given to a speech by Labour leader Ed Miliband.

Probably he will repeat some of the themes of a talk he gave on 10 February.

“Tackling inequality is the new centre ground of politics... The lesson of the New Labour years is that you can’t tackle inequality without changing our economy... promoting a living wage... helping create good jobs with decent wages”.

But in the same talk on 10 February Ed Miliband said: “The next Labour government will face massive fiscal challenges, including having to cut spending”. Shadow chancellor Ed

Balls followed up on 18 February by stressing that Labour would be “pro-business”, and would be “cutting public spending in the next parliament — that is very different from past Labour governments coming to power”.

The Blair government started by limiting itself to Tory spending plans for the first two years. Eventually it did increase public spending, to the benefit of hospitals and schools, though a diminished benefit because the spending was accompanied by marketisation, privatisation, PFI, box-ticking “targets” management, and bloated administration.

But a Miliband-Balls government would underspend Blair? It would continue on the path set by the Tories? More libraries and hospitals would close? More low-paid workers would be driven to reliance on food banks?

This approach leaves the wealthy comfortable in their spiralling wealth, offers the working class nothing, and makes talk of “tackling inequality” just empty.

Union and community activists should fight the Tory cuts now, not wait and hope that a Labour government will save us.

And we should step up pressure on Labour for more policy commitments like the meagre few won so far — to repeal the bedroom tax and the Health and Social Care Act.

being serious about power, this is not defeatism at all.” (*Guardian*, 10 May 2013).

And Balls’s rejection of coalition was not on the grounds of wanting to do something radical in the working-class interest which the Lib-Dems would block.

He stressed that Labour would be “pro-business”, and would be “cutting public spending in the next parliament — that is very different from past Labour governments coming to power”.

Worse even than the Blair government, which started by limiting itself to Tory spending plans for the first two years?

Young Labour rejects Collins

By a Young Labour member

The 22-23 February Young Labour conference in Bradford delivered a surprise upset for the Labour leadership, as delegates voted 109 to 107 to reject the Collins Review into Labour Party structures.

During an often heated debate, many Young Labour and trade union members criticised the Collins Review for its threat to the unions’ collective affiliation. The changes, proposed following the false allegations against Unite’s conduct during the Falkirk West selection, would mean that trade union members would have to “opt-in” individual to become affiliate “supporters” of the Labour Party.

In 2019, a reduced number of individual affiliate “supporters” is likely to become a pretext to reduce the unions’ collective power, including their 50% share of the votes at the annual party conference. Concern was also expressed that there will be just two hours of debate at the conference, with no amendments or taking-in-parts.

The vote at Young Labour conference means that the youth wing’s two delegates, Simon Darvill and Tori Rigby, are mandated to cast 25,000 votes against the Collins Review at the Labour special conference on 1 March.

This was a further blow to the leadership of the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS), whose conference immediately preceded Young Labour, and which tends to act as a right-wing bloc to keep Young Labour in check. The NOLS conference itself was marked by a dramatic walkout of several Labour Clubs, protesting

against the committee’s arbitrary and undemocratic decision to rule out a motion on introducing One Member One Vote (OMOV) in Labour Students elections.

Several years of agitation by the left for more democratic youth conferences have made some progress. As well as the vote on Collins, there was a small amount of time set aside on the Sunday to discuss policy. The left won several votes, including on the abolition of Right to Buy, greater freedom for trade unions, and a 10% “super tax” on the wealth of the richest 10% in Britain. The danger now is that, realising that greater democracy is to the benefit of the left, the leadership will crack down and roll back these limited democratic gains. Vigilance is necessary.

The Collins debate in particular was stormy, as one would expect on such a contentious issue. The first vote went 103 to 100 in favour of the Collins review, which prompted calls for a recount. The results of the recount were not released for reasons not shared with the conference floor. It was clear from the expressions on the face of party staff that the second recount had delivered a vote against Collins.

In future, clear standing orders and labour movement norms, including the right of conference to select and replace the Chair, and make points of order, are needed.

The left has made some headway in Young Labour, including the trade union delegations. The general mood was to the centre-left. The task now is to fight for a more democratic and active youth movement with socialist class-struggle politics.

No Lib-Lab coalition

In a welcome move, Ed Miliband and Ed Balls have responded to suggestions from Nick Clegg of a Labour/ Liberal-Democrat coalition after the 2015 general election.

Clegg, with a view to the 2015 election, is anxious to get some distance from the Tories.

In a TV interview on 17 February, he claimed that: “The Conservative party has changed quite dramatically since we entered into coalition with them. They have become much more ideological”.

In fact the Tories were just as ideological, and with the same ideology, in 2010.

Clegg proposed the Lib-

Dems as a safe conservative influence in a Labour/ Lib-Dem coalition after 2015.

“I think there’s nothing like the prospect of reality in an election to get politicians to think again, and the Labour party, which is a party unused to sharing power with others, is realising that it might have to... If there were a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition, we the Liberal Democrats would absolutely insist that government would not break the bank.”

Ed Miliband responded the same day: “What I’m looking for is a majority Labour government. There are such big issues that the country faces... Nick Clegg

should be worried about the Liberal Democrats.”

The next day the right-wing Labour journal *Progress* published an interview with Ed Balls: “None of us want to be in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, partly because it’s hard to know what’s more unpopular at the moment — the Liberal Democrats or the idea of a coalition government.”

However, advocates of Lib-Lab coalition remain prominent around Miliband. Shadow minister Andrew Adonis reckons that: “We should prepare for coalition negotiations properly, part and parcel of

Defend The Link

The Defend The Link campaign has put out a bulletin explaining the case against the Collins plan, and DTL and other Labour and trade-union activists will be at the Labour special conference on 1 March distributing leaflets.

A battle remains to be fought in the labour movement after 1 March to block the further rule changes which the Labour right clearly want, to reduce trade unions’ collective voice in the Labour Party.

- Download the DTL bulletin at bit.ly/dtl-col.
- Meet DTL activists on 1 March at 9am at the Costa Coffee shop at the West entrance to ExCel, London E16.

Right on independence, but for the wrong reasons

Scotland
By Dale Street



"It is difficult to decide which camp in the Scottish independence debate makes the stronger case for voting the opposite way," were the sensible opening words in the 21 February editorial in the *Morning Star*.

In recent weeks, the editorial pointed out, "some dire weakness in the SNP-led Yes campaign have been ruthlessly exposed."

The SNP claims that the pound would be the currency in an independent Scotland and that Scotland would be part of a "currency union" with the RUK (remainder of the UK). But all three Westminster parties have rejected such a "currency union"; an independent Scotland would have to have its own currency.

The SNP also claims that an independent Scotland would automatically remain a member of the European Union (EU). But EU Commission President Barroso has said that it would be "nearly impossible" for an independent Scotland gain membership of the EU.

The editorial might have pointed out how SNP-Scotland likes to tell the rest of the world how to run its affairs, on the basis that what's good for Scotland is good for the world.

Thus, the RUK will have a currency union with Scotland, the EU will admit Scotland into membership, NATO will allow Scotland to remove Trident from the Clyde but maintain NATO membership, and the BBC will continue to offer Scotland all its output.

And an independent Scotland will continue to be British, Salmond has claimed, because Britishness is the property of people in Scotland as much as it is of the people of the RUK.

The *Morning Star* also rightly pointed out that the "left and republican forces in Scotland" who support independence have yet to explain why it would "create more favourable conditions for achieving a genuinely independent, socialist Scotland."

For instance, in theory, the "left and republican forces" should have welcomed the rejection by Westminster parties of a "currency union" and the consequent need to establish a new Scottish currency.

But an article by the International Socialist Group (which initiated the "Radical Independence Conference") only recommend an article on the Open Democracy website (which argues for a separate Scottish currency on the grounds that it would make Scottish exports more competitive).

The basic response of the ISG was to simply sidestep the issue: "The rights and wrongs of currency union are really

not the issue." The "real issue" in the referendum, claimed the ISG, is to pass judgement on British history:

"September 18th is a referendum on the history of the British regime. It is the fulcrum of everything that has past: the wars, the crushing of strikes, neo-liberalism. ... The referendum narrative will be remembered by many as the people versus the British state."

The *Morning Star* was equally scathing about the official No campaign of the main parties ("Better Together"):

"The unionist arguments deployed against a Yes vote have been reactionary enough to drive any progressive-minded democrat into the independence camp. Like Chicken-licken, Turkey-Lurkey and Ducky-lucky, the doom-mongers want the Scottish people to believe that a falling acorn means the sky is coming down."

NO CAMPAIGN

The arguments for a No vote of "Better Together" vacillate between verbiage and incoherence.

According to the campaign: "We are proud that we fought together to defeat fascism and worked together to build a welfare state."

But that welfare state is being dismantled by the Con-Dem coalition (after years of dismantling by New Labour)!

Despite it being something of an oddity in a discussion about the referendum, the *Morning Star* editorial also raised the issue of the specific interests of the (all-British) labour movement: "The organic organizational unity of the labour movement across Britain is one of its greatest strengths."

This makes the labour movement "potentially the most powerful force" to "secure left governments in Edinburgh, Cardiff and London." These governments would govern within the overall framework of "enhanced devolution guaranteed by a federal Britain."

(Being the *Morning Star*, it placed this in the context of an "anti-monopoly alliance", but this did not obscure the basic point it was making.)

Where the *Morning Star* editorial lost the plot was through cross-referencing the issue of independence for Scotland with its visceral (and reactionary, little-England or little-Britain) hostility towards the EU.

For the *Morning Star* the root of all evil is the EU and its Commissioners. When national governments and national ruling classes attack the working class, the *Morning Star* would have its readers believe, they do so not because it is in their own class interests to do so but because they are acting at the behest of the EU.

But the most reactionary and anti-working-class sections of the Tories are also anti-EU. They favour withdrawal from

the EU because they see the EU as an obstacle to stepping up their attacks on the working class. And what is true of the Tories is equally true of other right-wing parties throughout the EU.

Anti-EUism was central to the case against Scottish independence put forward by the *Morning Star*.

"What kind of independence," asked the editorial, "would exist in a Scotland whose foreign and military policies are largely decided by the EU and NATO?"

It would be irrelevant if Scotland had a seat on the EU Council of Ministers given that "EU policies are mostly shaped by the unelected EU Commission and the unaccountable European Central Bank."

There would be no prospect of an independent Scotland promoting the interests of the working class because "a sterling union and EU membership make (such policies) all but impossible for a small nation with only nominal independence."

Such arguments are at one with those put forward by the *Morning Star* initiated and backed Scottish Campaign Against Euro-Federalism:

"It is dangerously misleading to suggest that Scotland can join the EU and escape the policies that are currently pulverising social services across the rest of the EU... The stark truth about the EU is that none of the citizens of the EU get to choose their government."

By this logic, there was no point in the colonies of the British Empire demanding — and securing — independence. Although they secured political independence, they all inevitably remained trapped within the confines of an international capitalist economy. But they were not "small nations with only nominal independence". They were small nations with real political independence who had escaped from the yoke of British imperialism (of which Scotland was an integral part).

Independence freed them from the national oppression they suffered as British colonies (which would not apply to an independent Scotland — no-one, not even Yes supporters, argues that Scotland is a colony of the Westminster imperialist metropolis).

In a global capitalist world economy independence is neither illusory, nor "nominal" just because it does not allow a country to exist outside of that world economy.

From a socialist perspective, the arguments put forward in support of an independent Scotland make little or no sense (and the more "radical" the arguments, the less sense they make). But EU-membership by an independent Scotland is not a valid argument against independence.

Help us raise £12,000 by October

The national committee of Workers' Liberty, meeting on 22 February, decided on a new drive to help and encourage members, sympathisers, and friends to educate ourselves in socialist theory.

The "study" page on our website, www.workersliberty.org/study, has been revamped. Support from our fund drive is needed to help us organise study groups and day schools — to book rooms, print off reading, produce publicity, pay organisers to help coordinate.

Our study groups on themes such as Marx's *Capital* offer a contribution to countering today's downpour of no-alternative-possible ideology. Help us expand them.

We want to raise £12,000 by our AGM in October 2014

You can set up a regular payment from your bank to: AWL, sort code: 08-60-01, account: 20047674, Unity Trust Bank, Nine Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2HB). Or send a cheque to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL"). Or donate online at workersliberty.org/payment. Take copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college, or campaign group, or organise a fundraising event. And get in touch to discuss joining the AWL!

More information: 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

This week we have raised £266. Includes profit from book sales and a donation. Thanks to Cath.

Grand total: £1756.



Protestors in Kiev ("dictatorship" is taped over their mouths)

Ukraine: the hope of a "third pole"

The three months of upheaval in Ukraine which culminated on 22 February with the fall of president Viktor Yanukovich started on 21 November with protests against Yanukovich's withdrawal from a planned deal with the European Union and his choice instead to seek closer ties with Russia.

According to many accounts, though, the EU issue fell into the background as the protests developed, being overshadowed by the demand for Yanukovich to go because of his corruption and brutality.

A Ukrainian anarchist, interviewed, says that people "pictured a very utopian ideal — society without corruption, with high wages, social security, rule of law, honest politicians, smiling faces, clean streets, etc. — and called it 'EU'. And when one tried to tell them that the actual EU has nothing to do with this pretty picture... they retorted: 'So you would better live in Russia then?'"

Ukraine was under foreign domination, first Polish, then Tsarist Russian, then Stalinist Russian, for many centuries. There was only a brief period, in the time of Lenin and Trotsky, when the new workers' state created by the 1917 revolution deliberately sought to promote "Ukrainisation", and to counter forced Russification.

Ukraine suffered especially under Stalin's Terror. Millions died in a deliberately intensified famine in 1932-3. After Stalin's death in 1953 and the subsequent "thaw", bureaucratically imposed Russification continued.

Despite its natural resources, Ukraine also suffered economically. Today its average income is much lower even than Russia's or Belarus's, let alone Poland's.

Nationalist feeling was and is strongest in western Ukraine, which did not come under Stalinist rule under 1939-40; but when the old regime in Russia broke up, in 1991, Ukrainians west and east voted 90% for independence.

There was a majority for independence even among Russian-speakers, many of whom identify as "Ukrainian". Even in the Crimea, an area incorporated into Ukraine only in 1954, there was a 56% majority. According to the *Financial Times* (24 November), even today, when many Russian-speakers in Crimea oppose the 22 February "coup", most Crimean Tatars are in the anti-Yanukovich camp.

In short, there are deep historical reasons why national feeling is strong in Ukraine, and why Ukrainians resent and fear Russian domination.

That feeling could express itself in a vague leaning towards the EU, partly idealised, and partly also seen realistically as more liberal and offering greater economic openings than Putin's Russia.

Some components of the anti-Yanukovich movement, such as the fascist far-right party Svoboda, have never been particularly pro-EU.

The movement of the last three months has had undeniable weight and popular support, maintaining an occupation of Kiev's main square despite periodic violent attempts to oust it, taking over local administrations in western Ukraine, and eventually toppling Yanukovich.

The immediate background to the fall of Yanukovich was the killing of many protesters in an attempt by the regime to reassert control; the promulgation of a compromise deal hastily devised by EU politicians, in which there would be new presidential elections in December; and the rejection by the people on the street of another ten months for Yanukovich.

But the dominant political shape of the movement has been right wing. Little good can be expected from the new regime.

One of its first measures has been to withdraw the status of Russian as a minority official language in Ukraine.

According to the Ukrainian anarchist quoted above: "Svoboda and other fascists are similar to the Egyptian Muslim Brothers and other Islamists in many ways. They are 'the' opposition to the hated regime... they cannot (hopefully) unite all protesters under their banner [but] the protesting people... lack their own language to express themselves..."

"[In the occupied main square of Kiev] there haven't appeared any assemblies or other instruments of collective decision-making... The opposition parties... are considered to be opportunists... but still they are indeed managing the infrastructure of [the occupation] and are the ones who make actual decisions".

Reports of the weight of the far right within the movement vary. All agree that it is substantial.

The Ukrainian anarchist quoted above says: "The actual number of the ultra-right activists is not that big... But, first of all, their ideas are welcome among the apolitical crowd; second of all, they are very well organised, and also people love their 'radicalism'", i.e. their readiness to confront the forces of the old regime on the streets.

Other opposition parties are neo-liberal and work with the far right. Although distrust and dislike of those parties is reported from the street protests, the protests have generated no autonomous political alternative.

Left groups which attempted to establish a profile in the occupation of the main square were violently attacked by rightists. So was the Confederation of Trade Unions, which sides with the opposition, but without any clear independent voice. (There are other trade union organisations which have been more aligned with Yanukovich. All are weak).

Part of the drive behind the protests, initially mostly student and middle-class, later including more workers, was protest against the confiscation of so much of Ukraine's wealth by a few oligarchs around Yanukovich. That also means that other oligarchs, out of favour with Yanukovich, supported the opposition.

EU

In the first days after the fall of Yanukovich, the scene is dominated by efforts by the EU to get a stable new government in Kiev, to stop Ukraine falling apart, and to make sure the new government enforces neo-liberal measures "in return" for emergency loans.

The EU and the new Kiev government will try to do a deal with Putin. Putin's interests lie with making a deal. He may well be able to do so. Ukraine's oligarchs' interests also lie with a deal which combines some orientation to Russia and some to the EU. Whether a stable balance can be found and maintained may be a different matter.

It would be wrong to urge a united front with Yanukovich's people on the grounds of opposing "a counter-revolutionary coup", which is the line the *Morning Star*, No2EU, and the Workers' Power group all suggest, in very different idioms. (The SWP, in its standard cod "anti-imperialist" mode of post-1987, should logically side with Yanukovich. It has not done so. It has expressed sympathy with the protests without backing their leaders).

It would be wrong to ignore the democratic content of na-

tionalist feeling in Ukraine, directed against Russian domination or threats of Russian domination. That seems to be the drift of the coverage by the Socialist Party, which (perhaps to sustain its position vis-a-vis No2EU without openly contradicting it) has chiefly argued that a socialist revolution would be better than the victory of either Yanukovich or the opposition (which is true, but not much help for orientation in current events).

It would also be wrong to expect any good from the new government.

Florin Poenaru, a graduate student at the Central European University in Budapest, on the LeftEast website, calls for "the third position [opposed to both Yanukovich and the new regime]... namely a class perspective". An open letter to the Ukrainian left on the same website appeals to them:

"These post-revolutionary conditions are now ripe for you to form a third pole, distinct from today's Tweedledums and Tweedledees... You are the only ones who can give meaning to the deaths and wounds of the [occupied square in Kiev]".

NEW UNIONISM 2014

An activist conference **29 March 11am-5pm**
University of London Union, Malet Street,
London WC1 7HY



This conference will seek to learn from experiences of organising the unorganised in history and today. It will hear from working-class activists on the frontline of today's class battles, and of struggles to reshape trade unions. It will discuss issues including the changing shape of capitalism and the working class, the struggles of young, migrant and women workers, organising in the private sector, outsourcing, fighting in bureaucratised trade unions vs "revolutionary unionism", approaches to working-class politics and much more.

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Gove's programme: break up, purge and privatise

by Patrick Yarker

In his four years or so as Education Secretary, Michael Gove has accelerated the pace at which English state educational provision has been fragmented.

New Labour proved itself just as hostile to democratic comprehensive education (as an ideal and where it existed) as the Tories and the Coalition. But by adding to the plethora of school-types, and enabling more and more individual schools to be acquired by edu-management trusts, academy chains, charities, faith groups and social entrepreneurs, Gove is deepening the damage.

Local accountability for, and local involvement in, the running of local schools is continually eroded. The government's policy is for academy (and free school) trusts to have almost complete flexibility to shape their governance arrangements and design the constitutions of their boards of governance as they see fit. This removes the requirement to have staff representation on bodies that make the key decisions, and allows there to be only two elected parent-governors. In reality the lead sponsor of the academy has control.

As Ross McKibbin puts it: "The right to determine the relationship between schools and society... is being removed from elected institutions, gathered up in Whitehall and parcelled out to friends and supporters of the ruling party" (*London Review of Books*, 3 April 2012)

Some academies operate as test-beds for Gove's educational experiments.

The Great Yarmouth Primary Academy aroused parental opposition with its plans to keep children at school from 9 am until 6 pm in line with one Govian initiative.

The Academy was set up by Theodore Agnew's academy chain, the Inspiration Trust. In common with many Norfolk primary schools it routinely buys in certain commercial programmes to teach "literacy" and maths.

It also uses an externally-devised programme to teach history and geography, one explicitly modelled on the ideas of E D Hirsch. Much lauded by Gove, Hirsch prioritises the need for pupils to be able to recall, and if necessary to rotelearn, factual knowledge.

Agnew has been named as a possible successor to Sally Morgan, the current chair of OfSTED. Gove appointed Morgan, an erstwhile Blairite, but has not renewed her contract. This decision drew sharp criticism from within OfSTED circles, including from the Chief Inspector. OfSTED inspects Academies and free schools, the boosting of which is vital to Gove, so the appointment of Morgan's successor is politically highly-charged. An obvious conflict of interest will arise should Agnew, who heads a group which runs an academy-chain, secure the post.

NETWORK

Agnew is a millionaire Tory donor. He has been a trustee of the right-wing think-tank Policy Exchange, and of the New Schools Network run by close aides of Gove and dedicated to ramping up the number of academies and free schools.

Agnew now chairs the DfE's Academies Board, which looks for sponsors to take over academies. He reports to another millionaire Tory donor and academy sponsor, John Nash, an under-secretary of state in the DfE. Nash was recently given a peerage.

These people and others like them connected through think-tanks, lobbying-groups, charitable foundations and personal ties, comprise a powerful unelected network in which educational ideas are propounded and initiatives implemented on the ground in schools, the better to advance a view of what education is and how it should be 'delivered'. This view endorses a transmission-model of teaching and learning and an ideology of fixed, innate "ability". It requires



that reading be taught to children in only one way. It wants to see subject specialists play an increasing role in primary schools, thereby undermining the holistic work of the class teacher and, paradoxically, making it harder for some pupils to learn in a given subject-area. It disregards the criticisms of educational experts, even those it has invited to serve on working-parties

and to offer advice. It is receptive to the call that schools be run for profit.

In a speech last May, Gove claimed he was "getting the state out of the way" in educational matters. In fact he is using his powers to set up, extend, manage and calibrate a market in as many aspects of education as possible. He is not stripping out the role of the state but re-configuring it in relation to the nature and provision of formal public education in England. Each academy and free school now has a core financial arrangement with Gove's own office: a stunning centralisation of power.

Gove's control over schools is reinforced by his ability and willingness to manipulate accountability measures, for example through raising floor-targets. Such targets require a stated percentage of the student cohort to reach a certain minimum grade in particular exams or tests. This in turn prompts schools to grade and level students relentlessly. Such an intense focus in schools on metric data generates a variety of malign outcomes, including teaching-to-the-test, curtailment of students' option-choices, inequitable distribution of teaching-time across student-groups, and students coming to be regarded as grades or levels in the making, rather than as people. Over-concentration on data can also heighten the tension surrounding existing regimes of teacher-observation and surveillance.

PURGE

Gove also appears intent on breaking the link between education as an academic field and as lived practice in schools.

By looking to shift the work of initial teacher education from universities to schools via his School Direct programme, Gove hopes to purge schools of what he regards as "progressive" approaches supposedly fostered in the academy. His strategy essentially offers an apprenticeship-model of learning to teach, with beginner teachers inducted only into the established models in place in the school where they are, or hope to be, employed. Such an approach is likely to hamper the development of a broadly-informed and systematically-reflective cadre of teachers. It is also likely to limit, if not to prevent, teachers engaging with pedagogic approaches from traditions informed by socialist thought on education.

Tristram Hunt, Labour's shadow education spokesperson, recently met educational activists from a variety of organisations. It seems Labour, if it comes to power, will not involve itself in rolling back the free school and academy programme. Instead it will focus on teacher-quality, on the provision of vocational education, and on improving free Early Years provision. These are important areas. But Labour needs to be harried also over how educational provision is best structured.

Gove's fragmentation of English educational provision increases educational inequality and social segregation. The positive alternative, the case for democratic comprehensive provision, needs to be re-made.

How a commu

By Kieran Miles

If you want proof that the Tory government does not care whether people die, look at last year's £100 million cut to the national floods budget. That's all too clear where I live in Egham.

Egham is situated on the western part of the Thames, a river which stretches from the outskirts of London, through Surrey and Berkshire, up to Oxford, and across Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. Here £1.8 million was cut from the Arklyn Kennels scheme, which involved building up concrete and earth bank defences. £1 million of the funding for the project won't be available for another four years.

West Drayton, the area near Heathrow which would most benefit from the scheme, has seen massive flood damage. Nearby Poyle, right next to Heathrow, was allocated £375,000 for flood defences by 2013, but has received just 6%. A huge £3.6 million has been cut from a dredging scheme in Penton Hook, close to Staines.

In Surrey, more than 1,000 homes were flooded, and another 2,500 damaged. Firefighters and volunteers had to rescue 1,124 people from flooded homes near the Thames during the days of the flooding (from Tuesday 11 February), 850 from within Runnymede. 57 roads were closed. A number of High Volume Pumps (HVP) were used to pump water out of the area, and around 600 staff from Surrey Fire and Rescue Services, and other agencies, worked to relieve the flooding.

With absolutely no help from the local Council people in Runnymede organised their own relief effort, and this was

Thames Valley flood defence schemes in line for funding in 2010 but now delayed, postponed or with reduced funding



Cuts in the Thames area

Memorial meeting for Mike Kyriazopoulos

Our comrade Mike Kyriazopoulos died on 18 January, a year after being diagnosed with motor neurone disease.

Mike was based in New Zealand/Aotearoa, and active in the Fightback group.

Friends and comrades from the UK are invited to come together to remember Mike, share stories and pay our respects.

Thursday 6 March, 7pm, Bloomsbury Suite, University of London Union, Malet Street, London

Community organised its own flood defence



Volunteers and firefighters at work. Fire services in Surrey, as elsewhere, face cuts.

nothing short of incredible.

In Egham, a church hall was used as a relief centre. Inside, there was a food bank, a depository of essential things like bottled water (given water contamination) and nappies, and a kitchen making hot lunches for the volunteers. Any leftovers were to be donated to the Runnymede Food Bank.

Next door, the car park of Magna Carta school was used to fill up sand bags, and volunteers drove them to people's front doors. Community watch groups were set up to safeguard against burglaries. A similar arrangement was made in Chertsey, though I only saw the Egham centre.

Within the Borough (of Runnymede) over a thousand people volunteered at the two relief centres established in Chertsey and Egham Hythe.

The army was present, but they did not interfere in the relief efforts. They were involved in door-knocking, checking if people needed evacuation, and helping to distribute sandbags, and show people how to stack them properly. The vast majority of the organisation was conducted by the local populace.

Everyone contributed what they had — equipment, food, labour power — and everyone took what they needed from

the centre. Everyone did the work they felt they were physically and mentally capable of and willing to do. Some people coordinated the effort, but they were granted no special privileges above others. Even when some people were working harder, or others less hard, than others, it didn't matter, as there were enough volunteers to get everything done. The communistic elements of the organisation of the relief were a balm in the chaos of the flooding.

On Friday 14 February, a full four days after the flooding started, the council heads finally came round to the relief centre, only to announce that they planned to shut it down! The only reason given was... it was not controlled by them.

Surrey residents were already angered by the responses to the floods.

There was the influx of politicians, keen to pose for sombre pictures, but do little else before disappearing.

There was the obvious disparity between relief efforts for rich and poor — there has been a national mobilisation of flood agencies and the military to protect Windsor Castle. Meanwhile, local residents were left to fend for themselves. (The creation of the Jubilee River, opened in 2002, designed explicitly to protect the royal estate in Windsor from Thames flooding, is another visible reminder of this divide — it cost

£110 million and is the largest man-made river construction in the UK).

Now the unelected executives of the Council asserted their right to shut down the relief centre, and even used the police to deny people entry to the water bottles and hot soup inside. In Runnymede, residents were also angry at the local council for failing to deliver sand bags; neighbouring boroughs Spelthorne, and Windsor and Maidenhead, had received their sand bags already. The residents shouted the executives out of the church hall, one person throwing their coffee over the Mayor. The council should have been involved in the first place, but in their absence, the community was right to reject the council's attempts to shut down the centre.

Over the weekend, the council organised more sand bag distribution, and coordinated fire and rescue service involvement. The relief centre has been largely left to function by itself, with a few council overseers helping in the administrative functioning of the centre, and liaising with local services.

FIRE CUTS

It has recently come to light that Woking company Specialist Group International has been employed by Surrey County Council since 2012 on a lucrative £690,000 a year deal to attend to water rescue incidents. They were also used to scab during the fire station strikes last year.

Local firefighters have complained that they were willing and able to attend to flood rescue, but that the outsourcing of the water rescue aspect of their jobs meant they were prohibited from doing so. One unnamed firefighter, speaking to "Get Surrey", explained "We are on standby, waiting to be deployed but we are not being used... we are paying a private company money for things we could be doing." Surrey FBU Secretary, Richard Jones, said that "It is not acceptable that emergency cover is being cut in Spelthorne while taxpayers' money is being turned into profit for a private contractor." This privatisation is a large contributory factor in explaining the huge delay in attending to the floods.

Whilst firefighters did become involved in rescue efforts, additional pressure has been placed on them.

On 4 February, Surrey County Council voted to merge the two fire stations at Staines and Sunbury. This will mean an increase in response times, some redundancies, and a reduction in services available. A public consultation found that 92% of respondents were not in favour of fire station cuts, and a petition demanding the stations be left open gained some 10,000 signatures*. Despite widespread opposition, the cuts were voted through anyway. Richard Jones said of the vote, that "this decision will put the lives of firefighters and the public at greater risk. Surrey's on-call fire stations have been understaffed for years and on the day of the council's meeting 10 of Surrey's 12 'on-call' fire engines were unavailable because of crew shortages".

The community's respect for the firefighters was visible outside Staines Fire Station, where innumerable flowers were laid out of respect for Clifford Cox, a 53 year old firefighter who died in Staines Fire Station on the 15 February in an incident unrelated to the floods. The fight against fire station closures continues, led by Save Our Services in Surrey, of which the local FBU is an affiliate.

There are many eco-struggles in the UK – fracking, flood defences, tar sands, eco-villages, No Dash for Gas, wind turbine planning, overfishing, forest destruction - and socialists should engage with them all. With the pace of climate change unabated, and the links between austerity and environmental damage made more apparent, the need for class-struggle environmental politics is necessary more than ever.

*A new petition has been launched here:

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/flooding-shows-that-fire-service-cuts-are-a-mistake>

Inspiring resistance to Stalinist tyranny

By Tom Harris

In an era of wars and revolutions — a new book from Workers' Liberty — features American socialist cartoons spanning the middle of the 20th century. This era saw Stalinism at the height of its prestige and power, as well as some of its most notorious atrocities.

In the late 1920s, the bureaucracy of the Soviet Union, under the political leadership of Joseph Stalin, wrested the last vestiges of power from the working-class, and unleashed a wave of expulsions and exiles to purge the Bolshevik party of those who resisted and held fast to their revolutionary socialist principles.

Stalin concentrated enormous power in his own hands. Members of the Left Opposition, foremost of whom was Leon Trotsky, and Stalin's other political enemies, were expelled and suppressed. Many of Stalin's own faction fell victim, too.

Usurping the rhetoric and imagery of socialism, the Stalinist bureaucracy transformed the Soviet Union into a grotesque totalitarian society, where social, economic and political power rested in the hands of the state bureaucracy, and in which basic freedoms of dissent, as well as working-class and democratic organisation, were smashed.

Far from being a socialist state, this new form of exploitative class society was the utter negation of the workers' revolution of 1917, dressed up in a distorted ideology that was a hideous parody of Marxism.

Many of the cartoons in *In an era of wars and revolutions*, from the Trotskyist movement in the US, comment on what was happening in the Soviet Union, but also on what was happening in the "Communist" [Stalinist] movement in the US and elsewhere.

Of course, cartoons depicting Stalin as a villain and Stalinism as a monstrous tyranny are far from rare, and were common in the bourgeois, right-wing press at the time. But these socialist artists do something more — they depict Stalinism as an implacable enemy of the working-class and of socialism.

Stalin is depicted as a gravedigger and an executioner.

In the Spanish Civil War, we see the Spanish proletariat



trussed up and presented to a Francoist executioner. The proletariat's hands have been tied together by the "Popular Front" — the Stalinist policy that firmly bound the workers' movement to the bourgeoisie, and destroyed independent class politics.

In another picture about Spain, a pile of corpses marked "political opponents" lies lifeless on the ground. Above it are two smoking pistols, one marked "Franco" and the other "Stalinist GPU" — the secret police that the Stalinists used to ruthlessly hunt down Trotskyists, anarchists and dissidents within the Spanish republican camp.

When the Comintern was first set up in 1919, it was in-

tended to co-ordinate and organise workers around the world for revolution. But as the bureaucracy took control in the Soviet Union, it became a crude institutional tool for imposing Stalin's directives on foreign communist parties.

When the needs of the Russian dictatorship changed, the line of the Comintern and its affiliates would rapidly change, too. The sudden volte-faces and contradictory changes of the line were ripe for mockery, and the cartoonists of the Trotskyist movement were quick to take their chance.

Earl Browder, the leader of the US Communist Party, is portrayed as a pathetic little puppet, constantly being forced into ridiculous stances by his master in Moscow. When the Soviet Union needed US help in World War Two, the miniature Browder prostrates himself to American jingoism, licking the boots of a giant army officer. The Communist Party itself is a goofy-faced mannequin being perpetually turned in different directions by Stalin's hand. Finally, Earl Browder, twisted and twisted round like a spring, snaps.

The rise of and rule of Stalinism in Russia, and later in Eastern Europe and elsewhere was one of the greatest catastrophes of the 20th century; understandably the cartoons on this topic in *In an era* are some of the more pessimistic. But they are not without hope.

In one of the boldest drawings, we see the prone body of the old Comintern lying face down on the face of the earth, stabbed in the back by a Stalinist bayonet. But over the horizon comes a mighty hand holding the banner of the 4th International.

The American Trotskyists bravely struggled for the creation of a new international grouping, untainted by betrayal and bureaucratic corruption, to liberate the workers once and for all. These cartoons were a fascinating part of that struggle.

You can *In an era of wars and revolutions* online — price includes postage and packaging.
Or send £10.60 to AWL, 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London SE1 3DG
<http://www.workersliberty.org/socialistcartoons>
<https://www.facebook.com/socialistcartoons>

Why we defended Salman Rushdie

Twenty-five years ago Salman Rushdie published *The Satanic Verses*. Two weeks later the theocratic ruler of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa declaring it permissible for Muslims to assassinate Rushdie because of the "blasphemous" nature of the book. This the front-page article in *Socialist Organiser* (forerunner of *Solidarity*) in which an Iranian comrade defended Rushdie.

We defend Salman Rushdie because we've experienced Khomeinism in practice. Many Iranians in Iran and in exile, oppose the "Islamic Republic", and want a secular Iran.

Those of us living in Britain would like also to see a secular Britain, and oppose any religious group, including those of oppressed minorities, trying to foist their religion on everyone else.

Ayatollah Khomeini's threat on the life of Salman Rushdie is typical of the man and his regime. The "Islamic Republic" was founded on the defeat of the Iranian revolution in 1979, and instituted a regime of medieval barbarism, persecuting all of its opponents — left-wingers, Kurds, women and religious minorities.

There is at the moment in Iran a wave of executions of left-opponents of Khomeini. The threats against Rushdie are also a warning to oppositionists in Iran, and opponents of Khomeini everywhere.

The spread of Islamic fundamentalism is very worrying. Obviously it was spurred on by the consolidation of the Khomeini regime. Although it claims to be "anti-imperialist", it is deeply reactionary.

Salman Rushdie has a perfect right to write about Islam. Free speech and the right to criticise are vital for a democratic society and religious leaders do not have the right to prohibit or threaten their critics.

There is a danger of a racist backlash; the right have seized

on Muslim opposition to Rushdie as an example of barbarian immigrants who don't know how to behave in a civilised country. But there is nothing exclusively Muslim about fundamentalism and intolerance — look at the recent furore over *The Last Temptation of Christ* [a Martin Scorsese film portraying Jesus Christ as subject to human frailties].

The working-class movement must defend free speech. Muslim workers who now call for the banning of *The Satanic Verses* are playing with fire. The workers' movement itself always suffers from bans. If it's Rushdie now, it could be other anti-racist writers later — and Rushdie, let it not be forgotten, is a socialist and anti-racist writer.

No one can seriously argue that *The Satanic Verses* is encouragement to racial harassment or a threat to the democratic rights of black people in Britain.

The workers' movement needs democracy and debate — in Iran and in Britain. Khomeini and his ilk are the enemies of working-class freedom.

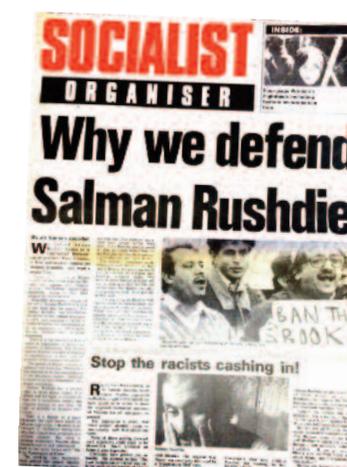
Religious leaders who want Rushdie banned or killed will not be striking a blow for Muslim communities, but against the rights of all people to think, write and talk as they wish.

Stop the racists cashing in

Racists have been climbing on the Salman Rushdie bandwagon. Muslim opposition to Rushdie's right to free speech has been seized on by racists to show the supposed "barbarism" not only of Muslims but of immigrants in general.

The implication is clearly that "these people" shouldn't come to "our country" with their obnoxious views.

None of those putting forward such arguments could claim to be democrats. Their criticism of Islam is pure hypocrisy.



Christians have proved just as touchy. The attempt to ban *The Last Temptation of Christ* was only the most recent example of a long list of Christian-inspired attacks on civil liberties. The original *Gay Times* was eventually destroyed by a "blasphemous libel" case.

Who wanted to ban *"Death on the Rock"* [a TV documentary exposing SAS executions]? The very same racist newspapers that now criticise Muslims for wanting to ban Rushdie's book.

Socialists are clear. We oppose absolutely the attempt to deprive Salman Rushdie or any other artist of their artistic or political freedoms. We oppose the Muslim fundamentalists who will not accept any standards but their own.

Equally we oppose the racist backlash. It is a matter of fighting for free speech, not "against Islam". We are for full freedom of worship.

In fact not all Muslims by any means support Khomeini's call. Dr Zaki Badawi, chair of the Imams and Muslims Council, the voice of Britain's 400 mosques, told the *Guardian*: "If you go into any library you can find worse books about Islam, and Christianity for that matter."

Democratic debate is the way forward. And the racists have no interest in that.

Socialist Organiser, 22 February 1989

Syriza ranks resist drift to centre

By Theodora Polenta

In the recent interventions of three of the most central and media-exposed members of Greece's big left-wing party, Syriza — Gianni Dragasakis (responsible for the Syriza program), Giorgos Stathakis (Head of Sector for Development) and Giannis Milios (Head of the Department of Economic Affairs) — we can see a new "narrative" on key issues: debt, "Marshall Plan", "primary surplus" and "balanced budget", banks.

It is an attempt to form a "centre-left" (with the emphasis on the centre) quasi-social-democratic narrative, rather than a working-class-biased left narrative.

Giannis Milios has said:

"We will attempt (if we become government) to really get to the markets, and because we want to have a reliable banking system, to solve the issue of financial credibility, to become a creditworthy State... We are confident that as a government we will immediately create a primary surplus. We will take immediate steps to fight corruption and impose justice..." (from an interview, 22.1.14)

Giorgos Stathakis says: "We will negotiate the loan agreement in order to achieve a sustainable debt".

Illegal, he has said, speaking to Syriza radio, "is only 5% of the debt". "It's the armament programs and the electrification of the OSE that never happened. It is around 5%. The vast majority of the debt, more than 90%, it is traditional public debt. There is no legal challenge to it".

Instead of a unilateral write off the debt, now Stathakis proposes a moratorium with lenders, with very low repayments for three to four years, until the economy is back on track. After that the debt will be paid normally. As for the idea of an audit committee on the debt, this is practically useless: the odious debt is 5%.

Yet the programmatic decisions of Syriza's conference were:

"Prevent the conversion of our country into a debt colony. Renegotiate the loan agreements and cancel their onerous terms, prioritise the write off the majority of the debt, form a committee to audit the debt..."

"We will put the banking system under public ownership and control, with radical changes to its operation and objectives".

The central argument from Dragasakis, Milios, and Stathakis is that the renegotiations with the lenders and Troika will result in a happy ending, i.e. "agreed" solution. The whole plan is based upon the unjustified claim that a government of the left will not need to make any unilateral actions. It can achieve all it needs by agreement.

The argument makes a jump over politics to land at the end of a successful negotiation: Yes, the government of the left will oblige Schäuble and the bureaucracy of the eurozone to accept their terms.

This does not sound like a government of the left which, basing itself upon the mobilisation of its working class base and rank and file, will confront the beasts of capitalism and imperialism on class terms. It sounds like an enlightened technocratic left leadership which will overcome all the difficulties of the current government through its technocratic competence.

It is always added for good measure that fights lie ahead in order to achieve these key objectives. But the emphasis means that we are not talking about negotiations that may take place auxiliary to the class struggle, but about international capitalism and imperialism being forced through the persuasive power of the left wing technocrats to an agreement with the program of the government of the left.

Even if we believe that a government of the left in Greece will cause a pan-European political domino effect, it is still un-historical to assume that international capitalism will quietly agree a deal.

The Syriza leaders' shift is portrayed as a shift to realism and responsible politics, but in fact has an utopian and metaphysical character, with the claim that negotiations will persuade international capitalism to finance a government that will put an end to neo-liberal capitalism's grand scheme and in addition to supply the government of the left with "non-loan" financial bonuses for development.

But the Marshall plan was a plan to reconstruct capitalist Europe as a buffer against the "communist threat". The mod-



Poverty and inequality on the rise in Greece

ern equivalent of the "communist [Stalinist] threat" must be Syriza and a left government in Greece fighting to overthrow the capitalist austerity program.

Therefore, what Syriza's leadership is calling for when demanding a Marshall Plan is that the austerity Europe of MerkOlland offer an equivalent of a "Marshall Plan" to a government of a left equivalent to the then "communist danger".

It's almost shocking to hear from members of the left who consider themselves Marxist or refer to Marx speaking of restoring the "creditworthiness" of the Greek government.

Do they have in mind some anti-capitalist credit rating agency that uses the overthrow of austerity measures as a positive index?

Do they know of some capitalist markets that will welcome the victory of the left in Greece by reducing the spread on Greek bonds and rushing to buy Greek bonds in the markets, when the government of the left who has just announced an increase in the minimum wage to pre Memorandum levels and restoration of collective bargaining and labour relations?

Where will the government of the left find the money? The answer of these top Syriza people is that "we will go to the markets". Why is borrowing from the markets, at rates much higher than those on the Troika's loans, in the interests of the Greek working class? Why suggest that the markets as an adjustment mechanism to austerity are milder than the Troika?

CLASS CHASM

This is very far from the conference decision for writing off most of the debt. The Syriza leaders have begun adapting to the criteria of "creditworthiness" and "sustainability". The chasm is unbridgeable. It is a class chasm.

Then we are told that the government of the left will not fall short of the government of Samaras in creating a primary budget surplus. Indeed, it will surpass Samaras's "achievements" and achieve a balanced budget. Government income will cover not only all state expenditure but also the interest on the national debt!

Even the memorandum program does not project a balanced budget till 2016. When Syriza leaders "promise" balanced budgets, whose needs do they respond to? to whom they address this promise? what time framework do they set?

The whole scenario breaks down as soon as we consider even the possibility that the renegotiation efforts of the left

government are not immediately successful. Then the government of the left will be forced to deal with the lack of external funding.

The only plausible answer for a government of the left that is committed to overthrowing the austerity program is to stop making payments on the debt.

Attacks on tax evasion, high incomes and profits will take time and at any rate cannot guarantee a primary surplus for the first year of the left government budget.

Those who promise primary surpluses and balanced budgets have an obligation to enlighten us on what the first year budget of a government of the left would look like — main categories of expenditure and revenues that the primary surplus would come from). How would they construct a budget which would both make a rupture with the austerity program and serve "an agreed solution" with the lenders?

How does Stathakis know with confidence that only 5% of Greece's debt is "odious"? After all, Syriza has made an electoral pledge to form an audit committee.

In Ecuador, in 2008-9, the government of Rafael Correa defaulted on debt payments, ran an audit committee, and in the end negotiated a cut of about 70% in payments due on outstanding bonds.

In the case of Greece, economists and lawyers already characterise as odious the loan agreements signed by the governments of the memorandum. The unilateral suspension of payments can be supported by numerous provisions of international law.

If stopping payments is ruled out, then what weapon that would a left government hold which could force capitalists to accept a debt write off or moratorium that they have vehemently refused to grant to the ideologically fraternal government of Samaras-Venizelos? What is the weapon that a government of the left has up its sleeve that will coerce the European and international capitalism to surrender?

Of the 317 billion euros of Greek government debt at the end of the third quarter of 2013, only slightly less than 30 billion is in private hands. The rest is either interstate or in the hands of the European Central Bank, other central banks, or the IMF.

What remains for a left government in Greece is the "weapon" of a subversive political domino effect. This can

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Syriza ranks resist drift to centre

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be developed only in one way: unilateral political decisions that will act as a pressure on any negotiations.

Not only the political logic, but the simple logic says that after the founding act of the repudiation of the Memorandum by a left government of the left, and during negotiations if there immediately are any, the next step must be a default on debt payments and interest of the debt. The percentage of the debt that will then be written off will depend upon the correlation of forces and the intensity of the class struggle and developments in a national and international level.

However, if the government of the left fails to deliver its promise for the founding act of the unilateral abolition of the memorandum and the default in repayments and interest of the debt before the commencement of the negotiations, that will be not just the wrong negotiating tactic, but strategically wrong for two additional reasons:

1. It will negate the “nuclear bomb” that the left government has in its hands: the political-subversive “domino effect” created by a message, not to the ruling classes and chancelleries, but to the working class and the peoples of Europe, that the left government of the left dares to challenge the very basis of negotiation.

2. The message to the Greek working class will be that the government of the left negotiates within the framework of the big powers of international finance.

There is no short cut or bypass. A left government must go first for abolition of the Memorandum before any negotiation. It must stop debt payments. All the rest will be determined by these two fundamental first steps.

During the decade 2002-2012 the government paid to the banks, in interest alone, more than 120 billion euros — an amount corresponding to almost 40% of the current debt. From 2008 until today the state has to subsidise the Greek banking system with tens of billions of euros to avoid a collapse that would have tremendous impact on the whole economy.

Today, the public is the main shareholder in the big four “systemic” banks in Greece. The directors, however, still are the same old bankers. Now the government is devising tricks to return the shares to the old bosses — collecting only a fraction of the billions that has given them.

The prime cause of the current indebtedness of the Greek government are all sorts of direct or indirect state subsidies to capitalists — banks, industry, shipowners and so on.

The pattern is old. When business is going well, capitalists pocket the profits. Once they began to encounter difficulties they are bailed out by the state.

That is why a program of a left government should talk clearly about “nationalisation of the banks and big business without compensation to the capitalists and under workers’ management and control”.

Other issues have brought conflict between the Syriza leaders and the rank and file.

VOUDOURIS

There was fierce opposition in the two-day debate in the Central Committee of Syriza on 1 and 2 February 2014 to the candidacy of Odysseas Voudouris for regional governor of the Peloponnese and the nomination of Theodoros Karypidis for the region of Western Macedonia.

As a Pasok MP, Voudouris voted for the first memorandum. Then in June 2011 he voted for the intermediate memorandum. In 2012 as an MP by then for the Democratic Left, he gave a vote of confidence to Samaras government. He was on the other side, when the members of Syriza and of the rest of the left were on the streets again the memoranda.

All the local organizations of the Syriza in the Peloponnese voted against Voudouris as candidate. He is unacceptable to the recently-radicalised rank-and-file ex-members of Pasok.

But the central leadership of Syriza want to clearly signal an intention to move towards the centre-left and social democracy. They want to make a “political nod” towards the Democratic Left and some Pasok MPs and top leaders.

The opposition of the Left Platform was not only on the substantive selection of the candidates but in the procedures followed to arrive at these selections.

These procedures disrespected and bypassed the organs and structures of Syriza. In many cases the candidates’ names



Syriza conference in July 2013 moved from a federation to a single party

were announced in the mainstream media prior to being publicised within the rank and file of Syriza, let alone discussed.

In Athens Helen Portaliou, head of the Athens Municipal Movement “Open City” and previously Syriza selected candidate for mayor in Athens, was informed by the media about Syriza’s selection of another candidate for mayor. Portaliou correctly stated that neither the “open city” movement nor the Syriza’s local Athens organization discussed the candidacy.

Such abuses of democratic procedure do not fit in a democratic party, and still less in a left party that aims to establish a government which will secure and expand the democratic institutions.

At the Central Committee meeting, the Left Platform also raised the shift of the Syriza’s leadership to the right.

Left Platform leader Panayiotis Lafazanis stated:

“Opinions expressed by central members of Syriza who are in charge of Syriza’s financial matters, about odious debt of around 5% and for balanced budgets, are arbitrary, erroneous and deeply outside the collective decisions of the Syriza conference. The reference to the Marshall plan ignores that these plans were within the context of the anti-left witch hunt and were used by the Americans as a weapon to control Western Europe and Greece.

“The selection as candidates for mayor of politicians who voted for the first memorandum and have granted a vote of confidence to Samaras’s government lies outside the decisions of the founding conference of Syriza and sends the wrong messages the people.”

Antonis Davanellos (DEA) voiced objections about the candidacies in Western Macedonia and the Southern Aegean. He contrasted, as exemplary, the candidacy of Aglaia Kyritsi in N. Aegean, stressing that the main “reservoir for the enlargement of Syriza should be in the world of social struggles and resistance”.

The Central Committee unanimously backed the candidacy of Kyritsi, a non-aligned militant left-wing journalist and dismissed worker from ERT.

The Syriza majority of Syriza suggested a single vote on all the proposed candidates. The Left Platform counterposed individual votes on individual candidates.

92 of the Central Committee members voted for the package, and 67 members voted against. There were dozens of abstentions, although over 70% of the Central Committee is generally aligned with the majority.

If the Left opposition of Syriza unites and coordinates its action, then it can put a brake on Syriza’s right-wing drift.

After the uproar caused in the Syriza rank and file by the choice of Voudouris as candidate for the Peloponnese, the proposal of Theodoros Karypidis in another region caused

even more rage. Karypidis ran an interview with Golden Dawn spokesman Ilias Kasidiaris on TV, and started the interview by thanking him for his attendance. On his Facebook page he has propagated anti-semitic views.

Under the pressure of Syriza’s rank and file, the leadership of Syriza decided to withdraw the candidacy of Karypidis.

The case of Karypidis shows that the transformation of Syriza from a protest to a party of administration is a difficult and contradictory affair. Syriza’s rank and file, cemented in the class struggle and educated in democratic procedures and decision-making, are not willing to stop complaining about decisions of their own party.

Syriza as a political formation has always been characterised by its structural ambiguity. Within it co-exist a range of forces, from euro-communism to the revolutionary left. If the new push by Syriza’s leaders prevails, this ambiguity will be resolved with the final victory of a line of historic compromise with the domestic and international capitalist system.

In order for this grand right wing narrative to prevail, the democracy of Syriza will have to be devalued if not amputated.

During the two day Central Committee meeting the central leadership of Syriza remained silent about the political criticism and polemics of the Left Platform. Both Dragasakis and Stathakis were absent from the meeting. Milios was present but he declined to respond or contribute.

The key for the next period is the extent to which the leftist oppositional tendencies within Syriza will be able to connect organically with the militant sections of society and the leftist voices that exist outside Syriza, and unite forces for a socialist program as a response to the crisis.

The connection with the movement of the working class and the popular strata movement is the most critical issue in the period to come, especially if Syriza becomes the government.

LEFT GOVERNMENT

In the current conditions of the great international crisis of capitalism, and especially in the “weak link” of the EU, Greece, the political possibility of a left government will have nothing in common with the consensus governments of the centre such as we have seen in Europe in the last 30 years.

A government of the left, in the current crisis will be a “transitory” formation, and not a stable, definitive one. Either Syriza will take steps that would substantially subvert the austerity programs, opening the way for the working class towards socialist liberation, or it will seek compromise with the local ruling class and their lenders, leading to a rapid dissolution of the political forces at its base.

A government of the left, in the current crisis, would have the characteristics of an episode in struggle, and not of comfortable management of the situation.

Those “above”, the ruling class, are not cutting compromises. They are not seeking broad consent. They are trying to crush the workplace and social rights that were conquered in the 20th century.

Those “below” have been thrown to the bottom of society, but they want to take back what they had, and when they get the chance they would like to crush the system that has crushed them.

The most critical problem in Greek society today is how Syriza will manage the wave of hopes and demands that will break the day after the possible political victory of the left.

Against this background, an important proposal is being discussed within Syriza. It is the decision on the establishment of people’s neighbourhood committees of rupture and resistance. There, under Syriza’s initiative, the political protagonists should be those who led the resistance in schools and hospitals; those who fight against lay-offs, redundancies and wage reductions; those who fought and are fighting against the regressive property tax, against the repossession of houses, against the fuel poverty; those who formed anti-fascist initiatives and those who created countless of networks of social solidarity and support.

That is the constituency that Syriza should support and rely on in all the political battles, including local, national and European elections. On the constituency and on that working class should be based, as an absolute priority, the political perspectives of Syriza and of the government of the left.

The program should reflect the demands, anxieties, moods of the world of the working class; and not the “bright ideas” of executives and of people who until yesterday supported neo-liberal capitalism, and now want to “save the country”.

A government of the left should be revolutionary or will not belong to the left!

NUT must end its “one-day” culture

By Liam Conway,
Secretary, Central
Notts NUT (pc)

The upcoming National Union of Teachers (NUT) strike against the government's attacks on teachers pay, terms, and conditions on March 26 is a positive development, and the strike should be built for across the country.

There needs to be serious discussion about what to do on the day and, most importantly, what should follow on from this strike. These discussion must involve the members at every level of the union. NUT activists must link up with other workers fighting across the public sector.

One glaring issue that stands out in the latest strike announcement is that we appear to have another one-off protest action, when what we need is a serious campaign of sustained industrial action, with timetabled dates. That kind of campaign would declaration of intent to the government; a clear signal that we aim to win this in-



dustrial dispute.

On 19 February, workers and campaigners from the “3 Cosas” campaign of outsourced workers at the University of London spoke at a public meeting in Nottingham.

What struck me, amongst many other things, was how this small group of workers told their bosses in no uncertain terms that they intended to win the demands they had made – on pensions, on pay, on union recognition, and on holiday entitlements.

With bold intent, with democratic assemblies and forums rather than behind-closed-doors talks, and with the active involve-

ment of the members, they have made tremendous gains.

Their actions and successes are in great contrast to the campaigns by the big public sector unions on pay, pensions, and conditions. Even the slogan of the campaign, “Stand Up for Education”, is woolly and ill-focused.

It is good that the NUT has at last abandoned the strategy of waiting for a green light from NASUWT, the more cautious and conservative of the main teaching unions, before taking any action. But the scale of the attack requires a response in kind. The NUT must lead a serious campaign of action, building over the coming months, linked up with any other unions, such as University and College Union, that are prepared to fight the Government.

It is time to end the culture of sporadic, one-day protest strikes. That strategy has won nothing and cannot defeat a government determined to ride out such limited resistance. The members must be involved at every stage of the

action, not treated as a stage army, only good for waving flags and wearing union-branded t-shirts on strike days.

The union must set out clear and concrete demands, focused on retaining national pay and conditions of service. School managements across the country are already imposing school-based pay ahead of the official imposition of the new, school-by-school pay regime in September this year.

The union has to draw a line in the sand on pay in a way that it did not do over pensions. We must learn the lessons of the 3 Cosas campaign and the living wage campaign that preceded it: if a small group of workers can win gains against an employer that once refused to pay them a living wage, then a union with over 300,000 members can win serious gains against an unpopular government.

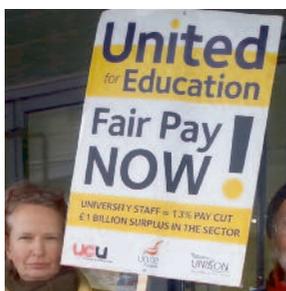
To do so it must get its boots on and put the members back in the saddle, running the campaign.

Lecturers threaten marking boycott

By Jonny West

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) have threatened to refuse to mark essays or exam papers from 28 April unless Higher Education bosses make concessions on pay.

The threat has already secured the promise of new talks ahead of the scheduled pay negotiations for 2014/2015.



A marking boycott is considered to be lecturers' “nuclear option”, and widely seen as a more effective and impacting form of industrial action than striking.

Higher Education workers have already struck several times against a 1% pay offer for 2013/2014. Some UCU members were disappointed that their union held back on escalating the dispute, calling a series of two-hour strikes followed by another one-day walk-out on 6 February.

The speed with which bosses agreed to new talks following the announcement of the marking boycott shows that more could have been won if the dispute had escalated quicker.

Real fight needed on local government pay

By Ollie Moore

Local government workers' unions have told the Local Government employers' body that they consider themselves to be in formal dispute, after bosses failed to make a pay offer for 2014/2015.

Bosses also insisted that any offer they did make would be “pegged” to the national minimum wage, thereby rejecting unions' demand that all local government employers pay at least the Living Wage (£8.80 in London and £7.65 elsewhere).

Heather Wakefield, head of Local Government at Unison, the

biggest public-sector union, said: “Our members are now beginning to say that they'd rather lose a few days' pay and strike than lose more pay, paid leave and sick pay for evermore. More and more feel that strike action is the only way in which their crucial contribution is noticed. Who can blame them?”

Unison leaders' realisation that strikes will be necessary to force concessions from employers is welcome, if woefully late.

Rank-and-file union members must make sure union leaders follow through strike threats instead of capitulating, as in previous years.

Cleaners' struggles



SOAS
Cleaning
workers
at the
School of
African
and Ori-

ental Studies (SOAS) in central London will strike on 4-5 March.

The cleaners, who are employed by ISS, are members of Unison. Their strike ballot returned a 100% yes vote for strikes, on a 62% turnout.

The strike aims to win improved sick pay, annual leave, and pension rights for the cleaners, who currently receive only statutory sick pay and annual leave, and, while they can join ISS's pension scheme, are excluded from joining the SOAS scheme alongside their directly-employed colleagues.

For more information, including details on how to donate to the cleaners' strike fund, see bit.ly/soasj4c

LONDON UNDERGROUND

ISS cleaners on London Underground have received letters demanding they agree to biometric booking-on (fingerprinting) by 2 March.

Their union, the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT) has already put industrial action in place, whereby cleaners will boycott the machines and only use existing booking-on procedures.

The union has also indicated it will ballot cleaners for strikes over this issue.

Cleaner activists commented that the plans should be seen in the context of Tube bosses' wider job cuts agenda, as biometric booking-on means existing Station Supervisors no longer have to oversee cleaners' booking-on process, and will allow cleaners to work on unstaffed stations, giving bosses another pretext to cut station jobs.

The rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker* will be building support for the cleaners' struggle.

EALING HOSPITAL

Workers employed by Compass Medirest at Ealing Hospital, West London, struck from 19 to 21 February.

The workers, who work as cleaning workers, catering workers, help-desk workers, and porters, also struck on 12 and 13 February.

The workers currently earn only the minimum wage, and are fighting for greater equality with directly-employed NHS staff.

A GMB union statement said: “These vital NHS workers want an end to a two tier workforce. At a minimum they are 44% below the lowest comparable NHS rate in London of £9.09 per hour.”

The union's long-term goal is to win the London Living Wage of £8.80 per hour.



Fast Food Rights campaigners hit Oxford Street

Trade union campaigners gathered on London's Oxford Street for a tour of fast food restaurants and coffee shops, as part of the new “Fast Food Rights” campaign, highlighting low pay and zero-hours contracts in the fast food industry.

Backed by the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU), the campaign held flash protests outside Burger King, McDonald's, and Costa Coffee as union organisers went into the stores to speak to staff.



Yanukovych falls. Back the left in Ukraine!



What next?

On 22 February, three months of protest in Ukraine culminated with the parliament unseating president Viktor Yanukovych.

Yanukovych fled from the capital, Kiev, and from his luxury estate nearby. Parliament installed a member of the opposition as acting president and called for new elections soon. On 24 February the new government issued a warrant of Yanukovych's arrest on charges of responsibility for the killing of protesters.

Joy at the fall of the corrupt and authoritarian Yanukovych may sour very

soon, though.

Our solidarity should be with left-wing and working-class forces in Ukraine which will fight to open up democracy, to push back the far right, and to help working people in Ukraine defend themselves against the neo-liberal "reforms" now demanded by the EU and the IMF in return for loans to enable Ukraine to manage payment deadlines.

The left and the elements of an independent workers' movement are, however, weak in Ukraine.

• More on page 5

Tube dispute: keep up the pressure!

By Ira Berkovic

Tube unions RMT and TSSA suspended a strike planned for 11-13 February after London Underground management retreated slightly from the plans to implement massive job cuts and close every ticket office on the network.

A 4-6 February strike rocked bosses and Tory Mayor Boris Johnson, shutting down the vast majority of London Underground services. The strike forced an arrogant management and City Hall regime, which had been referring to the plans as a *fait accompli*, into a limited but real climb-down.

The agreement for which the strike was suspended commits management to a station-by-station review of ticket offices, and guarantees a two-month truce period, during which management will not seek further implementation of their plans. Further negotiations between unions and management are currently taking place.

The rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker*, published by Workers' Liberty, is arguing for unions to keep the pressure on management. It is calling for unions to declare new strikes for April, when the "truce" period ends, to signal to management that they will strike again if the talks fail to yield real concessions.

Tubeworker believes an ongoing and escalating timetable of action will be necessary if bosses refuse to budge, and is fighting for unions to make funds available for strike pay to allow lower-paid, part-time, and other less-well-off workers to take sustained action.

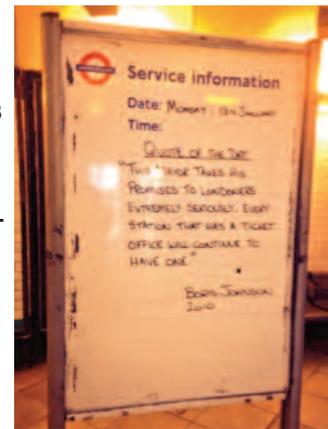
The bulletin is also arguing for increased communication between unions and members, ensuring that members are kept informed of what goes on in the talks and are able to hold their negotiators and representatives to account.

Tubeworker supporters are also campaigning for the RMT's current strike committee to become broader and more representative, involving workers from all areas and grades involved in the dispute, so it can more effectively hold union leaders to account and make sure they take their cues from the grassroots.

Tubeworker's proposals for the way forward also include calling on unions to remain clear about the demands of the dispute, and to hold a firm line against any and all job cuts rather than sliding into compromise.

Workers' Liberty members will be working with others to support the Hands Off London Transport campaign (handsofflondontransport.wordpress.com), a coalition of trade unionists, disabled activists, student unionists, and others which will organise direct action in support of a publicly-funded, democratically-controlled, well-staffed Tube network.

• For daily updates from *Tubeworker*, visit workersliberty.org/twblog



Atos cuts and runs

Atos, the French firm which runs the government's Work Capability Assessments for Incapacity Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance claimants, is seeking an early exit from the contract. They claim threats to its staff have been made, online and in person.

We don't believe for a moment that these heartless bastards care a jot about their staff. More likely is that the campaign against Atos has damaged the company's reputation so badly that it is desperately seeking a pretext to cut and run.

The company, which profits from cutting already meagre benefits from vulnerable people, earns blood money for its humiliating and flawed assessments. It has created a climate of anxiety and fear, ruining and, in some tragic cases, ending lives.

It is a measure of Atos that its public relations strategy cynically portrays disabled people as the aggressors, and themselves as the victims.



Anti-Atos day of action, 19 February