



Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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www.workersliberty.org

TORIES RE-ELECTED REGROUP FIGHT BACK!

See pages 5-8



What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Death at Yarlswood, end detention!

By Gemma Short

On Monday 20 April a 33 year old man died of a heart attack in Yarls Wood immigration detention centre.

The man, who has not been named, was being held with his wife and child at the centre. He was thought to have been healthy and not on any medication.

It is believed that the family came to the UK on visitor's visas from their home in India but were detained at the airport. They have been held in Yarls Wood for two months. One detainee told the *Guardian* that the family "wanted to see the UK" and that "the couple have children back in

India".

There have been 14 deaths in immigration removal centres in the past 10 years. Medical Justice, a charity which campaigns for improvements in health-care in detention and sends volunteer doctors to Yarls Wood, say the centre has inadequate health care facilities. It is unclear if this was a problem in this case.

In March this year a Channel 4 undercover investigation found poor standards of healthcare, widespread self-harm amongst detainees and abuse by staff.

Staff were filmed referring to the mainly female detainees as "animals" "beasties" and "bitches". Several were recorded threatening violence. Chan-



nel 4 also told the story of a woman who miscarried while being detained at Yarls Wood. Pregnant women are only meant to be detained if their removal from the country is imminent, yet many pregnant

women are detained for long periods at Yarls Wood.

People, including children, are being detained for long periods, in appalling conditions, having committed no crime. End detentions!

Reinstate Christine Shawcroft

By Gerry Bates

Christine Shawcroft, a long-standing left-wing member of Labour's National Executive Committee, has been suspended from the party and faces disciplinary action in connection with the removal of Lutfur Rahman as Tower Hamlets mayor.

Shawcroft, who is a former leader of the Tower Hamlets Labour group, is accused of supporting Rahman's Tower Hamlets First organisation against the Labour Party. She denies this.

In any case, the suspension is yet another example of the arbitrary and undemocratic nature of decision-making in the Labour Party.

As Ken Livingstone, also an NEC member and also publicly sympathetic to Rahman, points out, he is facing no disciplinary action. The difference with Shawcroft is they think they can get away with it.

Moreover, there is a long history of Labour right-wingers supporting candidates standing against Labour left-wingers and remaining untouched.

Richard Mawrey, the election judge who removed Rahman from office, devoted a chunk of his report to pointing out how disgracefully the ex-mayor had been treated by the Labour Party machine when they removed him as the Labour candidate.

From the viewpoint not of Labour Party disciplinary

procedure but class-struggle socialism, Shawcroft is an apologist for Rahman's poor politics.

Like many on the left, she ludicrously talks up his record (in this case comparing him to Sylvia Pankhurst and George Lansbury), ignores the communalist nature of Tower Hamlets First, and falsely presents the electoral judgement against him as a ruling-class, racist conspiracy.

Nonetheless in removing Shawcroft, the Labour leadership want to remove a prominent and popular left-winger from future NEC elections, as well as cracking down on sympathy for Rahman.

Shawcroft should be reinstated.

Ian Lavery for Labour leader!

A group of Labour Party members have launched a campaign for Ian Lavery to be the next Labour leader.

Lavery, who is Labour MP for Wansbeck in Northumberland, is former president of the National Union of Mineworkers. During the NUM's great strike in 1984-5, he was the only apprentice in the north east region to refuse to go to work; he was arrested seven times during the dispute.

The left should put forward a candidate for Labour leader, and in many ways Lavery is an excellent choice, as a former working-class activist and trade unionist from a region where UKIP is strong. (On 7 May, the Labour vote in Wansbeck increased to 50 percent, but UKIP jumped from 2.5 to 18.2 percent, only just behind the Tories.)

It will be hard for a left candidate to get on the ballot paper because rules say you need 15 percent of MPs, or 35 MPs, for that.

The labour movement should argue for that rule to be waived and then changed.

• More at facebook.com/Lavery4Leader

Take action against the Tories!

**Regroup and fightback: meeting for members and friends of the AWL in London.
2pm Sunday 17 May, UCL (Pearson NE, G22 LT), Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT.**

**Where now for Labour and the left?
South London AWL discussion meeting
7.30pm Tuesday 19 May, New Cross Learning, New Cross Road**

**March on the state opening of Parliament
Wednesday 27 May
Call from National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts
<http://on.fb.me/1PgtG80>**



**Fight the cuts, fight for our future
Saturday 30 May
Day of action called by UKUncut
www.ukuncut.org.uk/blog**

**National demonstration, End Austerity
12 noon Saturday 20 June
Bank of England, Threadneedle Street**

Syriza's leaders must listen to the party

By Theodora Polenta

Over 100 days have passed since the popular verdict of the Greek people on 25 January, which led to the formation of the Syriza-Anel government.

If only on a symbolic level — but symbolism has its importance in working-class politics — this government is of a different quality from the previous one. We saw Alexis Tsipras meeting and hugging the reinstated cleaners at the Ministry of Finance, thanking them for their class struggle, and key members of the Syriza cabinet such as Katrougkalos and Valavani joining the cleaners' celebrations. In the ND-Pasok years ministers were photographed at charity galas for the "helpless poor".

However, in terms of even a minimal redistribution of wealth, the government has not handed much back to the people. Neither the minimum wage rise to €751, nor collective bargaining agreements, have been restored. Nor has the 13th month's pension for low-income pensioners passed through parliament. Tsipras has left the window open to postpone to 2016 legislation for the €12,000 income-tax threshold and the abolition of the regressive property tax.

Since 25 January, the government has stopped the implementation of the further austerity measures which the previous government had promised. Just that gives the government time and support from a large part of the working class, even though the initial excitement has subsided. The government's establishment of an audit committee will allow for adequate documentation to expose the class nature of the accumulation of debt.

But, since the government's deal with the eurozone finance ministers on 20 February, the government has been pushed back further and further in negotiations. After each step backwards, the next battle starts from a worse position, and, so long as the government does not open up discussion within the Syriza membership and in structures such as the trade unions and neighbourhood assemblies, it undermines its own base.

Offered this or that

"something" by the Greek government, the lenders have so far responded with a grandiose "nothing". The relationship exceeds that for even a normal usurious loan agreement. A parallel would be to imagine, for example, that one has a home loan. You are paying the bank in time and the bank is guaranteed by the property. However, the bank requires in order to grant you the next loan instalments that you limit yourself to one meal a day, cut the pocket money of your children, and sell your furniture.

In exchange for the "nothing" provided so far from the lenders to the government, the lenders demand not "something" but "everything" from the government.

The creditors have shifted the "technical" negotiations onto the issues of pensions, labour rights and legislation, property tax, VAT, etc., seeking the humiliation and wholesale defeat of the government. They demand "labour market flexibility" and "reform of the pension system" as prerequisites, even though those are the last two remaining "red lines" of the government.

VAT RATE

One point that stands out for its regressive nature among those agreed by the Greek side with the creditors, is the creation of a single VAT rate at 16%, 17% or 18%.

It will replace the two existing rates 13% and 23%, and the lower VAT rates on the islands will be abolished. This means the transfer of food, non-alcoholic beverages, electricity, public transport tickets, cinema and concerts, restaurant and coffee shop bills from 13% to a higher rate, and the burden will fall disproportionately on working-class households.

Even if Merkel, Hollande, and Juncker talk about a conciliatory and pragmatic approach and "honourable compromise", it is by no means certain that the autonomous power centres in the multilateral negotiations, such as the IMF, the ECB, etc. accept that.

To cope with debt repayments of around €6.5 billion to date, the government opted to freeze the liquid assets of organizations in the broader public sector. At the heart of the govern-



Tsipras meets reinstated Ministry of Finance cleaners. But what now?

ment's negotiating strategy is the idea that the Grexit is "not an option" for the eurozone leaders and therefore the government will be able to implement its minimum commitments in the Thessaloniki declaration. As long as Greece does not "blink first", "Europe will not shoot itself in the foot".

In fact the Greek government has "shot itself in the foot" by exhausting the liquid assets of the public sector, i.e. exhausting its strategic stocks. And what happens when that gambit is exhausted?

The 20 February deal yielded no cash for Greece, but committed the Greek government to avoid "unilateral actions". The period since then has shown that this "no unilateral actions" rule leaves no possibilities for implementing even traces of the Thessaloniki plan, let alone of the comprehensive program of Syriza.

The argument that the "freezing" of the implementation of the program of Syriza is temporary does not withstand criticism: those measures already labelled as unilateral actions under the interim agreement will be labelled that way even more clearly in an overall agreement in June, if that happens.

Syriza itself, its political-electoral dynamics, is the genuine product of the class struggle and the social rift caused by Memorandum policies in Greek society after 2010. The political scene was shaken violently and reconstituted on the class line of "Memorandum versus anti-Memorandum, austerity versus anti-austerity".

Yet at Syriza's conference

its program implementation was disconnected from the strategic goal of socialism. In autumn 2014, the implementation of the Thessaloniki declaration was disconnected from any idea of confrontation with the lenders and in substance from the implementation of the overall program of Syriza. The Thessaloniki program was disconnected from plans for a progressive redistributive taxation system and a "Memorandum for the Rich" which would "make the rich pay for the crisis".

RED LINES

After the 20 February deal, the abolition of the Memorandum was forgotten, and the axis of the party's policy and the government shifted to defence of the "four red lines": no new cuts in pensions, no new wage cuts and mass layoffs, a halt on privatizations and no to new tax burdens.

As the negotiations have progressed, those "four red lines" have been reduced to two or fewer. The privatizations of the 14 regional airports and the Piraeus port will proceed.

The question is not why the capitalist governments of Greece's "partners" follow a policy of economic suffocation. Syriza should have been prepared for that. The question is why Syriza continues to pay debt instalments while the other side has taken such a hostile stance.

Even to implement the Thessaloniki declaration, Syriza will have to move to non-repayment of debt, nationalisation of banks and strategic sectors of the economy under workers' and

social control and management, full transparency and democracy in production, planning of the economy for the needs of the people and not for the profit of big capital.

The Syriza leaders should be open with Syriza's rank and file and its supporters. They should prepare working class people, Syriza's rank and file, and the social movements, for the possible outcome if the government refuses to bow to pressure and the EU "partners" push the country into a forced exit from the euro.

If the government does not do that, and keeps failing to meet the needs and expectations of the people, it runs the risk of causing massive frustration and disillusionment in its rank and file and giving the establishment parties time to prepare their counter-attack. Some of the latest polls give Syriza a lead of less than 10 points when only a few weeks ago that lead was approaching 25 points. The risks are real — and the worst thing the government can do is to underestimate them.

In this country with six million people living in poverty, there are 559 "Greek patriots" who through the years of the crisis saw their wealth rise to €76 billion, equivalent to 45% of the country's GDP.

The Syriza government should impose a special contribution tax on those privileged Greeks. Even at a nominal rate of 10% that could raise €7.6 billion.

In this country with 1.5 million unemployed, there are 11 "Greek patriots" who through the years of the crisis saw their fortune increasing from €16 billion in

2013 to €18 billion in 2014. The Syriza government should impose a special tax on these privileged Greeks. At a nominal rate of 10% that would bring in €1.5 billion.

In this country with 686,000 undernourished children (Unicef report), 10% of the population saw their wealth soar during the crisis years. The Syriza government should impose a special wealth tax, which could raise at least €10 billion.

Investigators have found funds of Greek capitalists held abroad totalling at least €140 billion euros. Euro. The Syriza government should impose a special contribution tax on that wealth.

RUPTURE

The voices within Syriza supporting an uncompromising stance against the EU "partners" have been strengthened and multiplied.

They explain that an "honourable compromise" is unattainable and the only realistic option is that of rupture. Such statements and articles play an important role. But they are not enough.

Even more voices, from the entire spectrum of the components and tendencies of Syriza, refer to the possible need for the government to resort to the people in the event of a deadlock, via a referendum or via elections. However, even in that case, the political leadership of Syriza cannot simply delegate the decision to the electorate. The role of the political subject, Syriza, is to take responsibility and dialectically lead the base.

The Central Committee of the party must be convened before any meaningful decisions are taken at government level. It must have the opportunity to formulate specific and detailed "red lines" and direct choices and moves that will follow if these "red lines" are not respected.

The members need the opportunity to express themselves on the choices and alliances that will determine the course of the party and the government. It's time for the leadership of Syriza to listen to the party.

We need to rebuild from the bottom up

How I became a socialist By Edd Mustill



Did I “become” a socialist? I suppose I must have done. Even those of us who in a different time and place might have been dubbed “red diaper babies,” born to socialist parents, must at some point make a conscious series of decisions, which lead us to join the world’s greatest, and most consistently defeated, political movement.

Like many people of my age, Palestine and Iraq were the motivating factors in my early political involvement. I remember marches in solidarity with the Second Intifada in Sheffield. I even remember when there were local Stop the War groups. I had imbibed somehow from my environment that all this killing was deeply wrong, that America was bad, that Blair was a sell-out, and that something must be done. I went to two meetings, Socialist Party (SP) and Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP), and found the SP one more interesting. There but for fortune, and all that.

Work in the SP was worthy if a bit plodding. We did a lot of good stuff; campaigning to keep post offices open, supporting the big bus strikes at South Yorkshire First, and against the BNP when, in its heyday, it was building a presence on the housing estates of south Sheffield. I got a basic education in Marxism, the idea that the working class is the fundamental agent to bring about socialism, and the importance of actually being active in working class communities. I’m still grateful for this.

As a teenage Bolshevik I must have been insufferable. My righteous know-it-all anger knew no bounds. People who were into “Make Poverty History” (remember that?) really got on my wick. I was a buzzkill around all worthy causes, except for socialism.

I didn’t encounter much of the left outside the SP. I was from the wrong side of the city to have had much contact

with the rather peculiar Independent Socialist Youth Forum, a laudable school student-led leftwing body which emerged from the anti-war movement. So my political education was rather confined to the SP’s own Millie tradition. I was real working class and proud, like.

But before I beat the do-gooder middle class kids of mid-Naughties west Sheffield over the head with the chip on my shoulder, I’ll confess that I can hardly lay claim to the mantle of the autodidact. Yes, I am another one of those Russell Group lefties (Cambridge, no less, old chap). But I didn’t learn my leftism at university, a fact for which I am eternally grateful.

Student politics never sat easily with me, partly because of the chip on the shoulder, and partly because, in the pre-Millbank days at least, so much of it was inconsequential chatter. I was always happier doing the (usually derisory) weekly party paper sale at the local shopping centre than facilitating one of those jazz hands meetings in an occupied lecture hall. I grew apart from the SP while at university, over their approach to student work, democracy, and, ultimately, trade unionism as well, and eventually left without much fuss.

SALVO

Millbank and the ensuing demonstrations happened just after I left university. That movement, and the state’s violent response to it, was at once exhilarating and harrowing.

I think many of us saw it as potentially an opening salvo in five years of bitter struggle against the Tory government. In retrospect of course, nothing of the sort materialised on a general sense.

The failure of the public sector unions to even land a glancing blow on the government over pensions in 2011, coupled with my own nascent experiences in the trade union movement, have pushed me to the belief that we need to rebuild from the bottom up. I no longer have the faith I did as a kid



Even the left-led PCS backed down on pensions

that “the unions” will swing into action if only they’re led by better people. I don’t think it is the unions’ relationship with Labour that is the primary problem holding them back; rather it is the unions’ relationship to their own members.

There are times when, for whatever reasons, the burning desire for a better world which drew me to socialism as a teenager has been dulled. The Tory victory in this month’s general election is stoking that fire up to a bit of a roar again. As of recently, I’m a somewhat reluctant member of the Labour Party, recognising that it remains — just about — the political wing of the labour movement. As Tony Blair might say, I feel the hand of history on my shoulder.

I’ve no idea how long that historical relationship will last. But I am still convinced that, whatever recomposition of the class, of parties, and of unions takes place, the ideas of working class socialism remain the great hope for the liberation of humanity.

Nationalise the top 200 monopolies to save climate

Climate Change



By Paul Vernadsky

“Nationalise the top 200 monopolies” was for decades the robotic answer to every political question parroted by the *Militant* newspaper, which spawned the latter-day Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal.

The slogan was mechanically repeated by the “Millies”, fetishising nationalisation and sometimes juxtaposed to the equally important idea of workers’ control. It had an eerie association with the bureaucratic state ownership of the Stalinist states. And it was often coupled with a reformist conception of socialism introduced through an Enabling Act in the Westminster parliament, evading the question of socialist revolution and ruling class resistance to it. The slogan has largely disappeared from their propaganda in recent years.

With all these caveats in mind, perhaps the slogan “nationalise the top 200 monopolies” might yet breathe new life in the climate movement. New research by financial specialists has found that the top 200 publicly traded coal, oil and gas companies now hold over 500 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide in their fuel reserves, close to the total amount the world could ever emit while keeping global warming below the danger limit of 2°C.

These private firms are in the vanguard of efforts to exploit fossil fuels in the Arctic, tar sands and deep sea waters, the unconventional sources of “extreme energy” that will blow the carbon budget in the coming decades. This will instigate climate change on a scale and depth that threatens millions of working class people and ultimately will undermine the material basis for socialism (and perhaps modern society in general) on the planet.

The carbon reserves of the top 100 traded coal companies

and top 100 oil and gas companies were revealed by Fossil Free Indexes (FFI), a US-based green consulting firm. Coal India has the largest reserves on the coal list, while Gazprom in the most on the oil and gas list. Other fossil fuel monsters such as ExxonMobil, Shell, BP, BHP Billiton and Anglo American all appear in the top 10. The FFI data shows that the top 10 coal companies alone own over half the carbon in the list, while the top 10 oil and gas companies own two-thirds of the carbon in those fuels.

The political conclusion is clear: these multinational firms must be brought under collective, democratic control, principally by the workers who work for them, if we are to halt dangerous climate change. Taking control of just 200 firms would make an enormous contribution to tackling climate change, providing they were converted to more sustainable and renewable forms of energy production, rationally planning the use of fossil fuels only where substitutes have so far not been developed.

This cannot simply be bureaucratic state ownership in the manner of the old Stalinist states or the old nationalised industries, both of which were massive polluters and carbon emitters. For one thing, on the global scale far more fossil fuels — about 2,650 gigatonnes — are held by state-owned companies, such as those in clerical fiefdoms of the Middle East and state capitalist economies such as China and Venezuela. Although these state-owned firms are run on a capitalist basis and integrated into global market circuits of capital (unless they are subjected to sanctions), most of all they are models of economic dictatorship where workers invariably lack even the basic right to organise their own trade unions, never mind exercise democratic control over production.

Climate scientists and economists estimate that overall, private and state capital now have four to five times more fossil fuels in existing reserves than can be safely burned. This situation indicates how the capitalist mode of production is leading towards climate barbarism: either these firms face an asset bubble and another economic crash, or they burn these



Protests in Washington DC after the Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster

reserves and fry the planet. The facts about their reserves strengthen the case for rational, planned socialist relations of production, where working people exercise democratic control over global means of production — including energy — and organise that production for socially useful and ecologically sustainable needs.

These forms of democratic collectivism are a much more expansive vision than the blandishments of “nationalise the top 200 monopolies”. They go much further than capitalist states taking over private industry in order to cream off huge surplus profits for revenue. But they highlight the need put ownership and control at the centre of the reviving climate movement. Small investment changes are not enough to avert climate catastrophe — system change is necessary to prevent dangerous climate change. It is workers that have the power and interest to end their own exploitation and simultaneously prevent ecological degradation.

Climate activists should work with (and indeed inside) the labour movement to develop the only force capable to replacing capitalism with a climate-compatible socialist alternative.

Regroup and fight back!

The Tories have won a 12-seat majority in the 7 May 2015 general election.

We face a government which has promised to continue and increase cuts, and to bring in new anti-union laws which will effectively ban large, multi-workplace public sector strikes.

Yet the small upturn of an industrial fightback which has already begun as the economic slump eases off (for some, at least), and unemployment recedes a bit (from 8.3% in November 2011 to 5.5% today) will continue.

The Tories have only 36.9% of the votes cast, 24% of the electorate, almost the same number as in 2010. Most people don't like the Tories. Their parliamentary majority is small. So long as activists remain resolute, the new Tory government can be pushed back on many fronts, in the same way as the Tories were often on the back foot in 1992-7, despite winning re-election in 1992.

Ed Miliband's combination of sporadic sallies against "predators" and in favour of "working people" with commitment to continued cuts; only microscopic, piecemeal additional taxes on the rich or restrictions on big-business profiteering; and no challenge to the banks — that combination didn't work.

The bulk of the labour movement failed to challenge him. Although all the big unions have, on paper, more left-wing policies, none campaigned visibly on those policies during the election or, by way of loud clear demands on the Labour leadership, in the run-up.

The Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, which we supported, got a better, wider response than we expected. But it was starting from a low base in the labour movement left. Some labour-movement-left bodies which nominally backed the SCLV, such as the Labour Representation Committee, did not even summon up the energy to circulate and publicise the campaign.

SLUMP

With the onset of the great economic slump in 2008, political shifts of some sort became likely. The sober fact so far is that, with exceptions here and there, the left has not gained seriously from the shaking-up effect of the slump.

Protests against the cuts in Britain were loud and lively in 2010-11, but have diminished since then even as the cuts have become more damaging. The Tories were able to make some headway with the idea that the cuts were after all "necessary".

The strand in politics which has gained most from the slump, not just in Britain but worldwide, has been different sorts of "identity politics". In Britain: the SNP and UKIP. Elsewhere, very varied forms, in some cases very different indeed: the BJP, ISIS, the Front National, Catalan nationalism...

"Identity politics" comes in liberal or leftish variants as well as its more organic hard-right variants; but even the liberal or leftish variants are a hindrance in the fight against the ruling class. The SNP was able to present itself as leftish despite its record of cuts when governing Scotland. Its show-

Fight planned new anti-strike law

The Tories, voted into government by 24% of the electorate, plan to ban public sector strikes unless at least 40% of the workforce vote for the strikes in the ballot. This would effectively outlaw almost all large public sector strikes.

The unions and Labour should start campaigning now to beat this threat.



Most people don't like the Tories, but they won the election; Labour failed to mobilise working-class votes

ing on 7 May makes another referendum for Scottish separation likely. This signifies, essentially, that anger against the Tories has been diverted into a nationalist blind alley instead of into class struggle.

The labour movement and the left can combat that diversion only by contesting the SNP from a position clearly to the left of it, not by adaptation to nationalism.

The left-of-Labour efforts, TUSC and Left Unity, did poorly, even when they had candidates quite well-known locally and a solid local group of campaign activists. What makes that worse was that both groups decided to run not on full socialist politics but on a trimmed-down "anti-cuts" platform, hoping that would bring them electoral success short-cutting the otherwise arduous process of winning people to socialist ideas. Getting a small-but-solid result for an explicit class-struggle socialist platform may be a real step forward; registering that 0.4% of an electorate have voted "against cuts" is not.

There is no way forward other than redoubled effort in workplaces and within the labour movement to win the arguments for socialism.

In 1992 there was a slightly similar election result. Most people expected Labour, under Neil Kinnock, to win narrowly; in fact the Tories won a fourth successive election victory.

The dismay on the left which followed that result was widespread and harmful, possibly even more harmful than the result itself. The dismay opened the way for Blair to prevail in the labour movement after 1994. As for the Tory government, its credibility was shattered by a financial crisis, within months of the election, in September 1992.

Realistically, it now looks difficult to stop the new Cameron administration triggering some developments which will take us backwards: the separation of Scotland (which Cameron doesn't want, but which he is effectively promoting); the collapse of the Labour Party in Scotland into a rump, or maybe its formal winding-up; and the withdrawal of rump-Britain from the EU (which Cameron is also effectively promoting, and may or may not want). It will be harder to resist those developments because much of the left foolishly sees them as positive.

The point here, however, is that Cameron's victory on 7 May does not at all guarantee that he can, for example, push through cuts and anti-union laws as drastic as he wants.

The lesson for today is: don't mourn, don't mope, don't mumble. Organise!

Help us raise £15,000

The election of a majority Tory government has given the ruling class the confident, fighting government it needs to carry out its war against us.

So confident that only four days after being elected, senior Tory ministers are boasting about the new anti-union laws they will outline in the Queen's Speech on 27 May.

Anti-union laws will further demoralise our labour movement at a time when it needs to be as bold in fighting for our class as the Tories are in fighting for theirs. Workers' Liberty is nearly unique on the British left in arguing for the transformation of the labour movement, for industrial organisation from the workplace up — not just pushing for the election of "left-wing leaders".

We have not picked these ideas out of thin air, we have thought about them, studied historical examples, and talked to trade unionists and socialists across the world. We try to act as the memory of our class, and our class is certainly going to need a memory bank of ideas and tools for the fight ahead.

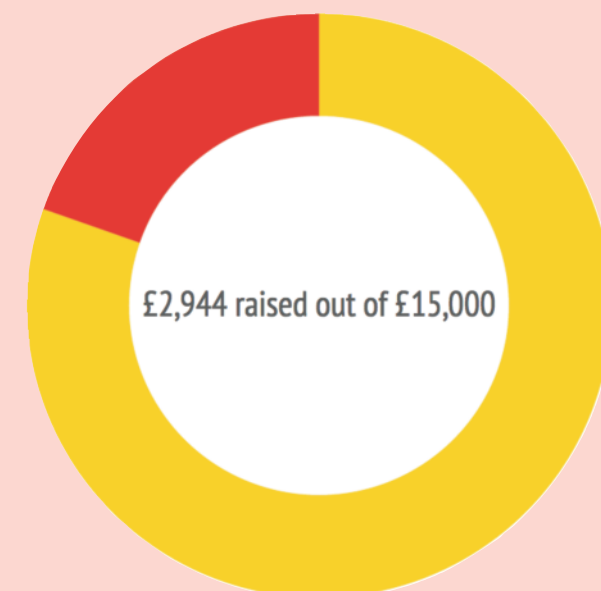
Due to having greater capacity in our office we have been able to respond to the election quickly, writing articles, talking to activists and organising a day school on "where next?" for 17 May.

To do this we need funds. We rely on contributions from workers and students like you! So please consider:

- Getting a subscription to our weekly newspaper, *Solidarity* — workersliberty.org/subscribe
- Taking out a monthly standing order.
- Making a one-off donation
- Organising a fundraising event in your local area
- Committing to do a sponsored activity and asking others to sponsor you
- Buying some of our books, posters, autocollants or pamphlets

For information on standing orders or how to donate visit workersliberty.org/donate For more ideas and information on fundraising visit workersliberty.org/fundraising

Thanks this week to Ed, David, Sam and Pat. So far we have raised £2944.



How to regroup and fight back

By Daniel Randall

Over the five years of the coalition government, the labour movement failed to mount any consistent fight (either industrially or politically) against it. Had it done so, and had it forced the Labour Party to respond to that fight, we might be looking at a different election result.

The capitulations of the last five years have to give way to a new spirit of belligerence. With many in the Tory party committed to pursuing new restrictions on unions' ability to organise and take action, the government may be about to go to war on our movement. We have to be ready to respond.

The 2010-2015 balance sheet makes for grim reading. Pitched battles like the public sector pensions fight of 2011 were sabotaged, de-escalated, and sold out. The public sector pay fight of 2014 was a shabby rerun on an even less ambitious scale. Politically, well-intentioned but relatively token and unambitious efforts like the NUT's "Stand Up For Education" campaign, or the rail unions' "Action for Rail" coalition, have been the only attempts to positively assert working-class political demands.

There has been working-class resistance, of course. Some local industrial battles have won gains, such as the 3 Cosas campaign at the University of London and the Ritzy Cinema workers' strikes, and inspiring social struggles such as those of the Focus E15 mothers have emerged and won victories. But these have been the exceptions, not the rule, and often these campaigns have been forced to the fringes of the movement — under resourced and staffed by beleaguered volunteers — because of the conservatism, inertia, and political timidity of mainstream labour movement officialdom.

The first step to regrouping and rebuilding, then, is to make our movement fight. No more token one-day strikes, launched too late to make a difference and then unilaterally suspended. No more "mañana militancy", promising the next battle will be fought full tilt, but surrendering on today's. Every campaign, every local dispute, every strike, must be amplified and helped to win. A movement on a war footing, that seeks opportunities for combativeness rather than finding excuses for passivity, is a prerequisite to any progressive change.

Don't abandon the terrain in the Labour Party, but don't limit the horizons either

The Labour Party is in political crisis. That is a tumult into which organised labour and the socialist left must intervene and assert ourselves. Abandoning the terrain to the Blairites, without even attempting to shape the outcome of that crisis, would be disastrous.

For over a year, there has been talk of Unite, the largest affiliated union, breaking from the Labour Party. Paul Kenny, the leader of the GMB, Labour's third-biggest affiliated union, has indulged in similar disaffiliationist posturing, as far back as 2012. Dave Ward, the new general secretary of the CWU (the fourth biggest affiliate) distinguished himself from his incumbent rival Billy Hayes by demagogic appeals to anti-Labour (and, often, anti-political) sentiment. If any of

these three unions, or any other, were to disaffiliate from Labour without a substantial fight, and if it were then to lurch into a pick-and-mix, candidate-by-candidate approach to politics, that would be a huge setback.

Rather than ducking the fight with the Labour leaders, and seeking better "value for money" elsewhere (the "payment-by-results" approach advocated by Jerry Hicks and others), the unions and the left need to push the historic, and ultimately untenable, contradiction the Labour Party has always represented right up to (and, if necessary, past) its limits. The left should mount a leadership challenge (John McDonnell MP is the obvious candidate), to make the case for genuine working-class political representation and socialist politics. The links established through the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, which Workers' Liberty and others ran during the election, can contribute to that.

All unions, affiliated and not, should be challenged to back that fight. When McDonnell challenged Gordon Brown for the leadership in 2007, members of the Unite United Left — a broad left caucus within Unite — held a majority on the Unite Executive. But, staggeringly, although UUL itself backed McDonnell, its supporters on the Unite Executive failed to use their majority to secure Unite's backing for McDonnell, and the union backed Brown.

That is the dynamic which characterises the big unions' relationship, and particularly Unite's relationship, to the Labour leadership for the last decade: demagogic posturing when it suits them, but complete acquiescence when it comes to the crunch. If Unite had even consistently fought for its own policies within Labour, it could have used its weight to force it to campaign in the election on an anti-austerity platform. Instead, Unite and other union delegates to Labour's National Policy Forum made sure pro-austerity policies were passed. That acquiescence has to end.

Faced with a genuine campaign of combative union self-assertion, within and against the Labour Party, the Blairites may move to sever (or reform out of existence) the link with the unions sooner than the 2019 deadline for the implementations of the recommendations of the Collins Review (which unions also failed to oppose at the time). Forcing a break on the momentum of such a fight would be vastly preferable to unions hiving off, one by one, in demoralisation and despair.

Left-wing Channel 4 journalist Paul Mason has bombastically predicted that Unite breaking from the Labour Party would lead to an "English Syriza". If only it were that simple. Syriza itself was not created by individual unions peeling away from the official social democratic party, but through long years of splits and fusions in Greek's radical left milieu. It is unlikely that model can be easily replicated here.

Nevertheless, it is not our job to defend the structural integrity of the existing Labour Party for its own sake. Our aspiration should be genuine, independent, working-class political representation: a party based on and accountable to the industrial labour movement, which acts in Parliament and wider politics for our class in the way that the Tories, the Lib Dems, and New Labour have acted for the bosses.

Winning such a party will involve a radical transformation, and probably the explosion, of the current relationship the

majority of organised labour has to politics (i.e., the Labour-union link). But the means of that transformation (whether it is affected by splits and recompositions resulting from combat, or whether it simply crumbles through passive disaffiliation and meek acceptance of the Blairite ambition to turn the British Labour Party into the US Democrats) matters a great deal.

Their plan and ours: be bold!

The project of the 2010-2015 coalition government, which will undoubtedly accelerate and expand now, has been to use the economic crisis that began in 2007 to screw down social costs for the ruling class, and to remake society along more rigidly neo-liberal, market-driven, and privatised lines. The Tories have had a clear, definitive plan.

Labour has not. Despite Ed Miliband's attempts to nudge the party back in the direction of mildly social-democratic reform, Labour's campaign fell between two stools. It half attempted to foreground its social democratic policies on the NHS, zero-hours contracts, wages, etc., but consistently limited itself in the attempt by insisting that it had to operate within the framework of Tory-dictated "fiscal responsibility". It offered alternative, and, for the most part, better, policies than the Tories on many issues, but by accepting the Tories' framework, these policies appeared as a wish-list, presented late in the day, rather than a coherent alternative vision for organising society.

But the revolutionary socialist left too has suffered from an abject lack of political ambition. TUSC, the main far-left electoral effort, based its campaign on opposition to "cuts". All the other parties wanted some cuts, it said. TUSC was the party that wanted no cuts. Its platform included many worthwhile demands, but was not a sharp propaganda effort to promote those demands, and synthesise them into a coherent political programme, but rather a lowest-common-denominator punt on the idea that there was some body of people inhabiting an "anti-austerity" space to Labour's left that, if they (TUSC) positioned themselves correctly, they could corral. That strategy has not been vindicated.

A socialist consciousness — that is, a conscious, self- and mutually-educated ownership of socialist ideas — can only be built by consistently promoting and arguing for the policies and demands that can link our day-to-day struggle with a struggle for working-class social power. In the parlance of the Trotskyist left, this has been called a "transitional programme". The "transitional demands" we need now must be bold, ambitious, and must respond to the questions our workmates, neighbours, and friends are asking of the society around us.

We need demands like:

- Expropriate the banks, tax the rich
- Repeal the anti-union laws; for a positive charter of workers' rights
- Public ownership of industry; genuine democratic social control, not bureaucratic nationalisation
- Living wages and living benefits
- A mass programme of social housing construction
- Free education; democratise schools, colleges, and universities
- Reverse cuts and privatisation in the NHS and other public services; rebuild the health service
- End the scapegoating of migrants; resist right-wing pressure to leave the EU; open borders
- Democratic reform; abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords; for a democratic federal republic of England, Scotland, and Wales, with constituent assemblies elected by proportional representation.

These are not catchpenny demands designed to capture or mirror back an existing "mood". In some cases, such as open borders, they are ideas that are positively marginal and currently rejected by most working-class people. Others, such as the demand for a democratic federal republic (rather than secession for Scotland and Wales), or opposition to with-

Nottingham conference to discuss fightback

By Pete Radcliff

On Monday 11 May, a packed meeting of Beeston North Labour Party branch (in Broxtowe constituency, Nottingham) voted to initiate a broad local labour movement conference to discuss the way forward for the movement after the Tories' election victory.

The meeting debated the resolution for well over an hour, but in the end there was only one vote against.

The motion is going forward to Broxtowe CLP on 28 May, but the branch agreed to move forward in contacting other labour movement organisations immediately.

The motion focuses on five areas: organising a fightback and demanding Labour Party support for it; opposing nationalist anti-migrant and anti-Europe agitation; opposing further division between Scottish and English workers; sorting out the left's electoral strategy; and opposing a Blairite coronation for the new Labour leader.

We need the broadest possible labour movement discussion about how we get organised and fight back, and the ideas underpinning that. Could you initiate a similar conference in your area?

• For the text of the Beeston North resolution, see bit.ly/1cNq6Bh



drawal from the EU, are marginal even on the far-left.

But we cannot hope to popularise them or make them less marginal except by raising them consistently, within the context of a programme which starts from the logic of our current struggles. The boldness required is the difference between attempting to create a political “space”, through the hard work of agitation and education in our workplaces and communities, and cynical attempts to manoeuvre into some existing space where people are already imagined to be by mirroring back to them slightly more radical versions of the ideas we presume them to already hold.

These wouldn’t be demands that we’d orient towards the state, necessarily, as if we expect a Tory government to implement them. They are demands that make up part of our own political narrative, our own plan for remaking society, just as the Tory policies of cuts and privatisation make up theirs.

Capital make concessions to labour either when we are strong enough to simply overwhelm it and impose ourselves, or when it is too scared of the consequences of not making concessions. For either condition, a conscious programme — a working-class socialist alternative to austerity — is necessary.

Organise the unorganised

The organised labour movement is at its lowest ebb for a generation. From a height of 14 million members in 1979, there are now half that number of trade unionists in Britain. More alarmingly, there are around 65% fewer elected union reps, and the average shop steward is 47 years old.

The labour movement must rebuild. That must mean an outwards push into new industries and sectors, including those, such as high street retail and call centres, reckoned in much labour-movement opinion to be too hard to organise — due to high turnover of staff, anti-union managements, or a variety of other excuses.

Here and there, there are attempts, or half-attempts, often at a local level, to undertake such work: the “Hungry for Justice” campaign for fast food workers’ rights, sponsored by the Bakers’ Union, Unite’s hotel workers project, or the embryonic “Union Town” initiative in Brixton. “Independent” union initiatives like the Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain (IWGB), some Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) projects, and “United Voices of the World”, a split from the IWGB, have had, in some places, successes in or-

ganising groups of workers marginalised or ignored by other unions, and in the case of IWGB particularly have built an impressive culture that combines industrial organisation and militancy with a social and cultural “union way of life”. Those experiences should be brought in from the margins and made the rules, rather than the exceptions.

The labour movement also needs to organise unemployed workers. The Unite Community project has many positives, although is ultimately a reflection of the bureaucracy of its parent body. Its activists need to be part of a conversation about how the labour movement can make itself the hub for struggles that take place outside the workplace, on issues like benefits, housing, and more.

Challenge nationalisms from the left

The SNP whitewash in Scotland is bad news for socialism. If we are entering a period where people feel more and more compelled to vote along “national” lines, that cuts against any attempt to rebuild working-class politics.

That the SNP were able to convincingly present themselves as opponents of austerity, when their record in Holyrood (and, indeed, their actual policies) so obviously prove the opposite, is an indication of the weakness of working-class consciousness — or rather, its confiscation into a cross-class project to boost an independent Scottish capitalism.

But nationalism is on the rise south of the border too. While Ukip’s result was, fortunately, not as bad as expected, close to four million votes for a far-right, anti-migrant nationalist party indicates that the appeal by both Tories and Labour to “English” and “British” national identities in the Scottish referendum has helped boost racism. The labour movement cannot challenge nationalism in Scotland by counterposing the de facto nationalism of support for the status quo. We must pose our own, progressive alternative to the current union: a democratic federal republic, with open borders. This must be part of a wider anti-racist push that makes the tough, currently-unpopular arguments against immigration controls and seeks to develop an internationalist working-class identity based on mutual solidarity.

A campaign for democratic and constitutional reform that is republican, anti-racist, and internationalist can resolve legitimate aspirations for greater self-determinations without leading us down the blind alley of nationalism, on either “side”.

Transform our movement

To make real gains, we need a vastly more democratic and responsive movement than the one we have.

We need unions in which local branches can call industrial action, and in which all officers are elected, recallable, and paid an average workers’ wage. We need structural reform to reorganise our unions along industrial lines, ending the ridiculous state-of-affairs where (to give one example) teachers in a school might be in any one of three or more different unions, and the teaching assistants with whom they share a workplace and an employer might be in any one of another three. We need real power for self-organised networks of women workers, black workers, LGBT workers, and disabled workers within the labour movement, to put liberation struggles at the heart of the labour movement’s agenda. We need organisation and decision-making structures in unions devolved as close to the workplace as possible, to ensure that the union is, fundamentally, a tool workers can use to fight for change at work.

None of this is to say that no fightback is possible until we have remade the movement. Local struggles will inevitably emerge, which must be amplified and proliferated wherever possible. And it is not in the interests of even the most conservative labour bureaucrat to respond with complete and utter passivity in the face of a Tory onslaught. The union leaders will inevitably launch some struggles, however minimal or inadequate, which grassroots militants in the movement must attempt to push beyond the limits the leaders set for them.

But without a substantial transformation of the labour movement, there will always be hurdles on our own side over which we will have to jump before we even begin to confront the obstacles that capital and its state place in our path. To make our class fit to rule, we must first make our movement fit to fight.

Why “labour”?

Why focus on “labour” at all? Why not aim for a broader alliance against austerity, in which organised workers might be one stakeholder, but play no privileged or leading role, participating instead as a partner alongside other stakeholders?

The answer, simply, is capitalism. As long as we live in a world based on the drive for profit, and as long as that profit is created by a minority class exploiting the labour of a majority to create value, the conflict between workers and boss is not just one struggle amongst many, but the struggle with a unique, integral potential to overthrow the rule of profit.

This is not to suggest that struggles which take place outside of the workplace are irrelevant, or of secondary importance. Although capitalism as a social relation is fundamentally expressed in the relationship between worker and boss, that is not its only expression: it expresses itself too in the relationship between benefit claimant and state, between landlord and tenant, between debt-saddled student and millionaire Vice Chancellor, between police brutality and black community. And there are other struggles, such as the struggle against the oppression of women, and struggles against religious oppression, that pre-date capitalism (although they are mediated today through capitalist relations).

But it is organised labour, the self-organisation of workers at the point where capitalism most fundamentally “happens”, that has the potential to be the hub to which all of these other struggles are spoked — not as subordinate elements, or as potential distractions, but as elements of an organic whole, a totalising, working-class fightback against capital.

In the bleak aftermath of the election, in a moment when our movement is weak, disorganised, and misled, and at a time when the ideas of revolutionary-democratic libertarian socialism seem utterly marginal, that working-class fightback can seem very distant.

But a fightback will occur. How successful it is depends on the extent to which socialists in the labour movement have managed to affect the regroupment described in this article. The attempt to do that begins now, with each of us recommitting to our basic task: to agitate, educate, and organise for socialism.

Where now for Scottish Labour?

By Ann Field

Winning just one seat in Scotland, the Scottish Labour Party was annihilated as an electoral force, and possibly as any kind of political force, on 7 May.

On being elected Scottish Labour leader last December, Jim Murphy said: "I am confident we will hold all the Westminster seats we have."

In January he criticised the SNP for being "sluggish, lethargic and off the pace."

By February of this year Murphy was predicting that Labour would increase the number of seats it held in Scotland: "We plan to hold all that we have, and we are going after (Lib Dem) East Dunbartonshire as well."

But back in the real world, satisfaction rates with Murphy's role as Scottish Labour leader had slumped to minus 19 by April, the lowest for any of the party leaders in Scotland.

On election day Labour won just 24% of the vote, and one seat in the whole of Scotland. Murphy's own seat saw a 32% swing to the SNP on an 81% turnout, underlining how committed his own constituents were to kicking him out.

The "sluggish and lethargic" SNP, on the other hand, won 50% of the vote, and 56 out of 59 seats (compared with just six seats in 2010).

Murphy blamed the party for its defeat: "It's proven hard to turn round years of difficulty with the Scottish Labour Party in just five short months. ... I will continue to lead Scottish Labour as we fight for our progressive policies."

The SNP entered the election campaign knowing that 81% of "yes" voters in last September's referendum were going to vote SNP. With those votes already in the bag, it focused on attacking the Lib Dems for having been in coalition with the Tories, and on Labour for selling out on its principles.

As one of the SNP's leaflets used throughout Scotland put it: "Labour used to stand up to the Tories. Not any more. Labour and the Tories campaigned together in the referendum. And they voted together at Westminster for deeper spending cuts. The only way to lock out the Tories and force Labour back to its roots is to vote SNP."

The claim that a vote for the SNP would force Labour "back to its roots" was nonsense. The SNP does not want Labour to go "back to its roots", and if Labour did the SNP would still oppose it.

And lots of people did vote SNP but that did not lock the Tories out of office.

Further, SNP criticism of Labour for not standing up to the Tories and backing spending cuts was deeply hypocritical.

The SNP's own manifesto required cuts in public spending (albeit at the end of the parliamentary cycle). In Holyrood and in local authorities it has not stood up to Tory austerity but implemented it.

Even so, the attacks on Labour for not standing up to the Tories, for collaborating with the Tories in the referendum campaign, and for supporting more spending cuts struck a chord with broad swathes of the electorate. Because, however hypocritical they might be, they were true.

Labour has failed to be an effective opposition in Parliament over the past five years. The Labour election manifesto committed a Labour government to more cuts in public spending.



Jim Murphy must go

Disastrously, and without any consultation with Scottish Labour's affiliates, the leadership decided to set up a Labour-Tory-Lib-Dem alliance ("Better Together") as the vehicle for campaigning for a "no" vote in the referendum, with politicians of the three parties appearing on the same platform.

But perhaps the biggest single factor accounting for Labour's humiliation in Scotland was the fact that its leader was Jim Murphy.

Murphy is an unreconstructed Blairite. He represents the politics which allowed the SNP to win voters away from Labour. He backed Blair's wars, supported tuition fees, voted for the benefits cap and did not bother to turn up to vote against the bedroom tax.

He backed the Blairite candidate in the 2010 Labour Party leadership contest, opposed Miliband's decision not to back Tory plans for military intervention in Syria, and went out of his way to publicly attack Unite at the time of the Ineos dispute and the Falkirk re-selection contest.

JOBS

On election as Scottish Labour leader he dished out jobs in the bureaucracy to his Blairite friends — including the appointment as his chief of staff of John McTernan, self-confessed admirer of Thatcherism.

Whatever the limitations, it is certainly true that Labour shifted to the left under Miliband and that its election manifesto contained a raft of policies to raise taxes on the rich and big business, defend the NHS, freeze private sector rents and energy prices, and scrap some (but nowhere near enough) of the Con-Dem legislation.

But in the election campaign in Scotland all of this was obscured by the fact that the SNP was able to masquerade as the "real" Labour Party, and by the fact that Labour was led by someone whose own political record was in direct contradiction to Labour's more left-wing manifesto commitments.

In fact, although the SNP poured resources into selected constituencies, in many others it did little or no canvassing, or leafletting. And yet it still won with a swing of around 30%.

An outsider observing arguments on the doorstep might well have concluded that Labour was led by a man called Tony Blair who had just invaded Iraq. The SNP's national and media campaign was so effective that it squeezed out

any discussion about what Labour was advocating now, in 2015, in this election.

And just to give the SNP an even bigger boost, in the final week of the election campaign Labour in Scotland ran on the theme of the alternative: "Labour's Fairer Economy or Another SNP Referendum". It did nothing to help Labour, but it certainly must have helped consolidate the SNP vote. (Murphy and McTernan were making a pitch for Tories to vote tactically in cities such as Aberdeen and Edinburgh. It didn't work.)

The general election result was a dream come true for the SNP: A Tory government in Westminster, and absolute SNP political domination in Scotland. With the Holyrood elections only 12 months away, the SNP is well on course to a clean sweep in those elections, a second referendum, and independence.

The Labour Party in Scotland has been out of power in Holyrood since 2007 and controls only a handful of councils. The Labour Party has now been out of power at Westminster since 2010. To demonstrate what it can achieve when in power, it has to go back to Blair. And that is a problem in itself.

The SNP is consolidating an electoral base for which voting SNP is becoming as natural and engrained as voting Labour used to be in the Central Belt: first-time voters in the referendum who voted "yes", who then went on to vote SNP in the general election, and who are guaranteed to vote SNP in next year's Holyrood elections.

These are not disillusioned ex-Labour voters. These are voters who see Labour as the party of Blairism, Trident, war in Iraq, public spending cuts and, most toxic of all, Jim Murphy and collaboration with the Tories. They are predominantly young.

There will probably be a concerted push in the Scottish regions of Labour-affiliated unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. A majority of trade unionists must have voted SNP on 7 May.

The union bureaucrats are unlikely to offer any resistance or any alternative. A layer of the bureaucracy already backs the SNP, or has even joined it — far better a few crumbs from the table of the SNP than fighting for union policies in the Labour Party and organising a working-class fightback.

Politics in Scotland will shift even further away from class and class-struggle politics to a politics of national identity and Scotland versus Westminster. Anyone on the left who sees the SNP's crushing of Labour as creating an opening for socialist politics needs to wake up.

The day after the election debacle, Murphy has said he would continue as it would take time for "the divisions of the referendum to fade back into distinctions between left and right."

This is true. The problem is that Murphy represents the right and everything which cost Labour all-but-one of its seats in Scotland. If Labour is to survive in Scotland, then the first precondition is that Murphy and his hangers-on such as McTernan are forced out.

More on workersliberty.org. The left's role in the 2015 election debacle: bit.ly/1Pg89MN

The decline of fightback and the rise of UKIP

By Sacha Ismail

The context for the rise of UKIP was set by two things: their sustained electoral intervention over two decades, and the failure of the labour movement to fight austerity.

UKIP was founded in 1995; the first general election it stood in was 1997, when it got 0.3 percent. In 2001 it got 1.5 percent; in 2005 2.2 pc; in 2010 3.1 percent. It used European elections and local elections to build its base. As far back as the 2009 Euro-election it won 18.8%. UKIP has had ups and downs, splits, crises. But it has been able to weather these in part because it has a consistent project, consistently worked at.

On the left? The Socialist Alliance (which we were in) first stood in the 2001 general election; later in 2001 the SP withdrew, then in 2003 the SWP shut it down. Instead of an organisation and political (including electoral) profile that large

numbers of people at least get to know and can become interested in, we have had one different front after another (Respect, No2EU, TUSC, Left Unity). None of these projects represented serious unity on the basis of anything like working-class socialist politics.

Clearly UKIP was aided by the prevalence of nationalist, anti-migrant, etc, ideas in society, ideas promoted by the "mainstream" parties. During the first two years of the Coalition, however, its support was not much higher than in 2010. The last five polls of 2011 had it on an average of 3.6 percent: last one 4 percent. A year later, UKIP's last-five average was 10 percent: last poll 15 percent.

2011 was the year which saw the most fightback against the Coalition's cuts drive. The student revolt of winter 2010-11 was quickly followed by an enormous TUC demonstration in March; then half a million public sector strikers in June; then more than two million in November. This was also the period which saw the beginning of the "Arab Spring",

with political Islam on the back foot and big workers' movements in Tunisia and Egypt. Things were moving and the far left grew. Soon the "Arab Spring" turned sour, as counter-revolutionary forces fought back and political Islam reasserted itself. In Britain, having insisted in putting all the movement's eggs in the basket of the public sector pensions fight, the trade union bureaucracies closed the dispute down.

The Tories were emboldened and every struggle against austerity was made much harder. The Labour leadership became entrenched in a pro-cuts position.

That situation and the feelings of disappointment and hopelessness it created were the context for UKIP's populist-nationalist revolt against the "establishment" to take off and gain traction with huge numbers of working-class people.

From March-April 2012 its polling started to climb. Labour was in the lead for a long time after that: how it lost that lead to the Tories is another, but related story.

Triumph and disillusion: Vietnam 1975

By Martin Thomas

Just over forty years ago, on 30 April 1975, the Vietnam war ended. The Stalinist National Liberation Front swept into Saigon, and the US Embassy was hurriedly evacuated by helicopter from its roof. Two and a half weeks earlier, on 12 April 1975, the Cambodian Stalinists had triumphed, seizing the capital, Phnom Penh.

For the previous ten years or more, big demonstrations against the US war in Vietnam had been a major route by which tens of thousands of young people came into revolutionary socialist politics.

The demonstrators not only denounced the corruption and authoritarianism of the various tinpot dictators of South Vietnam, propped up entirely by US power. They not only solidified with young people in the USA who did not want to be conscripted to fight in Vietnam. They not only indicted the brutality of the US war, epitomised by US commanders' comment that in Vietnam they "had to destroy a city to save it", and in Cambodia they were "bombing the country back into the Stone Age".

They made all those protests, and rightly. But the demonstrators also felt that they were identifying with proof that courageous struggle by poor people, with small resources, could defeat the huge power of the world plutocracy.

A popular slogan on the demonstrations coupled applause for North Vietnamese dictator Ho Chi Minh with a celebration of militancy: "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh/ We shall fight and we shall win".

By 1973 the US had already given up on victory in Vietnam. It signed a peace deal calling for the withdrawal of US forces. After an uneasy lull, the forces aligned with the Vietnamese Communist Party swept through the South in 1975. Triumph!

And then... Within four years the CP regime in Cambodia had killed about two million people, by forced evacuations from the cities, starvation and forced labour, and political mass murder.

The bloodshed was stemmed only by an invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 by the Vietnamese government, which introduced a more "normal" Stalinist regime into Cambodia.

From Vietnam itself something over a million fled as "boat people", preferring to risk their lives in rickety boats on the ocean than to stay under the police state established after the CP victory. Most of the "boat people" fled after 1978 when, with increasing conflict between China and Vietnam, life became very difficult for the large Chinese minority in Vietnam. China and Vietnam fought a border war in February-March 1979.

Already, before then, the Stalinist regime in south Vietnam had jailed something like one million people without formal charge or trials, and maybe over 150,000 people had died in "re-education camps".

And then again... From 1986 the Vietnamese CP government abandoned its socialist pretences and switched to a policy oriented to the capitalist world market and to drawing in foreign investment, while maintaining its Stalinist regime.

There is no way of exactly measuring the impact of all this on the activists in the West which had been brought into politics through demonstrations over Vietnam, on their morale or on their ability to speak convincingly to workers who reasonably concluded that a moderated capitalism would be better than Stalinist horrors. But after 1975 many thousands of would-be revolutionary activists scattered, lapsed into inactivity or moved to the right politically. Italy, for example, had three large revolutionary-left organisations (with daily papers, TV stations, and tens of thousands of activists) in 1975. All were "soft-Maoist". They saw themselves as anti-Stalinist, but also saw China's Cultural Revolution and the Vietnamese Communist Party's militancy against US imperialism as models of liberatory revolutionary action.

By 1980 all had collapsed or dwindled into rump groups. The brutal exposure by events of the naivety and credulity of those "soft Maoists" cannot but have been a big factor in it.

The American author Susan Sontag's comment in 1982 sums it up: "Imagine, if you will, someone who read only the *Reader's Digest* [a notoriously crude, right-wing, 'Cold War' magazine] between 1950 and 1970, and someone in the same period who read only *The Nation* or the *New Statesman* [left-



North Vietnamese tank rolls through the gate of the Presidential Palace, Saigon, on 30 April 1975

ish news-magazines]. Which reader would have been better informed about the realities of Communism? The answer, I think, should give us pause".

Enthusiasm for the courage of the Vietnamese CP had been pretty much universal on the activist left, and not just among "soft Maoists". The Mandelite current called the Vietnamese CP "empirical revolutionaries". The SWP-UK, then called IS, theoretically held that North Vietnam was state-capitalist, but in practice was only slightly less enthusiastic than the Mandelites. The "state-capitalist" label meant only something like: "What can be achieved by struggle in Vietnam is good, but, because Vietnam is small and poor, limited. Proper socialism can be achieved only in richer countries". SWP/IS activists would join the chants of "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh/ We shall fight and we shall win".

Some "orthodox Trotskyists" said that the Vietnamese Communist Party was Stalinist. This description, however, mostly meant a "theoretical" (and sectarian-pedantic-sounding) insistence that the Vietnamese CP could not be trusted to fight the Americans adequately and might compromise.

THIRD CAMP

Could a hearing have been won for a stance of opposing the US war, and recognising the indomitable character of the Stalinists' battle against US imperialism, but simultaneously denouncing Vietnamese Stalinism as a regime of brutal oppression of the people by an exploitative ruling group, and supporting Vietnamese workers and peasants against both the US and Stalinism?

Yes. After the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which even the British and Italian CPs condemned, and twelve years after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956, awareness of the hideous nature of Stalinist rule was fairly widespread. The facts about the regime in North Vietnam were not difficult to find.

But nobody argued that "Third Camp" view clearly. We — the forerunners of AWL, then Workers' Fight — didn't do it even halfway adequately.

Despite our sharp hostility to Stalinism in Russia and Eastern Europe, our mistaken "inherited" theoretical formula that the Stalinist states were "degenerated and deformed workers' states" misled us into thinking that revolutionary Stalinists fighting US imperialism — as the Vietnamese were clearly doing — must be achieving some sort of social progress.

And we allowed ourselves to be morally intimidated by the feeling that we owed solidarity to "revolutionary nationalists" fighting the allies of our own government, and must limit criticisms and warnings so as not to complicate that solidarity too much.

We wrote:

"The programme of the active democracy of workers' councils still remains to be fought for in Indochina — and the Communist Parties will fight not for, but against, that pro-

gramme. Workers' democracy is not just some ideal, inessential finishing touch — it is vital for any concept of socialism beyond a miserable bureaucratic-reformist level.

"Those, like the International Marxist Group (*Red Weekly*) ["Mandelites", forerunners of Socialist Resistance today in Britain and the NPA in France] who present the NLF and the Khmer Rouge as revolutionary proletarian forces (with perhaps various political weaknesses and confusions) are gravely abusing the elementary programme of workers' power. To say that one should not disdain to recognise a revolution

because it doesn't fit the 'norms' is one thing; to chop those 'norms' down to miserable proportions for the sake of fitting the accomplished fact, is another.

"The effect is that concepts simply lose all precise meaning. The NLF or the Khmer Rouge can be characterised as proletarian, working class forces neither on the reality of their politics, nor on the reality of their social base, but only through the most metaphysical constructions.

"Also in IS's *Socialist Worker*... we find a quite uncritical assessment of the revolutionary victories in Indochina. Given that IS has the theory that countries like North Vietnam, or the Soviet Union, are 'state capitalist', one would expect razor-sharp criticism of the aspirant 'state capitalist classes' of South Vietnam and Cambodia. Not a word of it! The term 'state capitalism' does not even appear in IS's reportage on Indochina" (*Workers' Fight* 94, 28 April 1975).

We sought out and circulated the views of the exile Vietnamese Trotskyists.

"After 1954 the VCP shifted from traditional Stalinist positions above all under the pressure of imperialism, fearing to lose their contact with the masses. They mobilise the masses, even including the working class — within bureaucratic limits, and not permitting the autonomy of the working class. Comrades who have been in Vietnam tell us that the VCP is now trying to base itself on the poorest elements in the villages — all within the limits of bureaucratic control. There is discontent among the petty bourgeoisie in Saigon who have found their privileges curtailed, who find for example that students from poor backgrounds have preference for entry to university over students from more prosperous backgrounds...

"But we affirm that... a political revolution is necessary. A bureaucracy existed even during the war, though its privileges in absolute terms were slight. It will solidify with economic reconstruction...

"[About Cambodia] it is difficult to get information. But it appears to be another case of the tragic results of the policy of 'socialism in one country'. They are trying to build a sort of agrarian socialism". (*International Communist* magazine, no.7, March 1978).

We pointed out repeatedly that North Vietnam lacked any democracy, and that any socialist programme in Vietnam would find a resolute enemy, not a friend, in the Communist Party. But we did not draw adequate conclusions from that. We let those conclusions be smothered by "solidarity" against the USA, and the vague (but left-consensus) belief that Stalinist victory would bring a sort of social progress despite its bad political regime.

Learning the lessons of the left's mistakes then is an important part of building an adequate left now. We were more critical at the time than other would-be Trotskyists; but our self-distancing from the general left "consensus" about Vietnam was too timid.

“Back to the 70s” will not reverse inequality

Matt Cooper reviews *Inequality: What can be done?* by Anthony B Atkinson (Harvard University Press, 2015)

The 970 pages of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twentieth Century* have been summarised in the three characters: $r > g$.

Expanded, this means, in recent years, the rate of return on the capital of the wealthy (r) has been greater than the rate of growth of the economy (g); the proportion of wealth owned by the richest becomes greater and inequality grows.

But Piketty had little to say about how this rate of return, and thus inequality, might be reduced. His main proposal is for a global wealth tax; but that is, in his own words, utopian. Tony Atkinson attempts to provide an answer to inequality. It is resolutely on the centre ground of politics; he is, after all, Sir Tony and a long time member of government, parliamentary and EU advisory bodies.

But Atkinson is well-placed to advise. He has spent his life studying the economics of inequality and income distribution, his earliest publication, *Poverty in Britain and the Reform of Social Security*, came out in 1969. In the past he has collaborated with Piketty, on whom he has been a major influence. His latest work has three sections: the nature of inequality; proposals to mitigate it; and an assessment of whether these policies are practicable. The focus is largely on the UK.

The section on the nature of inequality draws on Piketty. Atkinson argues that when inequality fell — from the 1930s to the 1970s — it was the result of a number of factors including trade unions being able to increase the working-class share of the social product and social-democratic policies at the level of the state redistributing some resources. The growth of inequality from the 1970s has been associated with systematic attacks on the unions and the welfare state.

This is a strongly-grounded analysis. Atkinson is highly critical of mainstream economic theory, particularly its more overtly neo-liberal variants, which largely ignore issues of inequality. Atkinson continues to assert, as he has for nearly fifty years, that economics should have a greater focus on inequality. He argues neo-liberal ideas about how the market should determine wage levels are to blame.

Atkinson remains in the mainstream, although his neo-Keynesian and redistributive views makes him a minority voice. There is no criticism of the market economy as such. Rather, two things are taken as axiomatic.

First, that it is human intervention through government economic policy and the norms of corporate governance that



Expropriate the outrageous wealth of the super-rich!

shape the economy. Just as neo-liberalism is at heart a political choice the benefits the owners of property so alternative choices that create greater social justice could be made. Second, Atkinson takes it for granted that policies which redistribute wealth and create greater equality are best. It is telling that the basis for this view is the work of the liberal philosopher John Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* was first published in 1971. There is a strong “back to the seventies” feel about many of Atkinson's proposals; but that was the last time mainstream policy sought to any degree to promote social justice, rather than the free market.

PROPOSALS

But the second part of the book, on proposals for decreasing inequality, is weak.

None fundamentally challenge the power of capital; they attempt to work against the unequal outcomes that private ownership of much of the productive forces of society creates. Atkinson is clear that inequality in contemporary Britain is underpinned by there being a group of people who either receive large incomes from the capital that they hold or from multi-million pound salary packages (and, as he notes, the two are increasingly the same people), but has no policy for correcting this other than through taxation.

Many of the policies are desirable, for example, raising the level of child benefit and increasing the minimum wage. But others are much more questionable. Thus, the proposal to re-

place inheritance tax on estates, with a life-time capital receipts allowance for anyone receiving an inheritance or equivalent gifts from the living is a recipe to cushion the richer sections of the middle class from inheritance tax. The proposal to establish a corporatist governmental body, the Social and Economic Council, in which various social “stakeholders”, including the trade unions, look at issues such as wage rates, is reminiscent of many tripartite institutions that were created in Britain between 1962 and 1979. Those were much more a way of co-opting the trade union bureaucracy than empowering the working class.

Such proposals seek to roll back the film of British politics to a point somewhere between the Labour government's move away from Keynesian policy at the time of the 1976 IMF crisis and the Conservatives 1981 budget. This was when the British state moved from moderate accommodation with the organised working class to an attack on it. In effect, Atkinson proposes that state policy should return to that point and to capitalism with a human face. It is a plea for a more European social market economy.

There are two problems with this.

The first is a poverty of ambition. By his own admission, Atkinson's proposals hope to do no more than turning Britain from one of the more unequal European states to one with middling inequality. When it comes to policies that might constitute real restraint on capital, such as higher corporation tax or a wealth tax on individuals, Atkinson is ambivalent, believing that they may be impracticable.

The second problem is one of agency. What force is going to wind the clock back to the 1970s and march capital down a different path? Atkinson's answer is that this will be a combination of the European Union and the force of his arguments.

The third part of Atkinson's book deals with the possibility that these policies are not practicable, that the state will be unable to raise revenues in a globalised economy while retaining growth. Although Atkinson's arguments are persuasive, the logic is dangerous: this approach makes policies to address inequality conditional on the ability of the capitalist system to be pliant enough to deliver them.

For example, Atkinson accepts the logic of the Laffer Curve. Arthur Laffer suggested that there is a rate of tax that maximises income, arguing that if tax were 100 per cent receipts would be nil (no one would have a motivation to work), and if tax were nil then tax receipts would also be nil. Therefore there had to be a single point between these two extremes that maximises tax revenues, particularly for the highest earners; he argued this point was a tax rate of around 40 per cent.

Atkinson thinks the rate might be somewhat higher, 65 per cent, but the truth is that no-one knows. Even in this most central policy, the degree of equality that might be obtained is limited by the marginal rate of taxation that is consistent with the super-rich getting out of bed to exploit the working class.

There is a saying, often attributed to the social democratic theoretician RH Tawney, that you may peel an onion a layer at a time, but you cannot skin a tiger claw by claw. Atkinson seeks to do the latter without a social force strong enough to counter the power of the capitalist tiger.

We need to work on developing our claws and teeth to fight that tiger and overcome it. Only then will the battle for equality be won.

IMAGINING THE FUTURE

WHAT IS IT?

A festival of socialist ideas and leftwing discussion, Ideas for Freedom, organised by Workers' Liberty, is an opportunity to explore, through talks, film showings, workshops and debates, ideas about how our world works, and how we can fight for a better one. This year, the theme of the event will be visions of a socialist, egalitarian, democratic future and strategies to fight for it.

PROGRAMME

THURSDAY NIGHT
WALKING TOUR

FRIDAY NIGHT
'CLASS STRUGGLE OR LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR' – SOCIALISTS DEBATE THE BISHOP OF MANCHESTER

SATURDAY
DAY OF DEBATE, FILM SHOWINGS AND TALKS

EVENING SOCIAL – FUNDRAISER FOR RAINBOW INTERNATIONAL

SUNDAY
DAY OF DEBATE, FILM SHOWINGS AND TALKS

SESSIONS INCLUDE:

TECHNOLOGY – THE END OF WORK?
Aaron Bastani, Nick Srnicek and Bruce Robinson

CLIMATE CHANGE: FUTURE OF ENERGY
Dave Elliott, author and engineer involved in the Lucas Plan

SECULARISM, FEMINISM & SOCIALISM
Marieme Helie Lucas, Algerian socialist and author

THOMAS MORE'S UTOPIA
Cath Fletcher, Workers' Liberty and expert advisor on the BBC's Wolf Hall

IF WORKERS RAN THE RAILWAYS
With transport workers from London and Toronto

BUY YOUR TICKETS

Tickets bought before 1 May
£30 waged, £15 low-waged/student, £6 unwaged

Tickets bought before 13 June
£33 waged, £17 low-waged/student, £6 unwaged

BIT.LY/IFF-TICKETS

@IDEAS4FREEDOM [BIT.LY/IMAGINING-THE-FUTURE](https://www.facebook.com/ideas4freedom) 0207 394 8923

Fight union busting

Dave Smith, founding member of the Blacklist Support Group and author of *Blacklisting*, spoke to *Solidarity*.

Blacklisting is primarily an industrial relations issue, and it needs to be fought in the workplace.

In the past, construction workers have walked off site just to get blacklisted workers onto the jobs in the first place. This isn't in the dim distant past; only last year, it happened on major Blue Book sites [sites covered by the terms of the "National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry", known as the "Blue Book"].

VICTORIES

When Frank Morris was dismissed due to blacklisting on Crossrail in 2012, Unite threw its weight behind the rank-and-file campaign, and, after a bitter year-long industrial dispute, got him reinstated.

But one victory has not changed the industry, and Crossrail remains a challenge to unions trying to build organisation, with activists being sacked only in the past few weeks.

There have been historic victories in the building industry over the past two-three years, involving thousands of workers.

Hopefully when Crossrail really starts mass recruitment in the next 12-18 months, many of the new younger activists who cut their teeth on BESNA [the 2011 campaign against an attempt by the major construction contractors to withdraw from collective agreements and impose worse terms and conditions] will manage to get a job and build genuine shop-floor organisation. We

did it in the 1990s on the Jubilee Line, we can do it again in 2015-16.

The High Court group litigation involves over 500 blacklisted workers in a class action-style case against over 40 of the biggest building firms in the country. Effectively the whole industry is on trial for blacklisting. With the prospect of directors of multinational companies and ex-undercover police officers giving evidence, it will be a full-on media circus.

The full trial is expected to start in summer 2016. The wheels of the justice system turn at a glacial pace.

The blacklisting campaign has achieved what it has so far because of the solidarity of our movement. Across the political spectrum, we have been supported in parliament, council chambers and at union conferences.

Big business, the police and security services have violated our human rights in an illegal conspiracy against trade unions. Blacklisting isn't about 3,000 building workers, it is about whether trade unions are free to operate in a supposedly democratic society.

It stands alongside Shrewsbury and the miners' strike as a stark reminder that, in the fight between labour and capital, the state is not neutral.



Dave Smith, Blacklist Support Group

Network Rail strike vote

Network Rail workers in the RMT union have voted by an 80% majority to strike in a dispute over pay and job security.

The strike ballot had a 60% turnout, with 92% voting for action short of strikes. The high turnout and substantial majority mean the ballot would pass the stringent tests the Tories

propose to introduce for industrial action ballots.

Workers have rejected a deal which includes a one-off, non-consolidated payment in year one, and increases pegged to RPI in years two, three, and four.

Under the terms of the offer, a "no compulsory redundancies" guarantee would expire after 2016.

Hundreds protest library cuts

By Gemma Short

On Saturday 9 May over 400 people marched from South Friern library in Barnet, to East Finchley library, then Finchley Church End before finishing at North Finchley library, to protest over proposed cuts to library services in the borough.

The march was joined on the final leg, from Finchley Church End library, to North Finchley library, by a double decker bus decorated with union banners, and a brass band.

Activists in Barnet have now completed four days of action, marching through all

the libraries in Barnet.

The protest comes after Unison members in Barnet council struck on 30 April and 1 May (as reported in *Solidarity* 363). Unison have planned more strikes for 21-22 May and 1-2 June if the council does not reverse its decision to outsource up to 80% of its services.

Workers at Bromley council continue their strikes, and will next strike on 19 May.

• Send messages of solidarity to: Barnet — john.burgess@barnetunison.org.uk
Bromley — onay.kasab@unitetheunion.org



London Met UCU vote to strike

By Charlotte Zalens

UCU members at London Met University have voted by 67% for strikes in response to management's

proposal to cut over 165 jobs.

71% voted in favour of action short of strikes. UCU members will meet today (Tuesday 12 May) to decide the next steps.



London Met Unison on May Day march

Staff and students today held a lobby of the London Met University board of governors meeting.

UCU regional official Barry Jones said: 'Our ballot result shows that many staff firmly believe making more cuts is the wrong direction for London Metropolitan University. This is an inner-city university with an out-

standing record of bringing people from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education.

"Far from further cut-backs, this university is in desperate need of investment to expand access to education."

• Sign the petition at: bit.ly/LDN-met

UCU members at Dundee university struck on 5 May in a dispute over job cuts.

Staff also earlier struck on 28 April. Dundee university plans to cut 120 jobs. Having already lost 55 people last year it is not seeking to make the re-

maining 65 redundancies.

Staff at Aberdeen university are also being balloted over 150 proposed job losses.

UCU members at Aberdeen university are being balloted currently, and the ballot closes on 8 June.

More college cuts

By Peggy Carter

UCU members at Leeds City and Bradford colleges are balloting for strikes over job cuts.

Bradford College is seeking to save £8 million, putting 140 jobs at risk. Leeds City college wants to cut wages and get rid of up to 146 staff, and bring in 166 lower-paid roles. Leeds City college UCU says this means the loss of one-in-four lecturing jobs at the college.

The cuts at Leeds City college come on top of 100 redundancies that were made in 2014. The college is now

planning on closing three sites in Morley, Meanwood and St Bartholomew's.

UCU regional official, Julie Kelley, said: 'Further education colleges are experiencing difficult times thanks to big cuts in government funding. However, the pace and scale of the job losses at Leeds City College and Bradford College is astonishing.'

"Colleges that are experiencing difficulties need to work with us to try and manage the situation. The last thing we can afford is knee-jerk job cuts that leave a lasting legacy on the local community."

Candy Udwin, suspended PCS rep at the National Gallery, today (Tuesday 12 May) had her disciplinary hearing.

PCS members and supporters gathered outside the gallery to protest during her hearing. As *Solidarity* went to press no news had been heard about the result of her hearing.

Workers at the gallery have now struck for 23 days in their dispute over privatisation of gallery visitor services. Their union, PCS, is planning a national demonstration against the sell-off on Saturday 30 May, in Trafalgar Square.

Almost 10,000 people



have signed the petition calling for Candy's reinstatement and strikers have made it very clear that they are also striking for Candy's reinstatement.

• Sign the petition — bit.ly/Reinstate-Candy



Solidarity

No 364

13 May 2015

30p/80p

Why Labour lost

An imaginary conversation with a Blairite after 7 May

Blairite: Labour has gone too far left and must move back to the centre ground.

Solidarity: Like the Lib Dems? The Lib Dems carefully positioned themselves as the golden mean, the happy medium, the equipoise. They got thrashed. Tories, Ukip, SNP, Greens — all those parties did well by coming out with something a bit left-field (or right-field). Where Labour had a fully-Blairite leader, in Scotland, it did especially badly.

B: So you think Labour just has to be more and more radical, and it will automatically win?

S: I didn't say that. I do say that Labour's half-and-half combination of vague generalities against "predators" and for "working people" with only small intricate adjustments in actual policy (cuts, NHS, tax, zero-hours, minimum wage, banks) made it seem, weirdly, both conservative and flaky. A clear and confident stand for improved social provision and worker rights, with higher taxes on the rich and more controls on the banks, would have won more votes.

B: Tony Blair knew how. He won three elections by presenting Labour as centre-ground.

S: People wearied and sceptical of changes introduced by one party can be swayed to another party which promises "normalcy" (US Republicans, 1920) or a "relaxed and comfortable" future (Australian Liberals, 1988) or "stable government... not inflamed by the passions of class warfare" (Tories, 1951). In 1997, with people fed up after 18 years of Tory restructuring, Blair could win support with a spiel about a "third way" between left and right. But only shallow, thin-rooted

support. The centre ground must usually belong to conservatives. And when people think the economy is in crisis — as now — they will distrust a party which fervently promises to be careful and to make only marginal changes.

B: You really think people believed the Tories' economic policy?

S: No. But in disasters and crises people turn more to religion. Failing an alternative, in a crisis people will vote for a party which seems confident and tough, even if they can't see how its promises make sense.

B: Labour appealed only to the poor against the rich, and disregarded the vast middle ground. Labour must offer more to the "aspirers".

S: You mean poor people don't aspire to success? And want education and health services, worker protections, union rights, welfare benefits to give them a better chance? And, indeed, "aspire" to be let into Britain in the first place if they are migrants "aspiring" to escape wars, terrorist regimes, and extreme poverty?

B: I mean the higher aspirers.

S: Like people who aspire to go to university? The Blair governments did a few things to help the poorest (minimum wage, tax credits, pension credit, new school buildings in poor areas). But they blocked the way for better-off sections of the working class by scrapping student grants, introducing tuition fees (1998), and raising tuition fees (2004). Those "aspirers" want a Labour Party committed to free education.

B: What about those who have already graduated from university?

S: They want worker rights which mean they can get good jobs, using their education, without first having to work for long periods unpaid as interns.



Miliband: help "working people" in alliance with Bloomberg?

B: What about those who already have fairly stable, well-paid jobs?

S: They want their unions (almost always strongest in the stabler, better-paid sections of the working class) to regain their rights and their strength. They want to be able to advance in their jobs without endless restructures and "performance management", to be able to rent or buy homes near their work at reasonable rents or prices and with security, and to get a good pension at a reasonable age. They also want those things for their children. If you want to offer them something, go for union rights, tenant rights, rent control, more social house-building...

B: Labour has to be "pro-business", because good jobs can only be created by prosperous businesses.

S: Pro-predator, you mean? Probably Peter Mandelson does mean that: he famously said he was "intensely relaxed" about people (himself included, I think) becoming "filthy rich".

B: No, even Tony Blair admits he was wrong to neglect inequality. But pro-business.

S: You might as well say that to stand up for slaves you must be pro-slavedriver. The slaves get fed only if the slavedriver gives them food. Industries would be more efficient if workers controlled them and the gains were not siphoned off into dividends,

profits, and vast pay-outs to top bosses.

B: Like it or not, people believe that excessive Labour social spending caused the economic crisis.

S: But it didn't. The profiteering excesses of the banks caused the crisis. Labour should indict the banks and call for public ownership and social control.

B: You're arguing old-style 1970s politics. Nationalising the banks, indeed!

S: But the New Labour government did nationalise banks — Northern Rock, RBS, Lloyds! So did George W Bush's right-wing administration in the USA. You're just saying that nationalisation should be with the same sort of people continuing to run the banks, on the same profit criteria, with the same lack of democratic control. Your case comes down to saying that democratic control is too "old-style".

B: I argue for Labour to reconnect with the people!

S: Tony Blair talked about that. In fact he dispersed almost all the 150,000 new members Labour got in 1993-7; largely disenfranchised the remaining members and Labour's bedrock, the unions; and thus blighted Labour's roots.

A sound new policy can come only from reopening labour-movement democracy.

BOB CARNEGIE SPEAKER TOUR

FIGHTING BOSSES' UNION BUSTING, ORGANISING FROM THE GROUND UP!

Bob Carnegie has been at the heart of every major workers' struggle in Brisbane, Australia, for more than three decades.

By trade, he is a seafarer. In 1985 his activities in solidarity with the South East Queensland Electricity Board workers, sacked en masse by the right-wing state government in a dispute over privatisation, got him arrested nine times and jailed for three weeks.

From 1984-92 he was co-chair of Queensland Unions Against Apartheid, and from 1995 to 2009 convenor of the Workers' Civil Rights campaign. From 1994 and through the 1998 dispute, when one of Australia's two major port employers, Patricks, sacked all its port workers in a bid to break the union, he was South Queensland full-time organiser for the Maritime Union of Australia, which covers seafarers and port workers.

In 1998 he resigned from his full-time union job because he could not support the deal to end the dispute, which saved the union but made it complicit in large-scale job losses and casualisation. He found work in construction, then from 2004 to 2008 worked as a full-time organiser for the Builders Labourers Federation.

In 2008 he resigned his full-time job to go back on the sites. In 2010 he was excluded from a job on a gas exploration rig off Western Australia (by the company putting him on a "no-fly" list for air transport to the rig) because of victories he had won on the rig over safety at work.

In August-October 2012 he was asked by workers on the Queensland Children's Hospital to help them in a strike in which all their union representatives had accepted court orders to stay away from the site. He helped lead that strike to victory; then the main contractor brought 54 separate criminal charges against him, and a civil case for damages.

The contractor dropped the charges and the civil case only after a long campaign, in which big building sites in Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne stopped work several times.

Bob, unable to work in his trade because of his back injuries, has recently worked for the National Union of Workers to help cleaners, catering staff, and other civilian workers in military bases in northern Queensland organise.

FIGHTING UNION BUSTING - LONDON PUBLIC MEETING THURSDAY 21 MAY, 7PM, ROOM D103, 25 GORDON STREET, WC1H 9AY

12th — Lambeth Left Unity public meeting — bit.ly/Bob-Lambeth

14th — 10am: Blacklist court case at the High Court, London. 7pm: RMT Central Line East branch meeting (open to RMT members and friends)

15th — Bristol, with Dave Smith of Blacklist Support Group — bit.ly/UWE-CESR

18th — Liverpool with Blacklist Support Group — bit.ly/Bob-Liverpool

20th — London Unite construction branch — open to Unite members

For full details of venues and times see — bit.ly/Bob-speaker-tour

