

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 268 12 December 2012 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

For a workers' government

Help Congolese workers!

page 3



Plan B in Greece

pages 6-7

Marx and Lenin on press freedom

page 10



Tories squeeze

poor to

boost

profits

See page 5

Corporation tax cut to 21%.

Benefits cut by £5 a week on average.

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

● Printed by Trinity Mirror

Get Solidarity every week!

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

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

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

Name

Address

I enclose £



Steps forward for left student campaign

By Luke Neal

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts held its fifth national conference at Birmingham Guild of Students on 8-9 December. About 120 student activists took part.

Many were independent left students, in addition to groups from Workers' Liberty, the Socialist Party, the SWP and Socialist Action. The latter two groups had again come with a sectarian agenda.

This time, however, their disruption failed. The conference was extremely democratic and constructive, with lots of time for motions, good-natured debate and positive discussion and planning in the workshops.

Workshop topics included further education and schools organisation, international students, what's happening in higher education, organising at work, the lessons of the Quebec struggle, abortion rights, student union democracy and campaigning on the NHS.

The conference elected a national committee of 14 people (nine independents, one from SA's front "Student Broad Left", four Workers' Liberty) and autonomous caucuses —

Women's, LGBTQ, Black Power, Disabled, International Students — elected reps and people to sit on the NC (all independents, except the Women's Campaign which elected a committee that will decide its NC rep).

Conference voted overwhelming (with only SWP and Socialist Action trying to block it), to develop the structures of the campaign by agreeing a formal constitution with individual membership and an affiliation system for anti-cuts groups and student unions, as well as a charter of political demands.

STEP

As the NCAFC has been held back by lack of structure, this is a step forward.

The NCAFC should now be stronger, more dynamic and responsive during periods of heightened struggle.

There was much debate about the federal model of organisation used by the radical student federation ASSÉ which led the recent student uprising in Québec, and how — in the absence of the long-established departmental associations which form the base of ASSÉ — something similar

might be accomplished here. The clause in NCAFC's new constitution facilitating emergency conferences of delegates from local activist groups reflected these lessons.

It was decided to call another conference within six months to discuss the setting up of something like a "Fighting Federation of Student Unions", i.e. an alternative SU federation organising independently of NUS. Whether NCAFC should operate within NUS was a contested point — we generally believe it should.

A sizeable number of independents, reacting to the record of the SWP, as well their own scepticism about the possibilities of working in NUS, voted against the SWP proposal to work towards a united left challenge at the 2013 NUS conference. Workers' Liberty's Rosie Huzzard spoke in favour of the proposal and it passed with support from many independents. But conference voted down attempts to say that left unity should include "Student Broad Left".

The conference passed a motion that argued that, instead of waiting next "big bang", during the relative lull in struggles NCAFC must develop organisation,

education and campaigns. Policies to extend the campaign's focus towards areas such as the NHS, student debt, housing and organising student workers were adopted, and a proposal to facilitate a speaker tour with a striking Wal-Mart or fast-food worker from the US.

A Royal Holloway Labour Club motion to demand trade unions fight for free education, including in the Labour Party, passed but was predictably controversial. After several critical socialist contributions, Socialist Action's motion presenting Venezuela as a model for free education was rejected. There was a lively debate on how to express our opposition to war and militarism. The conference also passed policy in solidarity with Tamil students in Jaffna suffering repression from the Sri Lankan state.

The NCAFC is the only forum where left student activists with different views can debate political issues while organising together for serious struggles.

Those who have been involved in the NCAFC's development should be proud of what has been achieved so far.

Barnet against Capita

By Vicki Morris

On Thursday 6 December around 50 Barnet residents took over a committee room in Hendon Town Hall for an hour, and ran an impromptu residents' forum.

Tory Cabinet members were forced to adjourn to another room to do their work.

We were protesting at their decision to grant a contract to outsourcing giant Capita to run a large chunk of services for 10-15 years, under the Council's "One Barnet" privatisation programme.

The contract, worth £320-750 million, will entail around 500 staff, currently delivering services such as revenues and benefits, transferring to Capita employment. Around 200 jobs are likely to move out of the borough to a call centre in another part of the country, where pay is lower.

The campaign against One Barnet has included

one-day strikes by the Union branch, but these have not been enough to deter the Tories and the outsourcing companies from pursuing their privatisation agenda. The residents' campaign has however built real momentum.

We are determined that Barnet's especially arrogant and stupid Tories will pay a political price for their misdeeds.

• Barnet Council will go to court on 18 December for a possession order against the Occupy campaigners who have re-opened Friern Barnet Library, closed by Barnet Council in April. The campaign to save the library will continue. More: barnetalliance.org

Fight Sheffield early years cuts

By Rosie Huzzard

On 4 December, Sheffield City Council announced a "redesign" to Sheffield's Early Years services (including both public and voluntary sector nurseries and children's centres).

This will mean cuts in front line provision serving 9000 people in Sheffield, reducing the 36 sites to 17 "areas", the removal of statutory funding to 16 voluntary sector services, the effective removal of funding for one and two year olds across Sheffield, and at least 150 redundancies.

These changes are based on a review of Early Years in Sheffield published around nine months ago, which has had no subsequent consultation with staff, parents or trade unions. It will be a £3.578 million cut to frontline services.

These funded services not only provide childcare for working and unemployed

parents, but also a range of intervention and prevention services to working class families, including health visitors, inclusion work, and in-home support.

The council has told the local press that there will be "no impact" on children or intervention work. But intervention money is being redirected to the city's Multi Agency team, which currently works with the most at-risk families. The services under threat deliver a distinctly different service which can prevent the need for "responsive" work.

Staff families and supporters are demonstrating at a public meeting with councillors on Wednesday 12 December. The campaign has also produced a briefing paper, and there is a petition at tinyurl.com/d7ctmwa.

If the petition reaches 5000 signatures, Sheffield City Council will be forced to hold a full meeting discuss these issues.

Workers key to real development in Congo

Jonny Keyworth reports on workers' struggles in war-ravaged Congo.

"History will one day have its say, but it will not be the history that Brussels, Paris, Washington, or the United Nations will teach... they will teach in the countries emancipated from colonialism and its puppets... a history of glory and dignity".

These are the words of the first Congolese Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, who led a nationalist movement against Belgian colonial rule. At the ceremony for the handing over of power Lumumba declared (whilst the Belgian King and his entourage sat nervously in the front row):

"We are proud of this struggle, of tears, of fire, and of blood, to the depths of our being, for it was a noble and just struggle, and indispensable to put an end to the humiliating slavery which was imposed upon us by force".

Lumumba was soon arrested and killed by firing squad, in a coup orchestrated by Belgian commanders who had stayed in the Katanga region after independence. He was replaced with his former chief of staff of the Army, Joseph Mobutu.

During the Cold War, Mobutu became a good friend of President Nixon and enjoyed substantial American aid, which he embezzled as the Congo became his own personal kleptocracy.

Mobutu's faux pan-Africanism had kept a divided Congo together, but at the end of the Cold War, he was no longer needed by the west; his patrimonial networks were no longer financed. The Democratic Republic of the Congo collapsed into conflict and instability, with the First and Second Congo wars, the genocide in Rwanda, and the more recent conflict in Kivu and Ituri, tearing Congolese society apart.

Analyses of Congolese society have been preoccupied with ethnicity and conflict management, rather than the structure of society and the class relations that perpetuate these divisions.

"Disaster pornography" has dominated images of Congo since the fall of Mobutu, and the horizons for progressive political change have been limited to precarious peace agreements between the government and rebels.

Whilst the international left rightly highlights the struggles of labour movements in North Africa,

workers are struggling in sub-Saharan Africa too. Yet international solidarity with Congolese workers will aid them not only in their struggles for rights, including the right to unionise, but also in their struggle for a place in the development and sustaining of peace as key political agents.

CONFLICT CONDITIONS Workers are still suffering from the effects of war and instability.

The conflict has destroyed productive activity in most rural and peri-urban areas, sparking a surge in the informal economy, now involving 80% of workers.

The entrenchment of informal work mitigates against the development of working-class consciousness. This phenomenon is prevalent across the African continent, yet when coupled with ongoing conflict and displacement as in the DRC, informal work is not only exploitative but lethal.

Foreign companies take advantage of this situation. For example the Chinese Cobra Tyre & Rubber Company are suspected of bribing the labour inspector who backed them in refusing to apply the minimum wage. The workplace representative for the main union

federation Confédération Démocratique du Travail (CDT, a main union federation) was later dismissed unlawfully. And the telecommunications operator Tigo, and Lebanese company Strippes have used the lack of laws to dismiss huge swathes of workers whilst the union's application for the new minimum wage is being processed.

SHAM UNIONS The private sector, mostly mining, is dominated by sham unions.

These unions have no active members and are created by employers to discourage real attempts at workplace organising. This is perpetuated by foreign companies such as the China Railway Engineering Corporation which has begun to build roads and railways. Labour inspectors are too frightened to take action against investors, after a history of witch-hunts and harassment.

In 2010, when railway workers went on strike in protest at 36 months of salary arrears, union leader Mulumba Kapepula was arrested and tortured by the National Intelligence Agency.

Minerals are the key commodity for the DRC. The recent global plummet of mineral prices has led to mass layoffs in the formal mining sector; these workers have fled to informal artisan mines where protection and safety measures are absent, and child labour is commonplace.

Artisan miners need secure jobs and safe conditions

In areas that have not been so adversely affected by conflict, mining companies regularly clash with artisan miners who dig illegally on mining concessions. The minerals from these mines are often termed "conflict minerals", particularly in the Eastern provinces, as the profits from their sale have financed the conflict in the Kivu and Ituri.

SOLIDARITY The disaster imagery that has plagued representations of the DRC in recent years is understandable; the country faces an uncertain future as unrest in the Kivu continues and the rebel M23 movement emerges.

Yet to neglect workers' struggles limits us to a liberal, "human-rights" response, seeing progressive political change as possible

only through limited peace deals and agreements.

International left solidarity based on working-class political economy extends our analysis of the DRC to the "conflict minerals" which drive and fuel the conflict, and the consequent explosion in informal work. We can begin to see the conflict as more than just apolitical jostling for power between opposed, self-interested groups.

For a sustainable peace in the DRC an end to the "conflict minerals" industry, and the respecting of trade union rights in the mines is needed. Workers can then begin to flex their strength and drive a worker-led economic development in the DRC.

The creation of secure jobs and the promotion of workers' rights will be at the heart of that development.

New Zealand Lend Lease workers back Bob Carnegie

The Northern section of the Amalgamated Workers' Union (New Zealand) has lent its support to victimised Australian trade unionist Bob Carnegie, and has written to David Saxelby (the boss of Abigroup, the construction company behind the legal case against Bob) to demand it drops its charges.

AWUNZ's support is particularly significant because it represents Lend Lease employees in New Zealand. Lend Lease is Abigroup's parent company. Secretary Ray Bianchi writes: "On behalf of the union that represents Lend Lease employees in Auckland, New Zealand, we call on you to drop your legal proceedings against community activist Bob Carnegie in relation to his role in the August-October 2012 dispute at the Queensland Children's Hospital construction site.

"The financial losses incurred by Abigroup during the dispute would have been better avoided by negotiating and agreeing to the workers' demand much earlier.

"Your proceedings against Bob Carnegie can only be seen as a spiteful attempt to intimidate every community activist who may in future wish to assist workers in obtaining justice."

• For more on the campaign, and to find out how you can get involved, visit bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com

Climate talks fail, alternative needed

By Paul Vernadsky

The irony should not be lost. The irony of holding the latest round of climate talks in the desert in Qatar, which has the highest per capita emissions of any state as well as an appalling record on workers' rights.

The UN 18th annual climate change conference in Qatar was an abject failure, which no amount of spinning can disguise.

The World Meteorological Organisation reported a new high of 390 parts of CO₂ per million in 2011 — the planet needs 350ppm to meet the 2°C increase target most scientists believe is necessary to avoid the worst consequences of climate change. Even a new

World Bank report warns that we are currently on track for a 4°C world, with extreme heat-waves and life-threatening sea level rises.

This month the Kyoto protocol, the only pitiful global agreement made to limit greenhouse gas emissions, will run out. Kyoto covered about 15% of global emissions, mainly from the European Union. No agreement to replace Kyoto was worked out at Copenhagen in 2009 or at subsequent UN conference. Nor was it resolved in Qatar. Instead the powers squabbled about carrying over "hot-air" credits.

The headline agreement concerned adaptation, for "loss and damage" for poorer states from a warmer world as a result of past

emissions. The agreement was hailed by some small states and NGOs, but it is difficult to see what price can be put on the submergence of whole ecosystems or the destruction of whole cities. The arrangement does not constitute legal liability and the funds are not compensation — they are most likely to come from miserable existing aid budgets.

There were few significant protests in Qatar during the conference. However on Saturday 1 December, 40 union delegates join a march through Doha under the banner: "No world cup in Qatar without labour rights", protesting at the 300 annual construction workers' deaths in the state.

Climate politics is currently in a very bad place,

with extreme energy such as shale gas fracking, tar sands oil extraction and more coal-fired generation threatening a 'second coming' for fossil-based power. The Tory-led government is backing a revived fossil fuel strategy. Its Energy Bill has excluded a "decarbonisation target" for 2030. The autumn statement included the setting up an Office for Unconventional (Shale) Gas — dubbed Ofshag — even though the drilling is highly damaging and the potential benefits unclear.

Climate activists need an alternative approach, opposed to all sections of capital, including the carbon marketeers and based on the interests and organisations of millions of workers.

Fight in British unions for solidarity, not boycotts

Eric Lee



In the course of just a few days, three news stories came across my desk that highlighted one of the problems we face in the British trade union movement.

As I write these words, the Israeli nurses' union is engaged in a major fight with the Netanyahu government. Netanyahu is the health minister (as well as prime minister) and his government stands accused of starving public hospitals, while coming up with millions to construct new illegal settlement housing. The nurses strike deserves the support of unions everywhere, in particular unions which organise nurses.

Israel's public sector unions solidified a major victory early this month. An agreement that ended February's general strike has now been translated into results on the ground. The general strike had been fought over the question of precarious employment and the Histadrut won a substantial victory. This week, contract workers in the public sector will get huge wage gains and back pay thanks to the solidarity of unionised workers who shut the country down and compelled the government to make concessions.

Both examples show an independent, and sometimes militant, Israeli trade union movement that deserves the solidarity of trade unionists in Britain. Indeed, the Israel public sector unions may even have a thing or two to teach their British counterparts about how to win on issues like contract labour.

But unfortunately Unison and the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), unions which should, in theory, be promoting solidarity with the Israeli nurses and indeed with all the Israeli public sector unions, have played a rather different role recently.

Unison and PCS were among the leading unions which actively pushed the recent congress of Public Services International (PSI) to adopt a new policy supporting boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) targetting Israel. PSI is also now on record supporting the slander that Israel is an "apartheid state".

UNUSUAL

It is unusual for a global union federation like PSI to take such a strong position in opposition to Israel, even if its BDS call was limited to "firms complicit with the occupation".

The pro-Hamas Palestine Solidarity Campaign hailed the decision as a breakthrough. I want to step back here and try to understand what is going on.

Israel is the only country in the region with a strong, independent trade union movement. It is not a perfect movement and there is much to criticise about it. But when Unison sent a delegation over to meet with Israelis and Palestinians, everyone they spoke to — including the Palestinians — encouraged the British union to keep up its relationship with the Histadrut.

No one, not even the far-left critics of the Histadrut, suggested to Unison that it disengage.

But when the report of the Unison delegation was put to

the national executive, it was rejected and Unison carried on with a policy supporting boycotts of the Jewish state and its trade union movement as well.

This makes absolutely no sense.

If you oppose the right-wing, neoliberal policies of the Netanyahu government, shouldn't you support the struggle of the Israeli nurses? Shouldn't you support the Histadrut's general strike which resulted in such an important victory?

Instead of engaging with the Israeli labour movement, unions like Unison and PCS are moving away from it.

There was a time not long ago when British unions played a more constructive role. They would bring over representatives of the Histadrut and the Palestinian unions to Britain where they could meet British trade unionists — and each other. British unions saw their role as bridge-builders, taking no sides in a tragic conflict between two nations.

One doesn't want to get all nostalgic about this — instead, I suggest we try to find ways restore some sanity and balance into the British labour movement's view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Above all this means educating activists and members, whose only source of information seems to be the pro-Hamas camp, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

Unfortunately, there is no effective alternative voice in the British labour movement today.

If members of Unison, PCS and other unions were to be made aware of the reality of the Israeli trade union movement, its struggles and its victories, I think it might be possible to have a more interesting and productive debate.

At the moment, the agenda in those unions is being dictated by supporters of Hamas, and that, comrades, is not a good thing.

Letters



Don't back Leveson

Since the publication on 29 November of the Leveson report on issues raised by the phone-hacking scandal, the big national newspapers have agreed a plan for a new self-regulatory body as Leveson recommended, but without Leveson's proposal for a legally-empowered body to vet the self-regulatory body.

Labour has shifted from backing Leveson's proposal for Ofcom as the vet to proposing a panel of judges.

The debate is narrowing. As Patrick Murphy pointed out (*Solidarity* 267), "the big question is avoided... ownership and diversity". Leveson's report talks about the need for pluralism in the press, but without sharp proposals, let alone anything resembling the socialist proposal that the major means of printing, broadcasting, and distribution be publicly owned with guaranteed access to those resources for every substantial body of opinion, and guaranteed rights of reply.

MUTTERS

On relations between top politicians and the press bosses, Leveson mutters about "cause for concern", actions which produced "a perception of bias" and of which he "doubts the wisdom", and "too close a relationship... not in the public interest", but again proposes little.

Patrick, however, seems to suggest some support for Leveson as far as it goes. That would be wrong, I think.

Leveson proposes no real change in the people who run the press and licensed phone-hacking, or the people (the police) whose job it was to investigate the phone-hacking. He offers some mild comment on the cops ("unduly defensive", "insufficiently thought through", etc.), but finds their decision not to take phone-hacking investigations further in 2006 "fully justified" and "indeed inevitable", "because of their incredible workload that was a consequence of terrorism". His new Board would not have helped in 2006.

Some things in Leveson are welcome, for example his suggestion (but it is only a suggestion) that the Board should suggest to media companies that they write into contracts that journalists will face no disciplinary action for refusing to act contrary to codes of conduct.

But there is no reason to expect the new Board, a souped-up version of the current Press Complaints Commission, which in turn was a souped-up version (from 1991) of the previous Press Council, to be radically better than the PCC. When the PCC considered phone-hacking in 2009 it censured not the *News of the World*, but the *Guardian* for blowing the whistle.

The Board's appointments panel will be made up of people outside the press, the House of Commons, and the Government? So is the PCC's Nominations Panel. Its majority should be independent of the Press? So is the majority (10 to 7) of the PCC. It will have no serving editors? But it can have deputies. It can impose fines? But will it? And is justice served by quango-type bodies being able to fine without legal process? Fines which, with a maximum of £1 million, would be very affordable for, say, the Murdoch empire, but could be crippling for a small dissident publications?

Leveson recommends that publications that are not part of the Board — as smaller radical publications like *Solidarity* wouldn't be — should face worse difficulties with libel law than we do now.

The law, he says, should be changed to "permit the court to deprive [the] publisher of its costs of litigation in... defamation... cases, even if it had been successful". We would have

to pay lawyers' fees even if the case against us was found worthless.

As it is, the British libel law enables rich media companies to abuse poor people with impunity. People without wealth cannot afford to bring libel cases. Rich people with a taste for it can go to law to suppress criticism of themselves. It is easy for them to win libel cases, and difficult and expensive for publishers to defend themselves in those cases.

In Leveson's scheme publications outside the Board would be regulated by a government body, Ofcom.

Leveson also throws in a recommendations that "names or identifying details of those arrested... should not be released to the press or the public". In the phone-hacking case, we wouldn't know that Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson had been arrested.

Patrick is right that the Leveson recommendations are far from broad "state control" of the press. But it would be wrong to back its bland recommendations, in the distant hope that they may restrain abuse by the press profiteers.

They also deflect from the central issues and contain much-less-distant threats to journalistic exposure of other abuses.

Colin Foster, London

Debating Stalinism in the 1940s

Mike Wood's very valuable account of the "Third Camp" Trotskyists of the Workers Party in the 1940s (*Solidarity* 267) misses three points, I think.

First, the narrowing of the differences between Max Shachtman's version of a "bureaucratic collectivist" analysis of Stalinist Russia and Joe Carter's was not all a matter of Shachtman discarding follies and accepting Carter's good sense without acknowledgement.

It was a virtue of Shachtman's analysis that it allowed for experience and events to correct it. In a way he corrected too much. Sixty-odd years later, Shachtman's idea that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a freakish ruling class, not "viable in the same sense as the historical capitalist class", looks more sensible than it did in the late 40s.

Shachtman got the timescale damagingly wrong. He seems to have thought of a "historical quirk" (as Irving Howe still called it, in a big article on perspectives of bureaucratic collectivism just after the WP's 1946 convention:

Labor Action 3/6/46) as lasting only a few years, rather than (as happened) a few generations.

He wasn't wrong to resist the idea implicit in Carter's scheme that "bureaucratic collectivism", though "an expression of world social reaction", was nevertheless as historically logical a system as capitalism.

Second, a disorienting assumption of the whole debate was that capitalism was in an epoch of collapse. The WP saw that capitalism was resilient enough for a "democratic interlude" after 1945, but only an interlude.

I don't know why, but Max Shachtman continued to assert that capitalism was "at the end of its rope", in "decay and disintegration", right into the 60s. Hal Draper too seems never to have explicitly corrected that view.

Third, a by-product of the WP debates with CLR James's version of "state capitalism" was the consolidation of the idea that "bureaucratic collectivism" and "state capitalism" were sharply defined opposite views on the USSR.

Before 1940, there were many differing "bureaucratic collectivist" accounts of Stalinist Russia, and many "state capitalist" ones, but no Chinese wall between them.

Martin Thomas, Islington

Tories squeeze poor to boost profits

Tory policy in government has been based on an age-old ruling-class mantra: take care of the rich, squeeze the poor. With a few concessions to the barely-alive social conscience of the Lib Dems, George Osborne's recent Spending Review was no exception.

He helped the rich by cutting corporation tax to 21% — a level lower than even big business claims is necessary to make the British economy "competitive". He squeezed the poor by fixing annual benefit increases at 1% for the next three years. At two percentage points lower than the Retail Price Index this is a big cut. For the jobless, disabled, and low paid it will mean, on average, £5 less a week. When you have very little £5 is an awful lot.

Despite the obvious evidence that capitalism has caused capitalism's troubles, the Tories continue to pin the blame on the poor.

It is not the system which relentlessly pursues profit that has led to global debt crises, the Tories say, but the colossus of a welfare state. And because New Labour let the "something for nothing" culture run away with itself.

WAYSIDE

George Osborne blames everyone except himself. Even as all of his original economic forecasts — on debt reduction, deficit reduction and growth — fall by the wayside.

The Tories are driven to return again, and again, and again to the troublesome, hateful poor. To the policy of cutting, freezing and capping benefits. They do this because they want to create a political climate where the rich can do as they please. They figure people in work will be so busy despising those out of work they will fail to notice top directors getting fat pay rises, big corporations paying no tax.

But you can't fool all of the people all of the time. Starbucks has been shamed into paying (some) taxes; some of the lowest paid, cleaners in London, have struck for a living wage.

This month thousands will have to visit a food bank to get their Christmas dinner. Why isn't Labour making a scandal out of the staggering increase in food aid? 250,000 adults and children will use a food bank this year.

Because Labour can't or won't abandon their timid approach to Tory social barbarianism.

Ed Balls condemns Osborne for punishing "hard working families". But he will never defend unemployed and disabled benefit claimants. Labour willingly swallows the centuries-old disgusting ruling-class tactic of dividing the poor in "deserving" and "undeserving". Because speaking up for all of the poor would be to direct the blame at capitalism and its political system.

Yet a programme to get capitalism to pay up is relatively simple. A government that stood up for all working-class people would, minimally, increase taxes on big corporations, ruthlessly pursue corporate tax-dodging, raise the taxes of the super-rich, and force bosses to pay a living wage.

It would also expropriate the wealth of banks and high finance. It would create a public bank run under democratic control.

That wealth could then be used to stop all cuts, fund jobs and public services.

We are a long way from that, but a first step would be to raise the debate in the labour movement around such demands.

All in it together? By 2015 Spending Review will cost the richest £8.05 a week (a drop in the ocean for them). The poorest lose £5.10 a week on average (a huge sum when you have very little).

Help us raise £15,000

We thought about replacing this week's fund appeal with an amusing picture of Karl Marx in a Santa hat. Surely the seasonal cheer that the merest glance at this image would inevitably induce in all our readers would be more likely to loosen your purse strings than another worthy exhortation.

Unfortunately there are so many amusing pictures of Karl Marx in a Santa hat out there the *Solidarity* office staff couldn't agree on which one to use. So you're getting neither amusing picture nor worthy exhortation. If anything this is the worst of both worlds.

Seriously though, folks — give us your money. We need it because our paper is important, and producing it is expensive. You obviously agree, otherwise you wouldn't have paid to read it. A small monthly standing order from you will help *Solidarity* to continue to provide labour movement news, working-class history, revolutionary theory, and a space for socialists to debate and discuss ideas. Publications like ours — with a clear and unapologetic political agenda, but also built around serious debate rather than cult-like repetitions of a facile "line" — are all too rare. Please support our fund appeal.

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

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

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

- Organising a fundraising event.

- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.

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



Total raised so far:
£6,666

We raised just £190 this week from a new standing order and an anonymous donation.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

Account name:

Account no:

Sort code:

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

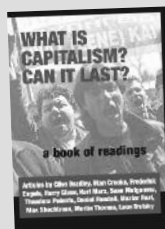
Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20 (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

Special offer on books from Workers' Liberty

Offer lasts until 16 February.

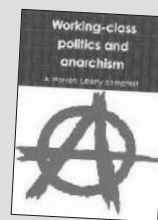


* **Three-pack: Antonio Gramsci: working-class revolutionary (ed: Martin Thomas); Working-class politics and anarchism (ed: Ira Berkovic); and What is capitalism? Can it last? (ed: Cathy Nugent). Three books for £10 (plus £2.20 postage within UK)**

* **Four-pack: Gramsci; Anarchism; Capitalism; and How Solidarity Can Change The World (ed: Sean Matgamna). Four books for £12 (plus £2.20 postage)**

* **Five-pack: Gramsci; Anarchism; Capitalism; Solidarity; and either Treason of the Intellectuals (by Sean Matgamna) or Fate of the Russian Revolution (ed: Sean Matgamna). Five books for £17 (plus £7.40 postage)**

* **Six-pack: All six books for £20 (plus £8.30 postage).**



More details and to buy online: www.workersliberty.org/bookoffer.

Or send cheques to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG.

For postage prices for destinations outside UK, email awl@workersliberty.org

Songs of Liberty & Rebellion



Nobody Knew She Was There

Ewan MacColl is best known as a working-class balladeer, and the architect of Britain's "folk song revival" of the 1950s and 60s.

His political and artistic legacy is complex and contradictory – he wrote and sung stirringly on many working-class struggles, but he was also a dyed-in-the-wool Stalinist and a cultural conservative with a narrow and dogmatic view of what represented "real" and "authentic" art.

This song, about his mother, is not one of his most famous but is exemplary of the moving human sensitivity of some of the best of his work. It is politically poignant, a poetic broadside against the treatment of working-class women, exploited at work and alienated and oppressed into invisibility by gender relations in the home so they become mere "faded servants". The line "at what point did she cease to be her?" expresses how that oppression alienates women even from a sense of self.

Cleaners, and other low-paid, mainly women workers, have often been an invisible caste, carrying out backbreaking work long before the "normal" working day begins, or after it has ended.

As those workers begin to move into battle against their employers, this song should stir us into solidarity with their struggles against the manifold oppression they face at work, in the home, and in society more widely.

The Ruby Kid

*She walks in the cold dark hour before the morning
The hour when wounded night begins to bleed
Stands at the back of the patient queue
The silent almost sweeping queue
Seeing no-one and not being seen*

*Working shoes are wrapped in working apron
Rolled in an oilcloth bag across her knees
The swaying tremor soaks the morning
Blue grey steely day is dawning
Draining the last few dregs of sleep away*

*Over the bridge and the writhing foul black water
Down through empty corridors of stone
Each of the blind glass walls she passes
Shows her twin in sudden flashes
Which is the mirror image, which is real?*

*Crouching hooded gods of word and number?
Accept her bent-backed homage as their due
The buckets steam like incense coils
Around the endless floor she toils
Cleaning the same white sweep each day anew*

*Glistening sheen of new-washed floors is fading
There where office clocks are marking time
Night's black tide has ebbed away
By cliffs of glass awash with day
She hurries from her labours still unseen*

*He who lies besides her does not see her
Nor does the child who once lay at her breast
The shroud of self-denial covers
Eager girl and tender lover
Only the faded servant now is left*

*How could it be that no-one saw her drowning?
How did we come to be so unaware?
At what point did she cease to be her?
When did we cease to look and see her?
How is it no-one knew she was there?*

The Greek left and Plan B

By Theodora Polenta

The Greek working class has made its choice: against the sectarian isolationism of the Communist Party (KKE) and in favour of Syriza's proposal for left cooperation and a government of the Left as the political means to escape the catastrophic quagmire in which we find ourselves.

Yet the leadership of Syriza is failing to face up to the issues, arguing that "there is no risk of Greece being thrown out the euro, because that would have huge negative consequences, financial and political, for the eurozone".

The Syriza leadership is wrong when it claims that the reason why the ECB/ EU/ IMF Troika has imposed the third Memorandum on Greece is because "the three party coalition government [Pasok-ND-Democratic Left] was not tough enough in negotiations".

Demetris Christofias, the AKEL [Communist Party] president of Cyprus was the model cited by Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras for being tough with the Troika. But now Cyprus has a Memorandum too. Imposition of or resistance to cuts does not depend on governments' negotiating skills.

Even if it costs a lot to Merkel and the other EU leaders to throw Greece out of the euro, and it does, it costs them much more, politically and ideologically, to tolerate little Greece overturning their policies. If a government of the Left of Greece can overturn their strategic plans without being punished, that will give a "bad example" to the rest of the South and the labour movements across Europe.

ILLUSION

It is an illusion to believe that a government of the Left will be able to implement pro-working-class, anti-Memorandum policies smoothly and the EU leaders will continue to fund Greece, respecting the "democratic will" of the Greek people!

The threats and witch-hunting against Syriza in the May and June elections were a prelude for the confrontations to come.

It is true that there is no standard procedure for the expulsion of a country from the eurozone, but eviction from the euro is simple: the EU cuts funding, and the ECB excludes Greek banks from the euro payments system.

A significant section of the revolutionary left selects an instinctive solution, "Out of the EU and the euro", as its plan B.

In an interview given to *Prin*, the newspaper of NAR, one of the main components of Antarsya, former Syriza leader Alekos Alavanos, now of MAAS (Front of Solidarity and Rupture) says:

"The focal points are the cessation of payments, cancellation of debt, exit from the euro and regaining our national monetary policy, nationalisation of banks, public planning in order to kick off the reorganisation of production, redistribution of wealth through measures that go beyond taxation and should confront property and wealth, workers' control".

"We call the program Plan B. Other forces of the left, such as Antarsya, refer to it as an anti-capitalist program. In my opinion it is a revolutionary program in the sense that it challenges the central choice of the ruling class of Greece from the 60s until today..."

"The euro is the central point... Syriza with its pro-euro positions defines itself on the other side. Syriza's presumption that "exit from the euro equals disaster" provides an ideological firewall for systemic eurozone domination within Greece.

"In Europe all the big powers, the parties, the banks, the big corporations have a plan B to deal with the prospect of Greece's exit from the eurozone. Only Greece has not in hand a plan B. Both the government and the parties in opposition have neglected the necessity to work on a plan B. If however,

Greece is taken by surprise when forced to exit the eurozone, with people panicking, this is going to be a main disaster.

"If the exit from the Euro takes place in an orderly way with the people's support, led by a government of the Left, it can be the start of a dynamic response to poverty, unemployment and destruction of social cohesion".

Thus Alavanos suggests that a government of the Left should initiate in an organised way something that market forces, the EU, or the ECB may impose on Greece. No other preconditions apart from the act of exiting the eurozone are stated in order to achieve full employment, regain our income, and (says Alavanos) get "a new equitable European economic and monetary cooperation".

Alavanos aims for "Greece focusing on its exporting power and potential" and revitalisation of the "internal market". But that road that has been extensively tried in the past decades, sometimes by populist social-democratic types of government, and sometimes by extreme anti-working-class dictatorships.

DRACHMA

In truth, return to the drachma by itself is not going to solve any of the contradictions of the capitalist system, and is not going to solve any of the problems of the economic crisis,

If transition to a national currency could solve the problems, why do countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, with their national currencies, remain in conditions of dependency, poverty, and hunger?

Posing the slogan "out of the EU and the euro now" carries an extremely high risk of creating national illusions, disguising the centrality of class struggle.

Greece's loss of national sovereignty is the result and not the cause of the crisis. The explosive social problems of Greece are directly linked with the crisis of a capitalist system which operates on a global scale.

This crisis is not a Greek crisis. The "debt crisis" encompasses all the weakest economies of the eurozone. The crisis started in 2007 from the housing market in USA, and mutated in 2008 to a crisis of the international banking system. When the European governments intervene to rescue their collapsing banks, the turmoil was again transformed into the public "debt crisis".

Capitalist governments around the world have tried to deal with the crisis in an "internationalist" and coordinated way. In 2007-8, in order to contain the financial crisis, the big central banks (Fed, European Central Bank) handed over 13 trillion of dollars to the commercial banks of their countries. Between 2008 and 2012 the Greek banks received 150 billion euros to support their liquidity from the EFSF and the European Central Bank.

What consequences of the global capitalist crisis will Greece be protected from outside the eurozone? Supporters of Plan B answer this question by saying that the recovery of sovereignty in the monetary and fiscal policy will solve problems. However, the dramatic devaluation of the new national currency that would follow Greek exit from the euro would lead to a big rise in costs of imported tools (from Western Europe) and raw materials (the Middle East), and cause unprecedented poverty to the vast majority of the population. Greek exports would be cheaper, but large benefits from that fact are not at all certain, given that the forecasts for growth in global markets are bleak. A boom for the tourist industry is unlikely in the event of turmoil caused by the currency change in Greece.

Since 2010 many "emerging economies" have hit crises, including the country cited by the Greek radical left as the prototype for the benefits of "going it alone", Argentina. An "independent" Greece with its productive base already dramatically shrunk will be in a worse position than other "in-

Members of DEA (Internationalist Workers Left, a tendency inside the Syriza coalition), march. The left could form the next government, but the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn — whose MPs, above right, give fascist salutes in parliament — is a growing threat.

dependent” capitalist economies.

In Serbia, the debt is only 50% of GDP, and there is no euro. Yet the government says it is “forced” to proceed with cuts. The Finance Minister repeats the new “There Is No Alternative” message: “You will live worse but will not die.” The issue goes beyond currencies and even beyond Memoranda.

Look at Germany itself, the “best” country of the EU. Millions of workers in full-time employment cannot make ends means and are forced to have a second job. Approximately 1.3 million full-time workers are forced to seek state benefits. More and more Germans are working for just 400 euros a month (“mini-jobs”). A worker paid 2,500 euros gross per month will receive in 2030 a pension of just 688 euros, a sum which cannot cover even housing expenses. The retirement age has already risen to 67.

The only way out is to stop functioning in the framework of capitalism, and not just to quit the eurozone.

FORGET

The proponents of Plan B “forget” the international environment, for example—the wave of workers’ struggles in the European South. What should the workers in Greece propose to the workers of Spain? “Equal partnership” between capitalist states in Greece and Spain?

The priority of the Greek Left should be in inverse order: Independent of whether a government of the left would be forced to use and manage a national currency or will remain within the eurozone, the Greek Left should prioritise international solidarity, cooperation, joint action with the Left and the working class in other European countries.

Supporters of Plan B talk about nationalising banks, increasing public expenditure on salaries, pensions and investments etc. and productive reconstruction. But they do not clarify whether the nationalisation of banks would be done with or without compensation to their bosses, or whether the policy of nationalisation (with or without compensation) will be extended to other strategic sectors of the economy, nor how they will find the revenues which will provide increased public spending.

The only way out is to nationalise the banks without compensation, under workers’ control and management, and to ban the outflow of capital from the country — to put a workers’ state in control of the whole credit system. Economic reconstruction will only benefit the people if it overthrows capitalist social relationships of production.

The Syriza leadership’s duty is to tell the truth to the Greek people, and not to conceal the hard times and confrontations

to come — to prepare the working-class movement politically, ideologically and organisationally (by encouraging the flourishing of workers’ committees and neighbourhood committees and other forms of workers’ self-management and control). Otherwise, an unprepared and disarmed working class movement will turn against the government of the Left blaming it for all the difficulties; and a regress led by the darkest forces of fascism and chauvinism and capitalism will be inevitable.

It is highly possible that confrontation with both national and international capitalism and its institutions will lead a government of the Left, based on workers’ control and workers’ power, to exiting the euro. That is very different from intellectual a priori plans to restructure the national economy starting from the idea of return to a national currency. Historically, the working class movement has never encountered a “currency road” to socialism.

Faced with a left government in Greece, the Troika would stop lending, the European Central Bank will cease to give credit to the Greek banks, and probably the ECB would cut off the Greek banks from the euro payments system, thus preventing the Greek central bank from creating new euros valid outside Greece.

ALTERNATIVE

The left government should be prepared to issue an alternative currency, which could run alongside the euro for a transitional period.

This currency could be national (drachma, say, or “geuros”, euros which would be valid within Greece but not outside, as would also be the euros in Greek bank deposits if the ECB cuts Greece out of the payments system). If the conflict expanded into a series of countries, for example across southern Europe, there could be a common currency for those countries.

The government would have to nationalise all strategic sectors of the economy under workers’ management and control, in order to create “national syndicates” per economic sector and for the economy to be designed and planned to cover the needs of society. A government of the Left would create jobs in areas of immediate need, such as infrastructure, education and health, reducing or cancelling the debts of poor households and businesses and then turning public investment into agriculture, renewable energy, tourism, and industrial production.

On that road, the Greek working-class movement and the government of the Left should coordinate and instigate com-

mon struggles with the workers in the rest of Europe, also hit by the crisis — especially workers in the South, where there have been militant strikes and social movements.

The Greek working-class movement and the government of the left will be in an infinitely better position to confront blackmail, if we can coordinate our struggle with the Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Irish, Cypriot workers.

It is imperative for the revolutionary left in and out of Syriza to raise on every occasion the question of socialism. Without a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system, the austerity measures will never end, in or out of the euro.

NO SACRIFICE

A “no sacrifice for the Euro” slogan can unify the working-class movements against the blackmailing and bullying of the EU leaderships.

The only truly practical strategic response to the crisis and deadlock of the capitalist European Union is the red Europe of the workers.

We need a workers’ government, based on workers’ democracy, workers’ and social control, and workers’ militias. The main axis of struggle should be the following:

- Fight for the development and escalation of industrial and social struggle against the attacks of the government and Troika, with rolling strikes, occupations, stoppages, demonstrations, reinvigoration of the neighbourhood movements

- Fight for the overthrow of the three party coalition government and all the capitalist parties

- In every neighbourhood the trade unions and the neighbourhood committees should form popular defence squads and solidarity squads to defeat fascist violence and solve social problems through solidarity and cooperation

- Fight for a united front and cooperation of the left in the industrial and in the political sphere

- Fight for a government of the left and a workers’ government

- Fight to alert and prepare the working class for the prospect and the consequences of a eurozone or EU exit

- Fight for a program of transitional demands based upon workers’ self-management and control and the nationalisation of the banks and the main pillars of the economy without compensation to the capitalists and under workers’ control

- **Fight alongside the European working class, and particularly the working class of southern Europe, for the overthrow of the capitalism and the establishment of the United Socialist States of Europe.**

One nation celebrates?

Dave Osler



The late Ralph Miliband made his name as a Marxist theoretician through detailed elaboration of the proposition that the Labour Party can do absolutely nothing for the working class.

His two boys, or so the lefty joke has it, have very loyally done their best to prove the old man right.

Now it looks as if Ed is trying to vindicate his father's analysis of Britain's royal family as well. On p.189 of his 1973 book, *The State in Capitalist Society*, Ralph displayed a sophisticated understanding of how the bourgeoisie utilises the House of Windsor for its own ideological ends:

"The unifying and socially emollient role of the British monarchy, for instance, has long been recognised and understood... The monarchy is not simply another element of the constitutional system; much more important at the present time is what Bagehot called its 'dignified' function which, properly understood, means the element of reverence which it helps to create towards the state and the traditional order of things, and the sense of national unity, beyond the 'mere' conflicts of class, which it is intended to foster."

National unity beyond the mere conflicts of class? Right on cue comes @Ed_Miliband on Twitter: "Fantastic news for Kate, William and the country. A royal baby is something the whole nation will celebrate."

Filial piety just doesn't get any better than that.

Above left: parasite. Above right: parasite. Not pictured: embryonic parasite.

SWP and Egypt

The Left



The attack on the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists member Taha Magdy poses in a most brutal fashion the failure of the strategic orientation over many years of the SWP, which has influenced the Revolutionary Socialists.

In *The Prophet and the Proletariat* (1994) the late SWP leader Chris Harman argued: "The left has made two mistakes in relation to the Islamists in the past. The first has been to write them off as fascists, with whom we have nothing in common. The second has been to see them as 'progressives' who must not be criticised..."

Harman concluded that revolutionary socialists should sometimes work with Islamists "against imperialism and the state". Their watchword would be: "with the Islamists sometimes, with the state never".

The AWL argued that this approach was bankrupt from the start. Over the years the SWP has drifted into approaching the Muslim Brotherhood as analogous to social democratic parties with whom revolutionaries should make a "united front" — as "progressives", although to be criticised. The Brotherhood, said *Socialist Worker* (23 June 2012) as it recommended voting for it, "represents the right wing of the revolution. It is not the counter-revolution".

When the Brotherhood took power, the SWP rejoiced that the ensuing "contradictions" would speed revolution. "[Egypt's] new, democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood government is already caught in the contradictions of power... This was brilliantly exposed by Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists when they called on the new government to stand by its pre-election policies" (*SW*, 24/11/12)

Yet, as SWP founder Tony Cliff had written in 1946, the Brotherhood are clerical fascists.

By late November, the RS recognised: "all the masks fell from Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood organisation... They and the remnants of the old regime are two sides of the same coin, which is tyranny and enmity towards the people". Morsi was trying to become "a new pharaoh".

The RS noted that "the efforts of Morsi and his group to win a large majority... through the votes of the Salafists have

led to a polarisation along a secular/religious axis". The Brotherhood have set up an "Islamist Coalition" with the Salafists to rally support against the popular rebellion.

There can be no alliance with the Islamists, no softness on them. They are the other "side of the same coin" as the old regime.

Yet the SWP persists with its confusion. Anne Alexander (5 December) states: "The crucial question is, which side is continuing the revolution?" Mursi and the Brotherhood were the "right wing of the revolution", she suggests, and are backsliding. Presumably if Mursi tacks "left" again, the SWP will once again support him politically.

But "the revolution" is not a disembodied ruse of reason. The working class is the revolutionary agent and has to take a stance on the other actors, particularly its enemies. A clean break with the SWP's popular frontism is necessary. Independent working class politics should be the watchword in Egypt, as it is elsewhere across the globe.

Pablo Velasco

Croydon: what error?

In *Socialist Worker* of 1 December, the SWP explained: "Respect's Lee Jasper has tapped into anger around police racism and other issues in the Croydon by-election.

"But *Socialist Worker* cannot campaign for him, following Respect leader George Galloway's disgraceful and well-publicised comments on rape".

SW called instead a vote for Labour. When the article was put on its website, however, that sentence was changed, with the comment: "This was an editorial error. *Socialist Worker* is not endorsing any of the candidates in the Croydon North by-election".

What was SW editor Judith Orr's "error"? For the 2010 general election, the SWP said: "The majority of voters will be in constituencies where there is no alternative. By calling for a vote for Labour in these areas, we are also standing alongside millions of workers casting a class vote" (*Socialist Review*, Feb 2010).

On the SWP's own account, there was "no alternative" in Croydon. Why not apply the 2010 line? Is it just typical SWP mealy-mouthedness and half-thinking? That they have seen through Respect, but still can't quite bring themselves to recognise that it is "no alternative"?

The SWP trashed the Socialist Alliance in order to set up Respect with George Galloway in 2004, and ran Respect in uncritical alliance with him until Galloway booted them out in 2007. Galloway was no better than now.

His visible collaboration with Saddam Hussein's regime for a decade was at least as "disgraceful" as his foul comment on rape in the Assange case.

Gerry Bates

A forgotten newspaper of critical Trotskyism

OUT NEXT WEEK!
FIRST REGULAR
ISSUE OF
LABOR ACTION!
PREVIEW: 20 WEEKS

LABOR ACTION

SPECIAL M.
EDITION
ONE CI

ORGAN OF THE WORKERS PARTY, SECTION OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL — 114 WEST 146 STREET, NEW YORK

MAY DAY, 1940 — —

**AGAINST BOTH WAR CAMPS — —
FOR THE CAMP OF WORLD LABOR!**

By Ira Berkovic

Socialists will have unprecedented access to a largely forgotten but incredibly valuable body of literature, following the Marxist Internet Archive's digitisation of the entire run of *Labor Action*.

Labor Action was the newspaper of the Workers Party (later the Independent Socialist League (ISL)), an American organisation which split from the Socialist Workers Party (no relation to the contemporary British group of the same

name) in 1940 over what attitude to take to the Stalinist USSR. It also developed a more open attitude to questions of party organisation and internal democracy. In AWL's view, the Workers Party/ISL represented the authentic continuation of the libertarian, revolutionary-democratic core of the Marxist project, almost entirely obliterated by a Stalinist counter-revolution whose effects twisted most of the Trotskyist movement to some degree into its own image.

Between 1940 and the late 1950s, the WP/ISL built up an enormous wealth of independent, anti-Stalinist, revolutionary socialist analysis on a whole range of questions, much of it contained in the pages of *Labor Action*, that has until now been hardly accessible.

The debates in the pages of *Labor Action* about the foundation of the state of Israel represent an immeasurably more sophisticated analysis of the situation than the common-sense of today's left, based on vicarious Arab nationalism and an "anti-Zionism" so emptied of working-class social-

ist content as to tend towards anti-Semitism. The accounts of the Workers Party's industrial organising during World War Two, contributions from neglected heroes of the tradition like Stan Weir, and much else, make this archive invaluable to anyone who wants to renew a libertarian, anti-Stalinist revolutionary tradition, organically linked to the Marxism of Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg.

Hal Draper

Marty Goodman of the Riazanov project and David Walters of the MIA have done the socialist movement another huge service.

- Read the archive at tinyurl.com/laboractionarchive
- More: tinyurl.com/thirdcampssymposium

Gramsci and the party

Murray Kane reviews *Antonio Gramsci: Working-Class Revolutionary*, published 2012 by Workers' Liberty.

Although only 70 pages long, Martin Thomas' *Antonio Gramsci: Working-Class Revolutionary* is remarkable in containing more insights than many a full length book on Gramsci.

In five short essays, Martin Thomas expertly summarises a mass of historical material relating to Gramsci's political life, including evidence for the relationship between Gramsci and Trotsky and about Gramsci's thoughts on Stalinism. He offers a succinct critique of the various interpretations and misinterpretations of Gramsci's work by subsequent left-wing political formations (the Italian CP from the 50s, the New Left in the 60's, the "Eurocommunists" in the 70's, and later various "post-Marxists"), particularly in relation to the key concepts of "hegemony", "integral state", "East/West divide", "war of position", "passive revolution", and perhaps most fundamentally, in connection with the nature of the revolutionary party.

Intriguingly, the booklet is complicated by the inclusion of an extended interview with Peter Thomas in relation to his book *The Gramscian Moment*, and two of Martin Thomas's essays — "The Revolutionary Socialist as Democratic Philosopher" and "Anderson's Antinomies" — constitute direct responses to *The Gramscian Moment*.

I say "complicated", because whereas Martin Thomas is clear, direct, and keen to raise sharp questions about what Gramsci's concepts mean and how they might be applied in the present by activists, Peter Thomas devotes his concentration to "problematizing" Gramsci's thought and finding ways to sidestep conclusions. I am surely not the only one who will find that Peter Thomas renders Gramsci's thought so dense and nebulous that the key concepts lose coherence.

The benefit of this however is that in his repeated attempts to avoid giving concrete answers, Peter Thomas provides an excellent foil for Martin Thomas's questions, which become more penetrating as the interview (which took place over three years) proceeds.

INTRODUCE

For those who are already familiar with Gramsci's work, this interview will provide much food for thought; but the three stand-alone essays by Martin Thomas which introduce and conclude the collection — "Gramsci's Life"; "Gramsci and 'post-Marxism'"; "Gramsci and Trotsky" — constitute a very useful resource in their own right.

The first commences with fascinating comparative details about the economies of Italy and Russia in the period before the First World War as context for a presentation of Gramsci's early political career as a journalist for the Socialist Party press, as editor of *Ordine Nuovo*, and as a central figure in the Turin factory council movement. Judiciously selected facts and quotations are used to illuminate Gramsci's decisions when faced with the competing tendencies of conservatism and ultra-leftism inside the Italian Socialist Party, as well as his role in the emergence of the Italian Communist Party, and his work between incarceration and death (1926–1937) which resulted in the immense body of writings that have survived as the *Prison Notebooks*. The essay concludes with a series of quotations illustrating Gramsci's conviction that a revolutionary party is absolutely necessary in the struggle for socialism.

The second of the independent essays — "Gramsci and Trotsky" — considers Gramsci's meetings with Trotsky in Moscow and the factors bearing upon his surprising misunderstanding of Trotsky as an ultra-leftist, as well as their respective appraisals of the rise of Stalinism. What emerges is a field of fundamental agreement between the two on the kind of party and the kind of strategy that those committed to revolution from below would have to hold on to in order to negotiate the immense difficulties caused by the defeats of the late 20s and 30s.

For those who are already largely familiar with Gramsci and Trotsky's perspectives, and don't need to be convinced of

Orchestra or iceberg? Which metaphors best help us understand Gramsci's perspectives on the revolutionary party and its role in class struggle?

their compatibility with each other and with the tradition that organisations such as Workers' Liberty keep alive today, the insights offered are more subtle. It is worth noting, for example, that despite the fact that Gramsci and Trotsky took for granted that a serious socialist would operate within a revolutionary party, they shared a realistic and generous attitude towards "sympathisers" and "fellow travellers", and in a word, saw it as important to encourage and accept different types of commitment from people who were drawn towards the socialist banner.

Martin Thomas's third independent essay, "Gramsci and Post-Marxism", presents a concise critique of left-wing academic thought over the last 25 years, and charts the rise and dissipation of the energy of this tendency by situating it inside an account of the economic and political developments brought about by the intensification of globalisation during this period.

The essay focuses on the work of Laclau and Mouffe, and ties their explicit rejection of both Marx and Lenin to their one-sided and tendentious appropriation of Gramsci's use of the concept of "hegemony", the more accurate and useful interpretation of which is given a full treatment in the sections in which Martin Thomas and Peter Thomas are in dialogue.

EMPHASISE

Amid all this material, there are two things that Martin Thomas seeks to emphasise and demonstrate — that Gramsci himself was a revolutionary socialist who shared the fundamental perspectives of Marx and Lenin on the nature of capitalist societies, and that mass working-class activity and organization is central to the struggle to overcome and transform these societies into socialist ones.

This has of course been argued before, but for those who have not read a biography (e.g. Fiori's) in conjunction with Gramsci's writings, then these essays provide an admirable introduction. The booklet works at a number of levels, then, but the point of real interest in the essays is what they have to say about the revolutionary party and the kind of organisational perspectives which the most active socialists in the present moment should seek to develop, and what they might learn from a study of Gramsci's work. On almost every page there is reference to this in one way or another.

Martin Thomas presents the revolutionary party as central to the way one thinks about socialism, but also takes pains to bring out the historical dynamics underlying the very flexible perspectives that Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci developed about the party when the struggle was at its height in the period from the end of World War One to the rise of fascism in the 20s and 30s.

While remaining clear about the general principles of the

centrality of the revolutionary party and absolute necessity of mass working-class involvement in creating, developing and organising this party, Martin Thomas is also very clear that with the passing of time and the transformation of the composition, terrain and consciousness of the working class by the multiple processes of globalisation, that there are questions as to what this actually means in the here and now.

It would seem that Peter Thomas is interested in the same question, but as already remarked, despite continual attempts to draw him into debate in the course of the interview, he is tentative and inclined to sidestep practical suggestions about "what is to be done". He chooses his words carefully and tends to suggest that much preparatory work needs to be done before the issue really comes onto the agenda again. He emphasises the need to "problematise" the form that the party, or "Modern Prince", or "hegemonic apparatus" might take.

DIFFERENCES

The section of the interview entitled "The Decisive Element" is characteristic and brings these differences in viewpoint to light.

Martin Thomas says: "Yes, the revolutionary political party is not an already-finished thing, with a 'finished programme' and so on, which then just radiates out and 'colonises' other groups..."

"But surely the party is central. It is the organised body of activists who are systematically and collectively politically active in a continuous way, not just at high points; who, with a continuously-developed and sustained theoretical basis, most resist the 'conceptions of the world mechanically imposed by the external environment'..."

To which Peter Thomas responds: "Again, the question is: what type of party? And further: how is this party formed? Gramsci was well aware that, in the broader sense, there is nobody without a party, or nobody who is not in a certain way a 'partisan', even if only in a practical state, of certain choices, values and interests they share with others in similar social positions. However... it is not a case, it seems to me, of stating that, regardless of complicating and intervening factors, the party remains 'central', in either the first or the last instance... Rather than conceiving of the party as a 'centre', it might be better in this Gramscian perspective to think of such explicitly institutional-political coordinating and organising functions as the tip of the iceberg of the Modern Prince, the visible 10% supported by the invisible 90% below the waterline."

For Peter Thomas, Gramsci is interested in the revolution-

Continued on page 10

Marx and Lenin on press freedom

Is the revolutionary party like the tip of an iceberg?

Continued from page 9

ary party as a “dynamic social relation of democratic pedagogy”, yet rather than giving practical examples of the kind of institutions or situations that might give rise to this social relation (the closest we get to this is a cursory list: “institutions inside the trade-union movement, ... even including sporting associations, community groupings and so forth”), Peter Thomas renders his account even less coherent by problematising the notion of the revolutionary party as a centre, and replacing this with the idea that it be seen as “the tip of the iceberg”.

Quite how this metaphor is intended to enhance our conception of the political party I cannot say, for the point about the revolutionary party constituting a “centre” is really a dynamic or dialectical question of how decision-making complexes form an identity by feeding back upon each other and coming together more or less organically to form and enact a coherent transformative strategy. On the other hand, the tip of an iceberg is joined mechanically and inflexibly to the bulk of the ice that forms it, and stands proud of the surface in the Arctic winds while the ice below invisibly experiences the relative warmth of the sea waters.

DYNAMISM

There is no room for dynamism of any sort with an iceberg other than the kind of melting that is associated with global warming, and that is not an inspiring connotation.

My own view, which has only been strengthened by reading the work of Martin Thomas and Peter Thomas on Gramsci, is that there is something of a paradox in Gramsci’s survival as a text or source of ideas across so many university disciplines, and that this stems partly from the creative misinterpretations analysed by Martin Thomas, but also, more directly, from the usefulness and flexibility of Gramsci’s conceptual formulations on the complexity of social groupings and the constitution of relationships with interpenetrating material and ideological layers.

For people on the left from the 60’s onwards, Gramsci perhaps offered a resource with a different quality to it than what could elsewhere be found among the giants of the Marxist tradition: a more compassionate voice, even if this seems hard to reconcile with Gramsci’s resoluteness and commitment. There is an implicit “patience” in Gramsci — for different levels of knowledge and development in the subaltern, and a correspondingly wider and less direct approach to questions of education and political involvement, although this is also enigmatic.

It may be the case that Gramsci’s imprisonment, disability and sickness, in conjunction with the particularities of his personality, tended to imbue his prison writings with a mythological “for eternity” (“für ewig”) dimension that evokes a compassionate response even, or especially, in periods of defeat and downturn. The writings of Trotsky and Lenin, and even Marx, are tools forged for the impact of the fight which come in to their own when the struggle becomes more overt.

If Peter Thomas’s metaphor of the iceberg is to stand, then perhaps Gramsci is what we should read when the iceberg is melting; Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky, when the sea is starting to freeze and the iceberg coming together beneath its revolutionary tip.

Marx analysed the problem of a free press thoroughly in two long essays which are to be found in the first volume of the collected edition of his works.

For Marx “the right to think and speak the truth” was an elementary human right and freedom of the press — as he said — merely “human freedom in practice”. Marx recognized that human freedom is made up of a complex of interdependent freedoms.

“Each form of freedom”, he said, “postulates the other in the same way as one limb of the body postulates another. Whenever one particular freedom is threatened, freedom itself is threatened. Freedom is always freedom, whether it is expressed in printers’ ink or in terms of land and possessions, in terms of conscience or in a political meeting”.

Without freedom of speech a nation is subject to an authoritarian regime — the slave not only of economic and social tyranny but of a tyranny of the spirit.

Marx regarded freedom of the press as an indispensable premise for the people’s collaboration in shaping its own fate, as an essential instrument for deciding its own destiny. With a passion such as is extremely rare in his works he described the free press as “the watchful eye of the people, the living expression of the people’s trust in itself, the vocal link which unites the individual with the State and the world, the incorporation of culture which, by a process of refinement, makes material struggles intellectual and gives ideal expression to their coarse, crude strength”.

Without freedom of the press, he wrote, he could not fulfill himself. Discussing the debate on freedom of the press in the Rhenish Landtag, he deplored the cool attitude of those liberal deputies for whom freedom of the press is “only an affair of the head in which the heart plays no part”.

He recalled Goethe’s saying that a painter succeeds only with those types of feminine beauty which he has at least loved in some living person.

“Freedom of the press, too, is a kind of beauty”, Marx stated, “which one must have loved to be able to defend. It is something which I love truly, whose existence I feel to be essential, to be necessary to me so that without it I cannot live at peace, or live a full life”.

And he closed his essay on the conditions of the press in Prussia with the words: “Those periods in which one can think as one wishes and say what one thinks enjoy great good fortune”.

The summary of Marx, above, was given in *Labor Action* of

7 December 1953, quoting a speech by the secretary, Julius Braunthal, at the third International Socialist Press Conference, with representatives from socialist parties in various countries..

Labor Action commented: “For socialists, the denial of freedom of speech is the blackest treason against the tradition of socialism; the enslavement of the free word is a fundamental mark of the counter-revolutionary nature of [Stalinist] Russia’s political system — a system which justifies itself by an appeal to Marxism.”

Braunthal continued: “And now let me quote what Marx thought of the press in authoritarian states — the kind of press which we know so well from Russia and the East Zone of Germany.

‘Hypocrisy, that vice of vices, is inseparable from it’, he wrote. ‘From this basic vice all its other sins derive. . . .

‘The government hears nothing but its own voice. It knows that it hears nothing but its own voice and yet persists in the illusion that it is hearing the voice of the people and demands that the people should submit to the same illusion’.

[Without a free press] people fall either into political superstition, or political scepticism, or else they take no further part in the life of the State and become a disorderly mass of individuals. Meanwhile — although it was only on the sixth day that God himself said of his creation: ‘And behold it was good’ — the press makes a daily boast of what the government has willed into existence; but since, of necessity, one day contradicts the next, the press lies continuously and must deny all knowledge of the lie and stifle its shame.”

LENIN

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin discussed another dimension of this question. He wrote:

“Freedom of the press” is another of the principal slogans of “pure democracy”. And here, too, the workers know — and socialists everywhere have admitted it millions of times — that this freedom is a deception while the best printing presses and the biggest stocks of paper are appropriated by the capitalists and while capitalist rule over the press remains, a rule that is manifested throughout the world all the more strikingly, sharply, and cynically, the more democracy and the republican system are developed, as in America for example.

“The first thing to do to win real equality and genuine democracy for the working people, for the workers and peasants, is to deprive capital of the possibility of hiring writers, buying up publishing houses, and hiring newspapers. And to do that the capitalists and exploiters have to be overthrown and their resistance suppressed.

“The capitalists have always used the term ‘freedom’ to mean freedom for the rich to get richer and for the workers to starve to death.

“In capitalist usage, freedom of the press means freedom of the rich to bribe the press, freedom to use their wealth to shape and fabricate so-called public opinion.

“In this respect, too, the defenders of ‘pure democracy’ prove to be defenders of an utterly foul and venal system that gives the rich control over the mass media. They prove to be deceivers of the people who, with the aid of plausible, fine-sounding, but thoroughly false phrases, divert them from the concrete historical task of liberating the press from capitalist enslavement.

“Genuine freedom and equality will be embodied in the system which the communists are building and in which there will be no opportunity for amassing wealth at the expense of others, no objective opportunities for putting the press under the direct or indirect power of money, and no impediments in the way of any working man (or groups of working men, in any numbers) for enjoying and practising equal rights in the use of public printing presses and public stocks of paper.”

Daring strategy needed in civil service fight

By a civil servant

A statement from the civil service union PCS says: "The union's national executive [NEC] has agreed plans for a determined campaign for fair pay and working conditions, including a ballot for industrial action by more than a quarter of a million civil and public servants."

"The NEC agreed that if employers do not respond satisfactorily to our demands, we will move to a national ballot in the new year for a programme of industrial action."

One of "the demands" is on pay, yet we are still in a pay dispute from 2011! In the ballot that started in May 2011, the NEC said that demand was for "an end to the pay freeze and a fair pay rise for all". The new ballot in 2013 will also

cover "cuts to pensions and jobs". Our ballot in 2011 was for those issues as well (remember the pension dispute!)

The current leadership has an irritating habit of starting disputes it never concludes, allowing them to fade away or merge into ever-wider (and less focused) disputes, with only the union's radical left acting as a collective memory.

In George Orwell's 1984 the record of the past is continually being changed. In PCS it isn't altered so

much as ignored. If PCS leaders undertook an honest accounting of what has happened to our national disputes since 2011, and set against what they said they wanted to do, they would find themselves greatly wanting.

All the signs are that the union will ballot in late January or early February. Conveniently (again we see shades of previous national votes), such a ballot will coincide with the NEC elections. We think that despite the many demands that

will be put to the government, defending terms and conditions (which all departments are currently reviewing) and (possibly) opposing increases in pension contributions will be the real focus of the campaign.

REAL FIGHT

There will be, yet again, no real fight on pay or jobs.

We are not opposed to a fight over terms and conditions and pension reform; we just want the union to be honest in its dealings with members. And that honesty extends to strike tactics. No doubt we will have our ritualistic one-day national strike – possibly in co-ordination with other unions – but what next? PCS knows that such limited action will not win anything for the members,

but it will persist with that tactic.

To win, we need as much national, all-members action as can be had, coupled with selective, targeted strikes and other industrial actions. We need a strike levy so that we can sustain a dispute, and we need get members involved in the running of the campaign through democratic action committees with real power. In our conception of the union, members are not just passive recipients of occasional circulars, who can be called to strike when the union deems it necessary.

We will of course build for a yes vote in any ballot on action, but we will also argue for a radical transformation of the union's tactics and strategies we believe necessary to win.



Steve Charles (NUT rep from Stratford Academy, where teachers have struck for nine days against pay management's use of pay cuts to intimidate staff out of striking) speaks at the second conference of the Local Associations Network (LAN) in Leicester on 8 December.

LAN is a rank-and-file school workers' caucus based mainly in the National Union of Teachers. Delegates discussed the joint NUT/NASUWT campaign on workload, including how to escalate and spread disputes so individual reps and school groups are not left isolated.

The conference also held a Skype link-up with activists from the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators, the grassroots network which led the Chicago Teachers' Union to a significant victory over the summer. For a full report of the conference, see tinyurl.com/lanconf2012

Mid Yorks NHS victimisation threat

By Ollie Moore

NHS bosses in Yorkshire have moved to take reprisals against clerical workers involved in a recent strike against down-banding.

A worker was summoned to an "investigation" on 10 December to look into "an incident which came to light during the strike". Management refused to give more details in advance.

Talks between management and the unions, which resumed on Wednesday 29 November, have been suspended until management withdraws the threat of victimisation.

Clerical workers at hospitals in Wakefield, Dewsbury, and Pontefract struck for three days from 20 November against a plan that could see some workers face pay cuts of up to £2,700.

McCluskey to stand again in 2013

argued against the changes to the constitution, as we think that democratic procedures and accountability are important and should not be manipulated in order to allow incumbents to continue in office.

Jerry Hicks, a maverick left-winger who came second to McCluskey when he won his position in 2010, issued a statement saying that the manoeuvre was opportunistic.

STOP

Hicks said the move would stop others (i.e., himself) from standing, as only McCluskey – with his access to greater resources and the union machinery – would be able to prepare and run a proper campaign in the time available.

Some of the changes under McCluskey have been positive.

The changes in the union's internal regime, towards a more democratic culture and greater tolerance of criticism and debate, have allowed discussions on industrial and political issues.

Len McCluskey, the general secretary of Unite (Britain's biggest union), is planning constitutional changes to allow him to stand again in an early election.

By Jayne Edwards

The Executive Council of Unite has backed the proposal from incumbent general secretary Len McCluskey to make constitutional changes to allow for an election for the post to be held "as soon as possible", rather than in 2015 as planned.

A statement from United Left (a political grouping within of which McCluskey is a member and in which Workers' Liberty is also involved) issued prior to the EC decision salutes McCluskey's various achieve-

ments while in office, including civilising the internal regime of the union and pioneering industrial strategies that have won various disputes. They also claim that McCluskey has helped stabilise the union since its creation from a merger of TGWU and Amicus, and should therefore continue in post. A national United Left meeting following the EC endorsed this position and agreed to back McCluskey in the election.

There has been very little opposition to this proposal. Workers' Liberty members

More industrial news online

- Postal workers' boycott threat
 - "Cleaners' charter" launched
 - London Overground strike
 - Tesco drivers' strike
- All at tinyurl.com/indnews

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Against the “Ikhwani state”

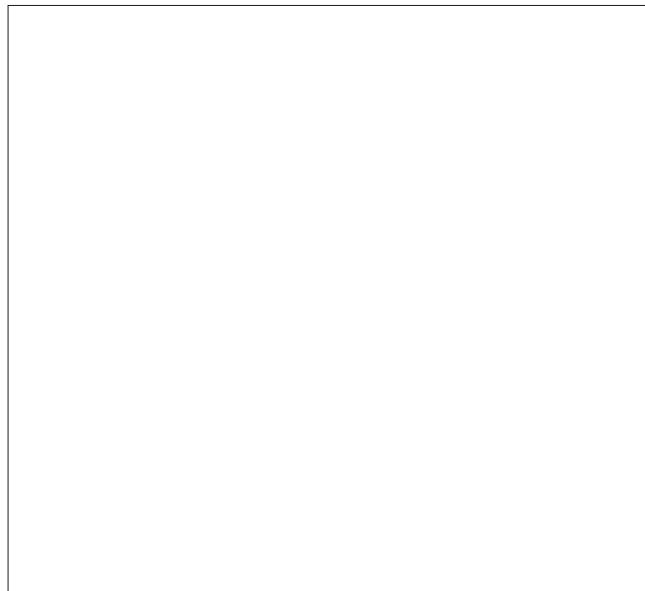
By Harry Glass

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in Egypt in the first week of December, with further mass protests against President Mohamed Mursi's cold coup, which includes plans for a new constitution that would give him exceptional powers.

The protests forced Mursi to backtrack on some emergency powers. He is pressing ahead with the referendum on the constitution.

On Friday 7 December, tens of thousands rallied in the square in front of the presidential place in Heliopolis. They broke through barbed wire, with some police apparently letting them through. Protesters had been expelled from the area by Muslim Brotherhood thugs on Wednesday 5 December.

Ahram Online reported



that a member of the Revolutionary Socialists was killed. “We are mourning the death of Taha Magdy, who was killed by Brotherhood thugs,” the Revolutionary Socialists said on their Facebook page. There have since been reports that

Taha is still alive.

On Friday 7th also, thousands of protesters in the industrial city of Mahalla al-Kubra were reported to have announced the city “independent”, and planned a “revolutionary council”. “We no longer be-

long to the Ikhwani [Brotherhood] state”. Protesters blocked entrances and exits to the city.

Ahram Online said the political forces involved in the Mahalla rebellion include the Free Egyptians Party, Constitution Party, Strong Egypt Party, Egyptian Social Democratic Party, the Popular Current and socialist activists.

Also on Friday, protestors set fire to three Muslim Brotherhood or Freedom and Justice Party offices in Cairo. There were demonstrations in several other cities including Alexandria, where crowds chanted, “The people want the execution of the president”.

The protests started after Mursi seized wide-ranging powers and immunity from the courts, and then announced a 15 December referendum on a hastily drafted constitution.

• The SWP and Egypt, page 8.

Flag-gate reveals working-class divisions

By William O'Leary

On Monday 3 December, Belfast City council resolved by 29 votes to 21 to remove the Union Flag from the top of City Hall on all but 15 designated days a year.

The motion, a compromise from the liberal Alliance Party, was passed in preference to a nationalist-supported proposal to remove the flag completely.

Violence ensued, with loyalists breaking into the building.

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) councillor Christopher Stalford was typical of much of the unionist response. There was “absolutely no excuse” for what happened after the vote, he said, but “those who started this debate should have known from the outset that it would stir up tension and cause division.”

The hypocrisy is astounding, given that the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the DUP jointly put out 40,000 leaflets before the vote attacking the Alliance and encouraging people to complain. Alliance Party leader Naomi Long received a death threat, and party constituency offices have been attacked.

PRINCIPLES

It is legitimate for nationalist councillors to vote to remove, or limit, the flying of the Union Flag on public buildings. This principle is important and the national question is not just a “distraction” from economic concerns.

Northern Ireland was created following the partition of Ireland to ensure a unionist majority in the largest possible contiguous territory on the island, whilst simultaneously locking in a nationalist minority. State institutions are still the site of contested national identities, with unionism winning out for purely majoritarian reasons.

Removing the Union Flag is part of the removal of this vestigial, British, national privilege, without forcing a rival, Irish, national identity upon the unionist majority. Attempts by loyalists to resist, with violence, the neutralising of public space are wholly reactionary.

Much of the loyalist violence has involved paramilitary organisations, especially the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), and it is likely that the networks in and around such groups have played a role in facilitating the mobilisation of discontented loyalists.

At one rally the crowd was addressed by the fascist former BNP member and anti-abortion fanatic, Jim Dowson. The UVF-aligned Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) leader Billy Hutchinson and Ulster Defence Association (UDA) leader Jackie McDonald were also in attendance.

But the nationalist parties are guilty of double standards too. Loyalists can point to Sinn Fein and SDLP councillors in Newry voting to name a children's play park after IRA hunger striker Raymond McCreech.

It is not unreasonable for unionists to see the partial removal of the Union Flag as a continuation of the nationalist political project to promote an Irish identity at the expense of their own.

At a time when all the major Northern Irish political parties are involved in an Executive attacking working-class people, the labour movement in Northern Ireland urgently needs a political expression.

Trivial as they may seem, issues such as the flying of flags still have the potential to divide workers in Northern Ireland and need to be addressed with a programme which “prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority.”

Keep Lewisham A&E and maternity open!

By a Lewisham health worker

The campaign to stop the closure of the A&E and maternity departments at Lewisham hospital continues.

The threat stems from problems at the South London Healthcare Trust and these are entirely due to PFI debt.

Back in the 1990s PFI consortia built two hospitals in Woolwich and Bromley at a cost of £210 million. The annual repayment is £69million and over the course of 30 years the total bill will come to over £2 billion.

Using the handy mortgage calculator on the Money Savings Expert website, Workers Liberty calculated that SLHT are locked into a mortgage with a 33% interest rate.

To put this in context, the average house price in the UK is £250,000. If these

homeowners paid signed up to mortgages at the 33% PFI rate then their monthly repayments would be £6785 a month.

The average homeowner would have to earn a pre-tax salary over £150,000 a year just to pay off their mortgage! Homeownership would be restricted to “the 1%”.

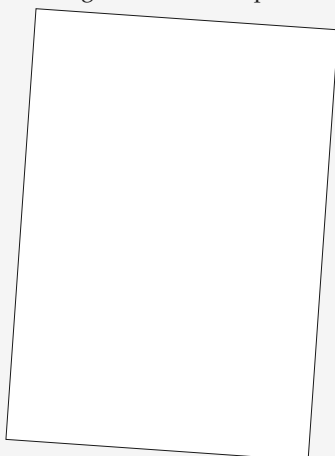
But the SLHT are not alone in signing up to these extraordinary rates of interest. It is estimated that PFI consortia have built £11.4 billion of hospitals and by 2049 will have pocketed over £65 billion in taxpayers money.

This means that the average PFI contract is paying out at around 19% rate of interest — a higher rate than has ever been seen in the history of the credit markets.

As more and more NHS Trusts struggle with the PFI debt, the government will be sending in bureaucrats like Matthew Ker-

shaw (Special Administrator in South London) to ensure that the NHS can continue to function as a moneyspinner for the PFI capitalists — even at the expense of shutting down hospitals.

But we should not be too superstitious about the power of these dodgy debt obligations. The hospitals



Taken from the AWL's new workplace bulletin, *Hospital Worker*

have been paid for many times over. The people who now own PFI debt are simply holding entitlements to future streams of income tax.

If we decided to keep open the services they want to cut by carrying on working, what would happen? A handful of exceedingly rich individuals might be a bit upset, but would they send the bailiffs in? If the doctors continued to perform life-saving treatment would they be arrested? If the nurses continued to admit patients would the police try and barricade the doors?

The people who make Lewisham hospital work have the power to stop this closure. By ignoring orders to shut down the hospital we can force the government to cancel the rip-off PFI debt and nobody would suffer.

• www.nhsunity.com
savelewishamhospital.com