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THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES SAVE THE NHS



Mark Booth

THE BRITISH WORKING class is facing the fight of its life. The NHS is facing destruction.

The Health and Social Care Act, the ConDem government's massive "reform" of the NHS, has been voted into law. It allows for the privatisation of the whole NHS, under the rule that "any qualified provider" can be contracted to provide any NHS service. Behind a smokescreen of GPs being given control of the health system, control over services and the NHS budget will be transferred to private health corporations and management consultancies.

These changes are already underway, but they can still be stopped. Despite the lack of coverage of the issue in the media a massive groundswell of public opposition exists to the government's NHS reforms. There is massive opposition to the Bill amongst NHS staff and

opposition from professional bodies like the British Medical Association (BMA) and Royal College of Nursing (RCN). Public opinion polls show overwhelming opposition to privatisation. So what has to happen for this opposition to be turned into action?

Coupled with the government's reforms are £20 billion of cuts to the NHS budget over the next four years. Already this is leading to necessary operations like hip and knee replacements and cataract surgery being withdrawn, and operations being withheld from people who drink and smoke.

The cuts will prove a key mobilising factor as crucial services and facilities are withdrawn or closed, and previously public NHS departments are privatised. While dozens of campaigns will spring up around the country as cuts start to bite, these local campaigns must crystallise into a national movement to save the NHS. We need to

build a campaign as massive as the antiwar movement, with local groups in every town and city, rooted in the community carrying out regular activities, with a national centre to coordinate resistance around the country, calling national days of action and protests. If this is done it is possible to create a terminal political crisis for the government.

So far the Labour Party opposition to the Bill has been a matter of speeches. They hope that the NHS reform's unpopularity will fuel a Labour vote at the next general election. The Labour Party receives millions of pounds from health unions. We must demand that its cynical passivity ends and MPs and local parties join the fight to defend every service and every job. Their MPs must demand the total repeal of the Act. It must pledge itself to renationalise without compensation all hospitals and other facilities handed over to the privateers.

The members of the largest health unions, Unite, Unison, the RCN and BMA, along with the TUC, must force their leaders to organise a national demonstration against the reforms. Demonstrating the level of public opposition on the streets will help shatter the government's lies that there is widespread support for their actions.

Ultimately though it will take a massive campaign built from the grassroots up to stop the destruction of the NHS. We need a movement on the scale of the Stop the War Coalition, which can mobilise people with the same energy and dynamism, build links between local communities affected by the cuts, health workers and their unions. What it must not do is make the same mistakes as the Stop the War. It cannot restrict itself to demonstrations but must take direct action, strikes and sit-ins, to stop closures and privatisations.

This kind of campaign can be built. Over 1.2 million people work for the NHS. Millions more use its services on a regular basis. The personnel and supporters for such a campaign are already there, but they must be organised. An opportunity to do so is coming up.

Keep Our NHS Public and the NHS Support Federation have called a National NHS Supporters Conference to be held in London on 23 June. Activists around the country should contact KONP and NHSSF and get involved in building and organising the conference. We need delegations from every town and city, from as many union branches as possible so that the conference can launch a national Save The NHS coalition and prepare for a fight that could sink these devastating reforms, and bring down the ConDem government.

The editorial DAVE STOCKTON

Toffs in troughs

MARCH PROVED to be a bad month for the Coalition. It was a reverse of the old adage that March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. In the first week or so it looked like things were going smoothly with the NHS destruction bill finally clearing the Lords, and the 28 March national strike against the pension "reform" crumbling. Dave Cameron obviously felt confident to press ahead with a new round of attacks.

Royal Mail is finally to be sold off; the London fire brigade is outsourcing 999 calls to Capita, a firm notorious for the mess it made of local government benefit services. Health and education multinationals are casting hungry eyes on NHS hospitals and cash-starved state schools.

Clearly sizing up the sheer lack of fight by the leadership of the big unions – who have failed to call a single national demonstration against the destruction of the NHS – Cameron, Clegg and Osborne believed they could get away with a blitzkrieg on all the post-Second World War social gains. Labour's Ed Miliband – elected by the unions to reconnect to Labour's social base, but having done nothing in this direction – was facing a Blairite counter-revolution from his MPs.

Cameron and his millionaire cabinet seemed to be getting away with it.

But suddenly in the second half of March, it all started to go wrong. The cash for access corruption, a witch-hunt of the tanker drivers, which totally backfired, and George Osborne's budget with its "granny tax" and "pastygate" saw the media having a field day at the Tories' expense. To add insult to injury, *The Sun* too-bared its populist teeth at what it (hypocritically) called, "Toffs at the Trough".

Its 30 March leader called Osborne a "public school-educated heir to a multi-million pound fortune" and his Cabinet colleagues people who "don't worry how much to pay for food, rent or petrol". It concluded that there is a growing "divide between working people and a rich elite." Too true as their massive slump in the opinion polls showed. But this isn't the only slump they have to worry about.

On 28 March it was announced that the UK economy grew by a miserable 0.5 per cent in 2011. In effect the UK economy is in stagnation not recovery. Britain's GDP is 4.1 per cent below its pre-recession peak, which makes this "recovery" worse than during the Great Depression of the 1930s. It is becoming clear that for all the excruciating pain (for the great majority) there is no "gain" – except for the top 1 per cent.

But it isn't only the Tory toffs who need to be worried. The Oxbridge lookalike elite with their policy differences only of timescale and packaging rather than substance are deeply distrusted if not hated by millions bearing the brunt of the crisis. The young in particular – the unemployed and those on McJobs in the inner cities, as well as in the colleges and schools – are seething with anger.

What George Galloway's victory in Bradford shows is that, at least in the inner city heartlands which formerly could be relied on to vote Labour, large sections of its supporters are deeply alienated. For two decades Labour has done little for them and has been too busy courting that strange being, Middle England (Is it a region? Is it a class? No it's an excuse for betraying working people!)

The events of the last month – the victory of the electricians over their bosses, the success in London of the 28 March, despite the betrayals of the union leaders and thanks mainly to the teachers, the revolt of the young voters of Bradford – all bear witness of a simmering anger: against the Tories and the Lib Dems certainly, but also against union leaders who call off strikes for which they have huge ballot majorities, and against a Labour Party that will not join the fight and whose councillors implement Coalition cuts.

Over the winter the labour movement leaders sold out the struggle or let it go off the boil. But a hot Spring and Summer are brewing – a real opportunity to follow the example of the electricians and build up rank and file organisation in the workplaces and the unions, a real opportunity to break sections of the unions from Labour and lay the foundations of a new workers party, a real opportunity to unite anticapitalists in a variety of groups and parties – or none – in a coherent political alternative.

Linking these together we can transform the movements of workers and youth into a powerful force that can defeat the Coalition, drive it from office and pose the question of power – the power to create a society and a world without exploitation, racism, sexism and war.

'Come Dine with Cameron' scandal

KD TAIT

DAVID CAMERON must have hoped that the commotion over a threatened tanker drivers' strike would take the heat off the latest Tory sleaze scandal. Well, he was wrong. In fact, Francis Maude's dreadful attempt to invoke the spirit of the blitz by telling everyone to fill up jerry cans with petrol only resulted in a woman suffering acute burns.

While media headlines have focused on 'Pastygate' (George Osborne's decision to slap a VAT levy on Gregg's pasties, among other foodstuffs), the real news was the resignation of the Tory Party treasurer, in the doghouse after being caught peddling influence on government policy in a *Sunday Times* sting. Whether this was revenge for the Tories' Leveson inquiry into phone hacking or not, it has exposed corruption at the highest level of government.

For just £250,000 Tory party treasurer Peter Cruddas claimed to get donors into the "Premier League" with personal access to Cameron and Osborne – and privileged access to the No. 10 policy unit.

Many donors have gone to ground, afraid of having their influence over the millionaires' government dragged into the open. The Tory spin-doctors went into overdrive, claiming that donors had no influence over government policy, and sacrificed Cruddas, who was forced to resign.

Contrast this with the reaction of the Tories' big business backers, who insist they should be congratulated for funding a party whose policies they support. They claim the Coalition limits their influence.

But a cursory glance across at their Coalition partners suggests this is not the case. The majority of the Liberal Democrats' own funding comes from giant private healthcare companies. If anyone was wondering why the Lib Dems were so keen to privatise the NHS, this might provide a clue.

Budget robbery

The Tories' strategy to limit the impact of this latest sleaze scandal seems to be to treat voters like idiots by claiming that party donations have no impact on policy.

But if these businesses and millionaires weren't getting something out of government policies, then why would they be pumping so much into these parties?

The answer is that the mega-rich are working hand-in-glove with the Tories to make sure that working class people pay for the economic crisis caused by the bankers, bosses and speculators – in fact themselves and their cronies.

These 'exclusive' diners are the same people Osborne just gave a massive tax cut to, despite the fact that they already manage to dodge £120 billion a year in tax. Just in case a few tax loopholes are closed for these parasites, Osborne also cut corporation tax from 26 to 22 per cent over the next three years.

The Coalition tries to claim that lowering the top rate of tax from 50p to



45p on salaries over £150,000 is balanced out by raising personal tax allowances by £1,100. This is a con, as even the bosses' rag *Daily Telegraph* points out:

"A senior lawyer, banker or GP earning £250,000 a year will be no less than £5,000 a year better off as a result of Osborne's tax cut; an investment banker on £500,000 will be more than £15,000 to the good. By contrast, a basic rate taxpayer gains barely an extra £200 a year as a result of the meagre increase in the personal allowance."

And this was written before the so-called "granny tax" scandal broke. Hidden away in the budget was the removal of age-related personal allowances, meaning around 5 million pensioners will lose £325 a year. Ironically, the figure almost matches the amount given away to the rich by millionaire chancellor Osborne.

A matter of class

The Tories' union-baiting attack dog Maude called on Labour to agree to a £50,000 cap for party donations. As this wouldn't just count for individuals but also unions, it is unlikely Labour would agree – and why should they?

The Tories are the party of big business and the rich. They can rely on the super-rich parasites to bung them a million now and then. Workers – who make up the majority of society – can only fund a party by pooling their money through unions and political associations.

We know sections of society fund political parties in order to fight for a certain set of policies. This isn't corruption. If you want society-wide change,

you need a political party to fight for those policies.

With a dozen or so millionaires in the cabinet, we all know who funds the Tories and that's why they've always been – and always will be – the party of the rich, by the rich and for the rich.

To combat that we need a party that fights equally hard for the interests of the working class. This is why Unite and the other trade unions should stop throwing good money after bad and use their political funds to launch a new party – a revolutionary socialist party.

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George Galloway's 'Bradford Spring' shows huge potential for left advance

Dave Stockton assesses George Galloway's stunning election win in Bradford West

GEORGE GALLOWAY has pulled off his second big election victory (the first was in Bethnal Green and Bow in 2005) to confound the major national parties, especially the pro-war and pro-cuts Labour Party.

He won with 18,341 votes, trouncing a stunned Labour Party by more than 10,000 votes, with a 35 per cent swing.

Galloway said after his victory that the working class of Bradford West were giving the Labour leadership a warning: "You can no longer take our votes for granted."

He is 100 per cent right.

In a whirlwind campaign of just three weeks, culminating in an election rally of more than 1,000, Galloway and Respect broke thousands away from the establishment parties with their look-alike policies of cuts, racism and war.

Galloway set out four major themes in his campaign: an industrial policy, which will bring jobs back to Bradford, get rid of tuition fees, get the troops back from Afghanistan, and stop the break up of the NHS. He added, "I am the real Labour man in this election."

That's why he won.

Not just a Muslim vote

Undoubtedly his win was helped by both the strong Muslim and youthful demographic of the constituency. But it was not just Muslims who voted for him.

Labour tried to stir up racism by claiming he had neglected the white working class areas of Bradford West. *Guardian* writer Patrick Wintour even called Galloway's campaign "fundamentalist".

But as Respect leader Salma Yaqoob pointed out on Radio Four the morning after the count, Galloway won votes from every part of the constituency. In Clayton Ward, which is 80 per cent white English, Respect won 800 votes, while the Labour Party managed just 40.



Against imperialist war

This was an uprising of the working class and youth of Bradford against two things: the Tories' savage cuts, carried out locally by Labour councillors, and Labour's occupation of Afghanistan, continued today by the Tories.

Labour takes the Muslim working class community's votes for granted, while trampling on its concerns by backing cuts and wars. But Respect expressed their real concerns by calling for investment not cuts, and by resolutely opposing the occupation of Afghanistan.

In a revealing incident, Radio Four's Justin Webb demanded to know if Salma Yaqoob "supports attacks on our troops". She replied not just by calling for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and not just by pointing out it is the main parties including Labour that send British troops into harm's way, but by reminding listeners that "Britain is an

occupying power" and supporting "the right to resist".

One lesson of this campaign is that you can win mass support without giving in to patriotism and militarism. Not just among Muslims but among all sections of the working class.

Community leaders

Back in 2004-07, during Respect's first surge of support after the Iraq war, Galloway and his former allies in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) built alliances with Muslim businessmen/women and clerics to win votes from the Muslim community in the East End of London. This class contradiction caused it to split in 2007, in a bitter falling out between Galloway and the SWP, then led by John Rees who is currently fronting the breakaway Counterfire group.

But this does not appear to have been how Respect approached the Bradford West election. The mosque hierarchy were apparently firmly

behind Labour, whose candidate, barrister Imran Hussain, was a Muslim of Pakistani origin and a product of the local clientelist party machine, called "Bradree" locally: an Urdu word for a hierarchical system where political leaders are chosen for their connections rather than their policies.

The surge of youth support for Galloway (whose leaflet said "God knows who is a Muslim") was not secured through Bradree or an accommodation to community leaders, but through a rebellion against it. This is positive and shows that the way to organise working class youth is not through backroom deals with businessmen but through bold political agitation.

The politics of Galloway and Respect

Despite their bitter break with Galloway and Respect in 2007, the leaders of the SWP and Counterfire are today calling any criticism of Galloway "sectarian". But there is no need to become suddenly uncritical. Socialists can "walk and talk at the same time". We should understand Galloway's brilliant agitation in Bradford and at the same time criticise his and Respect's politics.

Despite the four progressive themes he stood on in the by-election, Galloway holds a number of reactionary positions. Some of them are simply right wing, like his opposition to abortion rights. Others are reactionary policies shared by much of the left worldwide, especially in the Communist Parties, such as his support for "anti-imperialist" capitalist dictators, like Bashar Assad and Muammer Gadaffi, and his opposition to the Syrian revolution today. When courting Muslim leaders in East London – clerics and businessmen – he was careful to avoid giving overt support for lesbian and gay rights.

The unaccountable celebrity leadership practised by Galloway has

always been uncontrolled and uncontrollable by Respect's membership. The working class needs orators as brilliant as Galloway, but we have too many MPs who are out of the control of their parties' base. They should be strictly representative of their party's programme and policies, and should be recallable by their members and constituents if they break their word. They should earn a workers' wage, not the big money Galloway is on.

A new workers' party is possible

The huge vote in Bradford West shows the willingness of thousands upon thousands of youth and working class people of all communities to break away from a Labour Party that will not defend them against cuts and supports British imperialism.

It proves that the left can rally hundreds of thousands to our side, if we clearly oppose the cuts, the destruction of the NHS and Britain's wars and occupations.

Above all, it shows that, important as new movements like #Occupy are, with their emphasis on networks and horizontal methods of organising, the idea of a political party is not dead. Bradford proves it is essential for getting a clear alternative across to millions.

And it proves the time for a new party has come, that a new, mass, nationally-organised socialist party would win huge support. Socialists should raise the demand across Britain that Respect, the socialist organisations like the SWP and the Communist Party, the unions fighting cuts, the students and youth fighting fees, the anti-racist and anti-war campaigners should come together in a great democratic convention to found a new working class party.

Within such a formation, *Workers Power* would work to build the party, and to win it to a revolutionary policy for the overthrow of capitalism.

Vote TUSC against the cuts in May elections

Simon Hardy

THE TRADE Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is standing a range of candidates from across the unions and campaigns in capital for the Greater London Authority (GLA) elections on 3 May.

Excitement is growing in the wake of the surprise victory of Respect's George Galloway in Bradford West.

GLA candidate Nick Wrack hit the nail on the head about Galloway's vote: "George Galloway's overwhelming win in Bradford West shows that Labour can no longer take its working class voters for granted. Labour has paid a huge price for its support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and its

endorsement of the government's austerity policies."

Candidates include: socialist and black rights activist Gary Macfarlane; Mick Dooley, a leader of the recent successful rank and file electricians' campaign on the building sites; train driver and RMT President, Alex Gordon; Steve Hedley, a rail worker and RMT London organiser; barrister Wrack, a member of TUSC's national executive; and militants from Unison, the NUT and the POA.

Ed Miliband has made it clear that in local government Labour will not be the "dented shield" that even Kinnock promised in the 1980s as protection from Tory government cuts, since the Labour leadership today

supports most of the cuts and austerity measures – the only difference being how quickly to implement them. There is a desperate need for an alternative to Labour. It is clear to many traditional Labour supporters that the Labour left is hopelessly weak and unable to pull the party away from the right wing consensus.

TUSC is standing on a platform of opposition to all cuts, for a living wage for all London workers and against privatisation. These are the core issues that put TUSC clearly at odds with Labour and the Coalition. A vote for TUSC is a vote for union rights and women's rights, and against the pro-rich policies of the ruling Coalition. That much is true – but TUSC could be

so much more.

What is holding back TUSC from achieving its full potential as an anti-cuts political alternative is that groups like the Socialist Party (SP) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), as well as its main union backers, the RMT leadership, view it as solely an electoral platform; to be rolled out at elections times and then put under the dust covers until the next time.

But it should be part of a push towards a new mass working class party, not just an electoral alliance. A new party could be out on the streets on a day-to-day basis, showing people in practice what a political alternative really means. It should be on the picket lines not just on the

ballot paper, leading occupations against library or hospital closures, leading the fight against NHS privatisation and actively participating in local struggles as a political force.

While it is good that there is slate of candidates standing against the cuts in the GLA elections, there is still an urgent need for a united political party rooted in the unions and the social movements with a clear alternative political strategy to reformism. We will not only be supporting TUSC but arguing that it and its union sponsors, the SP and SWP, plus the Communist Party and Respect – indeed the entire left – unites forces to create a new anticapitalist workers' party in Britain and internationally.

Vote Ken - but organise to fight!

By Jeremy Dewar

On May 3, Londoners go to the polls to elect a new mayor. The two main candidates are the incumbent Tory candidate, Boris Johnson, and Labour's Ken Livingstone, who was in office from 2000 to 2008. Workers' Power is calling for a vote for Livingstone.

The London Mayor is the top elected political post in England outside of parliament. London is the largest city in the European Union with a population of 12-14 million and while the Mayor has limited powers and responsibilities he does control the budgets for transport, police, the fire brigade, environment and development for the entire city.

While the Greater London Authority has the power of veto over the budget, the Mayor alone can choose how to spend the allocated £14 billion. This is a deeply undemocratic system and one which we would advise workers and socialists in other cities not to replicate, as the Mayor is inevitably less accountable to both his or her voters and his/her party.

Ironically, this has allowed Livingstone to draw up his own manifesto and position himself significantly to the left of the national Labour Party. The downside to this is that when he was last mayor he also veered off to the right, encouraging a laissez-faire attitude to the bankers, who grew rich under his 2000-08 terms, supporting the police shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes and condemning striking tube workers.

However, since the office of Mayor exists and there is no campaign to abolish it, it is important that workers and young people use the elec-



tion to fight for measures to counter the government's austerity, oppression and poverty. They must hold Livingstone to account and demand that he takes real measures to tax the rich to pay for the transformation of poor and working class districts.

Ken's pledges

Livingstone's manifesto is broken down into six campaign pledges. While most of them would undoubtedly make a real difference in raising working people's living standards, they fall far short of what is needed.

Transport: Ken says he will cut public transport fares by 7 per cent

in October and raise them only by inflation thereafter. By contrast, Boris Johnson has raised fares by a massive 56 per cent and cut the transport budget by 21 per cent since 2008.

Childcare: Livingstone promises a £700 grant for low-income families to help pay the extortionate costs of childcare in the capital and fund more out-of-hours places in nurseries and crèches. However, this is merely providing a subsidy for the private sector, rather than funding a socialised alternative, which could be run under parents and workers' control.

Energy bills: He claims to be

able to save Londoners £150 a year by taking up energy companies' offer to subsidise home insulation. Johnson failed to implement this. What is needed, however, is an energy company run by the municipality, so that pensioners and vulnerable people do not have to line the pockets of fat cats every time they need to heat their homes or cook a meal.

Housing: The Tory mayor has abolished Livingstone's regulation that demanded half of all new housing has to be "affordable" and allowed the waiting list for council properties to rise to 360,000. In fact, half a million new homes are needed in the

capital to abolish the terrible overcrowding and slum conditions. Livingstone has promised to set up a non-profit lettings agency and "campaign for living rents" - which is totally inadequate to meet the crisis.

Education Maintenance Allowance: Ken will bring back the EMA, worth up to £30 a week, for 16-19 year old students, a key demand of the student revolt of 2010. However, he is proposing to rob money from other parts of the budget for colleges and universities, most of which are already facing cuts. The youth deserve more funding for courses and apprenticeships, as well as a living grant.

Police: Here Livingstone is, not surprisingly, completely out of touch with many Londoners' experience of the police. He wants to reverse Johnson's cuts and put 1,700 more police on the streets. But young people - especially black men - suffer daily harassment from the Metropolitan Police. If Livingstone is sincere about righting the wrongs that led to last August's riots, he must call for the sacking of racist cops, the disarming and disbanding of the special forces, like the TSG and CO19, and for killer police to be brought to justice.

Almost all of London's trade unions support Livingstone's candidacy, as do many black and ethnic minority organisations. We now need a mass campaign to get out the vote and put Livingstone back into office. But workers should also get ready to fight, whoever wins the election, if we are to make the rich bankers and speculators in the City of London pay for the crisis and deliver up the funds for an emergency programme to rebuild the capital and provide jobs for the unemployed.

Countdown to Royal Mail privatisation begins

ANDY YORKE

ON 21 MARCH the European Commission, in charge of regulating competition, approved the Coalition government's plan to take on the Royal Mail pension scheme, relieving the company of the burden of its £8.4 billion deficit. While the CWU has long argued for the government to take on the pension scheme the government's reasons for doing so have little to do with concern for the workers.

Both the Tories and New Labour have said they would only ever take this step as a prelude to privatisation. If the massive hike in stamp prices and the huge programme of closures that is making millions in real estate sales are also taken into account then it is obvious that privatisation is the goal.

The government has used the pension deficit as a stick to beat the company, demanding cuts to postal workers jobs and conditions to set it right. Lib Dem Postal Affairs Minister Norman Lamb applauded the decision as a "fundamental step" towards privatisation. In reality the roots of the

deficit lie not in postal workers' gold-plated pensions but in a thirteen-year contributions holiday Royal Mail managers and the government took in the 1990s.

The government's taking on the pension scheme is not an example of generosity but a neoliberal policy to "nationalise the debts, and privatise the profits", similar to the pro-business nationalisations of Northern Rock and other banks.

It is also a numbers game for Tory Chancellor George Osborne. Government accounting rules mean that the Tories can count the £28 billion in pension assets immediately on the balance sheet, while the deficit will only come on stream in the future as retired workers draw on their pensions. The government has hired consultancy analysts to sell the pension scheme's assets and use the £28 billion windfall to pay off government debt.

Pile up cash to privatise

It was widely recognised that in its "present state", i.e. with a huge pensions liability around its neck, no private company would touch Royal

Mail with a barge pole. Besides removing that, the company's privatisation bosses have embarked on a crash course of asset-stripping and price-hiking in order to pile up cash to tempt a private company.

A massive mail-centre closure programme, agreed by the union in the 2010 Business Transformation agreement, along with a recently announced (and un-agreed) plan to close scores of delivery offices will bring in millions in real estate sales. Added to the Group's operating profit of £67 million last year, it all adds up to a tidy sum.

The aim is for a sell-off by Autumn 2013, the biggest since the sale of British Rail in the 1990s and, like that privatisation, will most likely involve offering some shares to the public to defuse popular opposition to the plans.

For years government-appointed regulators have battered the publicly owned company, allowing private companies like TNT to steal big business contracts from Royal Mail and use them as an artificially cheap delivery option. Now that Royal Mail is up for privatisation these same reg-

ulators are all up for price hikes to be paid for by the public, not big business, which will get discounts of up to 38 percent off of stamps.

Only days after the EC announcement, the regulator Ofcom agreed to massive hikes in the price of stamps by Royal Mail and, at the end of March, the separation of the popular Post Office Ltd and Royal Mail was completed to allow the privatisation of the potentially lucrative delivery network.

These hikes will hit poor people the hardest, with second-class stamps going up from 36p to 50p, and first class up to 60p. Royal Mail CEO Moya Greene has refused to rule out the possibility of a £1 stamp. The consumer website uSwitch has warned, "First-class post is going to become uneconomic. For most people it will be the writing on the wall for the services we have had. If first-class virtually disappears, then next day delivery will disappear and all of us will have a second class postal service." Small business groups and Age UK have also condemned the price hikes.

The postal service is being sabo-

taged in order to make it serve the big banks, industrial monopolies, and a future private owner. The result will be a poorer, more expensive service and job losses, all for the benefit of private companies - TNT has said it will trial delivering mail for the first time in London.

As postal workers we have no interest in seeing Royal Mail sold off to the likes of TNT the banks or slash-and-burn private equity firms run by secretive millionaires. Such a sell off will probably mean an all-out attack on our wages, conditions, and union rights, with the real possibility of compulsory redundancies.

The CWU leadership condemns privatisation but has no plans to fight it, only contemplating strike action in the case of changes to conditions due to privatisation, but not against privatisation itself.

If postal workers demand a fight back against further closures and job losses in the months ahead, it could lay the basis for a strike against privatisation itself in the coming year, defending a full-publicly owned postal service for all.

Tanker drivers: the Tories' new 'enemy within'

Tanker drivers have a legitimate dispute. If they win, it would destabilise the Tories further. Rebecca Anderson explains that this is why Tory ministers have launched a war against them

Over 2,000 petrol tanker drivers from five oil distribution companies are threatening to strike over deteriorating and dangerous working conditions. The root cause is the outsourcing of tanker transport by the big oil companies and the pressure they put on the competing subcontractors to cut costs or lose contracts.

The result is a race to the bottom and increasing job insecurity for drivers, with some forced to switch companies two or three times a year. Job losses have begun and more are on the way. Shorter delivery times mean pressure hiking up on drivers to cut corners and overwork, leading to potential accidents.

An earlier dispute this year at Kingsbury, Immingham and Stockton-on-Tees refineries with a company called Wincanton, which threatened its drivers with 20 per cent pay cuts, closure of the current final salary pension scheme and slashing redundancy and sick pay to the statutory minimum.

The oil giants calling the shots – BP, Shell, Exxon Mobil, Chevron and ConocoPhillips – made a record \$137 billion profit last year but have refused to negotiate on minimum health and safety standards, independently accredited (i.e. real) training for this dangerous, skilled job or trade union facilities.

Against all this the drivers' union Unite is demanding industry-wide standards on pay, pensions, training

and hours that all companies would have to comply with. This would mean that they couldn't undercut wages or ignore safety rules in the endless drive for profit.

Media wars and war games

Not that you would have gleaned any of this from the telly, radio or newspapers. The BBC – except for Newsnight – has so far failed to mention any of the issues or the companies involved. Instead it has portrayed the strike as an irresponsible act by a handful of workers seeking to make ordinary drivers' lives hell and bring the economy to a halt.

Despite the clear public interest in creating decent safety standards, the government and the media have slandered the tanker drivers and their union, Unite.

Cameron has demanded the tanker drivers abandon their strike and has met with the tanker companies to plan how to undermine the strike, promising at least 80 RAF crew and 300 army drivers for a scab distribution service. Cameron has even convened a meeting of Cobra, the state's top emergency committee, usually convened in times of national crisis.

The prime minister also advised drivers to top up on petrol, even though Unite had not even given the statutory seven days' notice of a strike, causing chaos at the pumps and shortages in some areas.

Even worse, cabinet minister Fran-

cis Maude called on drivers to store "maybe a little bit in the garage as well in a jerry can". The Fire Brigades Union and the AA both complained that this was dangerous advice, and that it was potentially illegal to keep petrol indoors.

Tragically, their warnings did not come in time to save Diane Hill, who suffered 40 per cent burns after fumes ignited while she was decanting petrol in her kitchen. Diane was rushed to hospital in critical condition.

Time to strike

The Tories were forced to beat a retreat after this but still claim Unite and the drivers should negotiate, not strike. But here again ministers are throwing sand in people's eyes; the bosses have refused talks for a year. Unite should name the date of the first strike, announce a plan for rapid escalation to keep the anger focused, and allow tanker drivers to build solidarity from other workers.

Unfortunately Unite officials have delayed the strike, insisting there will be no action over Easter; instead appealing to the government to intervene – as if they haven't already! – and focusing on talks at ACAS. This dithering plays into the hands of the government – why give Cameron and co. time to organise against the strike?

Tanker drivers should remember the British Airways dispute and the way that talks, on-off strikes, refus-



ing to strike over Christmas and Easter and calls for government intervention all led to defeat. If tanker drivers follow the successful example of their fellow Unite members among the Sparks and organise a rank and file committee, they can

control the strike, set the pace of the action and reach out to other sections of workers for support, such as the construction workers at the refineries, who have recently won with wildcat strikes.

Victory to the tanker drivers!

Spark's campaign moves on

Rix Bragg

The electricians' - or sparks' - struggle against new contracts on the building sites that would have resulted in a 35 per cent pay cut has led to a stunning victory for the workers and humiliation for the bosses, showing the strength, power and effectiveness of militant rank and file organisation.

As we reported last month and throughout their six month campaign, the sparks and their supporters leafleted sites, unionised builders, mounted wildcat walkouts, protested outside (and inside) the employers' dinner parties, picketed high profile constructions and badgered their union leaders until they balloted for strike action. And throughout the campaign, they elected their own, unofficial leadership to prosecute their struggle. A model for all trade union activists.

Now any hope the bosses and union leaders might have had that having won the sparks would settle down quietly into their old roles has

been dashed, as the workers turn their attention and efforts against the continuing injustices of blacklisting and agency work.

At a national rank and file meeting in Manchester a 20-point programme was agreed, calling for, among other things: an end to blacklisting, wage equality, better rights to organise unions on site and better pay and conditions.

The meeting also agreed to begin weekly protests outside large London construction sites, the first of which was held outside the Shard on the 14 March, as part of the campaign against the use of agency workers, who, while doing the same job, are paid a fraction of industry standard wages and denied the benefits, job security and conditions enjoyed by others.

By applying the same, phenomenally successful tactics that they used against the bosses during the electricians' dispute, the sparks can win their demands that all workers on site receive equal pay and conditions, and could even - finally - shred the blacklist.

Grass Roots Left meets

Paul Silson

On Saturday 31 March the elected leaders of Grass Roots Left, a national rank and file grouping in Unite, met in London.

The first point up for discussion was the Open Letter from the Communist Party of Britain, which proposed unions withhold their funding from Labour in order to strengthen their demand that the party starts supporting workers' struggles and unions' demands. It suggested that if this doesn't produce the required result the unions break from Labour and form a new party.

It was agreed that this was an interesting step forward and GRL broadly welcomes it. We agreed to watch what further developments take place and to participate as appropriate.

After the victory of the sparks, a motion of support to the construction rank and file committee was passed. The motion notes "the very

powerful sentiments against the agency employers and that a priority must be given to rooting them out of our industry. No agencies wanted, direct employment only."

The motion also specifically supports Mick Dooley in his struggle against the UCATT bureaucracy in expelling him and preventing him from taking part in General Secretary's election.

Tanker drivers

Alongside this, GRL also proposes to make contact with, and offer support to the tanker drivers in their battle. At the moment we do not have any contacts among the drivers, a real disadvantage compared to the situation on the sites, where rank and file bulletins and blogs were already in existence. Nevertheless, once a campaign is started and efforts are made through oil refinery building site activists, we are confident we can make an impression and help them to victory.

Following George Galloway's victory in Bradford West, GRL is sending a message of congratulations. While some members have serious criticisms of Galloway, it was agreed that the vote of 56 per cent - more than all the opposition votes combined - and a 10,000 majority marked a truly remarkable by-election victory in a traditionally safe Labour seat.

This must be seen as massive indictment of the Labour Party. It is noted that Galloway's victory was on the back of principled policies such as "Tax the rich", "No to the privatisation of the NHS", "End attacks on pensions, jobs and services" and "Bring the troops home" – a clear message to the ConDem coalition that people are not prepared to accept their attacks without a fight.

Other messages of solidarity are to be sent to Greek, Spanish, Portuguese, Irish and all other trade unionists in struggle against austerity.

Pensions dispute and the left: a tale of backsliding and cover-up

Jeremy Dewar

THE 28 MARCH strike by London schools and colleges showed just how impressive a nation-wide strike could have been. Around 1,500 schools were shut down or severely disrupted, while almost all colleges and most 'new' universities faced chaos or closure. Ten thousand marched in central London, bringing traffic to a halt and cheers from passers-by.

The lively and colourful demo was swelled by the ranks of students and support staff, many of whom were taking potentially unlawful solidarity strike action in support of their colleagues. Banners of other public sector unions – Unison, PCS, Unite – from as far away as Leicester, Birmingham Sandwell, Lancashire and even Derry showed that, for many, this was a strike of national importance.

Bureaucratic collapse

It was as if rank and file teachers and students were out to prove a point against their reluctant leaders: "We could have all been on strike together, in London and every town, if only we had been called out." But because London alone was out, the BBC suppressed coverage of the walkout on national bulletins. Thus for most of the country the momentum and militancy of last November's two million strong strike was frittered away.

Of course the right wing union leaders of Unison and the GMB bear most of the responsibility. After 30 November they practically stampeded to sign up to the Heads of Agreement deals, calling off further action as soon as the placards and armbands were binned.

We have to call things by their name. This was an outright betrayal both of their members' pension battle, and the whole anti-cuts movement. And supposedly left-led Unite watched from the sidelines, eventually calling on a few of its 100,000 health workers to lunchtime demos.

Many activists were also shocked by the spinelessness of the left union leaders. Back in January, teachers' leaders in the NUT and civil servants' chiefs in the PCS led the way with calls for coordinated strike action lasting more than one day in early February at the latest. A "coalition of the willing" they called it.

Then weeks were wasted as they re-balloted – or as the NUT expressed it "surveyed" – the members on whether they wanted to go ahead. It came as no surprise to anyone working in departmental offices or schools that the results revealed that 90 per cent wanted to carry on and 75 per cent voted for more strikes.

The Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) was the first to show its hand, calling a national strike for 28 March. But then the NUT



executive limited the action to London only, claiming as a cover-up for a shameful retreat that this would be part of a rolling programme of regional stoppages. Finally, even more disgracefully, the PCS declined to call any action at all, hiding behind a phrase in its ballot that called for action "with other unions". The "left" firefighters' leaders once again failed to slide down their pole.

The fiasco of 28 March as a national day of action continuing and escalating the days of 2011 is due in part to the false strategy of an alliance of separate union struggles around pensions to avoid unlawful common action. *Workers Power* warned from the beginning that it gave the union leaders a hundred and one opportunities and excuses for breaking the united front and doing deals with the government. The most left talking of the leaders could claim that they had been left to fight alone and had no option but to cave in too.

It also shows the fatal flaw of Broad Leftism – the strategy of capturing the union machines for left wing officials. Mark Serwotka (PCS leader), Christine Blower (NUT) and company spent months putting together a coalition with right wing unions like Unison and the GMB. Fine. But they had no Plan B for when the likes of Dave Prentis (Unison) and Paul Kenny (GMB) jumped ship – as we predicted they inevitably would.

So rather than tear up the book of bureaucratic etiquette, which forbids any union leader from "interfering" in the affairs of another union, and appeal directly for solidarity strike action over the heads of the traitors, they scaled back their operations... until there was barely anyone left to strike.

Far left: no alternative

But what about the so-called revolutionary left? Did they have an alternative plan? The short but honest answer is no. Despite organising impressive national rallies and conferences in the course of the dispute – Unite the Resistance (UtR) in June, November and January, PCS Left Unity in January – at none of them did the larger socialist groups fight for independent rank and file control of the struggle. Nor did they even hint at a possible sell out until January when it was well underway.

The Socialist Party (SP) is the leading force on the PCS executive. The party claims it is a model 'socialist-led' trade union. Yet, not only did they fail to criticise Serwotka's decision to abandon the strike, SP members voted to call off the strikes. For good measure they retreated farther than the NUT by abandoning the strike altogether. Their excuse was that the PCS ballot referred to action alongside other unions. This reasoning is that of a hidebound union official not of a socialist mili-

tant concerned with the interests of the working class as a whole.

But what is a "socialist-led" union doing tying its action to a deal that could (and most likely would) be abandoned by other union bureaucrats? This was always bound to end in betrayal because union leaders on £80-90,000 a year have no fundamental interest in a class-wide war against the government and, faced with the first serious obstacle, take the line of least resistance. A real socialist-led union would have said: "We're going on strike. If you're with us, fine; if not, we'll take the lead anyway and appeal to your members to join us."

Curiously, their members on the NUT executive did call for national strike action, although they lost the vote. But this is a hallmark of the SP: in opposition, they support bold initiatives; but when in office, they cautiously tack towards the most conservative layers of the membership for fear of being voted out. Holding on to their leadership posts is critical even if it means abandoning actual leadership.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) did publicly call on Mark Serwotka to organise national strike action. They even argued for him to break with the bureaucratic code of conduct and picket out other unions. But they remain mild in their criticism: his decision not to strike was a "mistake", rather than the "betrayal" that was committed by the likes of Prentis and Kenny.

This begs some important questions. What sort of mistake was it – a one-off poor decision or one dictated by a false strategy? If it was the former, how could activists correct the mistake or replace Serwotka; if the latter, isn't a radical democratic overhaul of our union organisation urgently needed?

But the SWP is silent. Although theoretically in favour of a rank and file movement in the unions, they do not fight for this in the here and now. Instead, they muddy the waters, claiming that UtR is a hybrid between a rank and file organisation and a Broad Left. In fact, UtR is a ginger group to whip up support for the left officials, while mouthing left-wing platitudes for its members and supporters.

What we need now is to break completely from the failed strategy of Broad Leftism and launch a campaign for a rank and file movement. Only such a movement, rooted in workplaces and steered in combat, rather than resting on left-wing reps and officials and mobilised purely for elections, could have warned of this sell-out in time to have built support for independent action and coordination from below. We can start this fight at the UtR conference on 28 April. We urge the SWP to raise its practice to the level of its theory and reject its current Broad Left approach in favour of building a rank and file movement in every union and across all of them.

Alfie Meadows: drop the charges, put the police in the dock

Sally Turner

MONDAY 26 MARCH was the first day of Alfie Meadows' trial for 'violent disorder' after police beat him into a near-fatal coma - a crime for which no police officer has been charged.

Despite having to receive emergency surgery for bleeding on the brain following a bludgeoning by a police baton, he is now facing up to five years in prison for causing 'sustained and widespread violence and disorder' along with five others.

On 9 December 2010, over 10,000 people - mostly school and college student - took to the streets of London to protest against the rise in tuition fees. It was the last of four mass demonstrations against the increase and was the day of the vote in parliament.

The demonstration route from University London Union was due to finish at the Victoria Embankment. However, a large section of the march broke off and headed into Parliament Square.

The 20 year-old philosophy student Alfie Meadows found himself trapped after police kettled the demonstrators outside parliament.



While he was trying to exit the area via Westminster Bridge the police viciously bludgeoned him with such force that he suffered an intra-cerebral haemorrhage, a severe condition which required emergency brain surgery.

Alfie himself was only one of

more than 40 people seriously injured by the London Metropolitan Police's thuggish, out-of-control Territorial Support Group.

Solidarity

The Defend the Right to Protest Campaign held a lively rally outside

the court in solidarity under the slogan 'We are all Alfie Meadows', with over 200 people turning up for the morning demonstration. A number of speakers highlighted how Alfie's case fits into a history of severe injuries and deaths at the hands of the police, for which no offi-

cer has ever faced prosecution.

Despite the fact there is no evidence that Alfie Meadows caused any injury at all, prosecutors are pinning their weak case on the allegation that he was wearing a balaclava.

Why it is Alfie is being charged with violence and disorder while the policeman who nearly killed him is free to continue carrying a baton, to abuse, attack and potentially kill with no repercussions?

The answer is clear. By prosecuting Alfie Meadows and others for violent disorder, while extending legal protection to the truly violent police, they are sending out a clear message that anyone challenging the might of the state is a legitimate target for police violence and legal repression.

We cannot allow these attempts to scare protesters into silence to go unchallenged. We must all rally to support Alfie Meadows and the other victims of police brutality. This is a campaign against repression and a fight for justice - we demand the prosecution of the police officers responsible for Alfie's life-threatening injuries and those responsible for deaths in custody.

Youth: at the sharp end of Tory Britain

KD Tait

TWO YEARS of Tory Britain has taken its toll on young people. Unemployment stands at 20 per cent and rising; for Black youth the figure is pushing 50 per cent. University fees have tripled, Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) has gone, and unpaid workfare is the only option for a million youth without jobs, education or training.

Recent figures show that one in five students who have graduated since 2010 are out of work. Of all those who have graduated in the previous six years, 36 per cent are in unskilled jobs such as call centres, retail and bar work, while 15 per cent remain unemployed.

With the UK back in recession, statistics like these should worry all young people - in the universities, in the schools and the workfare it's become clear that attacks on young people are part of a systematic drive to make us pay for an economic crisis we didn't cause.

Expose workfare whitewash

Unpaid, compulsory work continues to be forced on young jobseekers, despite government claims that there are no sanctions for those who refused to be farmed out as disposable labour to rich corporations. While Tesco's was congratulating itself over its PR whitewash, it was business as usual for Jobcentres, who

are continuing to funnel young people into 'Mandatory Work Activity', which lasts for up to eight weeks.

A Freedom of Information request has revealed that far from reforming the systematic exploitation of the unemployed, the government is taking its revenge by imposing compulsory 'work experience' on those who refuse 'voluntary work experience'.

The government thought it had seen off the issue by scrapping the penalty (docking two weeks' benefit) for those who didn't complete the voluntary scheme. In reality, those jobseekers are then just shunted into compulsory schemes, where the failure to complete the eight-week course means your benefits can be suspended for between three and six months. The reality is that the government has no intention of scrapping workfare, and it has no intention of delivering a genuine plan to address the mounting crisis of youth unemployment.

Instead of long-term, secure, well-paid jobs, the Coalition wants to impose measures that will create a labour market more suitable to the liking of Britain's bosses - temporary and precarious with poverty wages.

Youth are being attacked from every angle, and with virtually no collective organisation, victories are few and far between. But the recent occupations of stores in Ireland against

compulsory redundancies and the Primark workers, vote for strike action against a pay freeze show that resistance is possible in sectors with little history of struggle.

Low pay - no way

While raising the minimum wage by a miserly 11p, the government has frozen the minimum wage for those under 21. This means that 16 and 17 year-olds earn just £3.68 an hour and 18 to 20 year-olds only £4.98 per hour. With inflation, the wages of young workers will have lost nearly 10% of their value during the recession.

The freeze on the lower rate was welcomed by the bosses' organisations, which recognised it would allow them to squeeze bigger profits out of young workers. The lower rate is a disgrace - allowing bosses to pay some employees up to 60 per cent less for doing the same job as colleagues a few years older.

A mass of low-paid, untrained and desperate young workers will act as a downward pressure on wages and intensify competition for jobs - all of which benefit the bosses. General secretary of the TUC Brendan Barber said: "There is now a real danger that young people will view minimum wage work as exploitative." He's absolutely right - but he's not doing anything about it.

Nevertheless, drawing in trade union support will be vital to building a campaign, which can organise



successful resistance to the prospect of another Tory-inflicted lost generation. The protests in November 2010 and August 2011 have convinced increasing numbers of youth that actions speak louder than words. It is only a matter of time before

young people once again take a lead in turning opposition into resistance.

The politics of austerity have failed. Now is the time for an alternative - we demand equal pay and decent jobs. Expose workfare whitewash - Equal pay for equal work!

THE ANTI-CUT

As we approach the second anniversary of the Coalition government coming to office, the Workers Power 2012 conference reviewed the movement against austerity – not from the viewpoint of passively recording history, but in order to build on our strengths, overcome our weaknesses and chart a path forward.

Since coming to power in 2010, the Tory/Lib Dem Coalition government has launched systematic attacks on the public sector and welfare state, aiming to transfer wealth from poor to rich and kick-start economic growth by opening up previously protected areas of the economy through privatisation. They began with more vulnerable sectors i.e. those without high levels of organisation or unionisation, or those they thought unlikely to resist.

Services for the disabled and the elderly, as well as funding for charities and other not-for-profit organisations, were the first to come under the axe. Local council funding was slashed, leading to a wider impact on local services such as libraries and leisure centres. Most councils, however, held back from attacking large sections of its public sector workers at the beginning.

Students were next in the firing line, as the government took deliberate steps towards privatising higher education. The government expected that the NUS, certainly post-Governance Review, would mount no serious resistance. They were right to expect this, but failed to anticipate the potential for an alternative leadership, developed through the strategy proposed by left groups, intersecting with the spontaneous anger and militancy of hundreds of thousands of youth.

Despite the speed at which this movement developed, the political awareness of the leading activists did not develop to the point where it continued to fight the attacks after the parliamentary vote. The teaching unions limited their support mainly to words, as well as some practical assistance in the occupations. Without combining the militancy of the students with the industrial power of the workers meant that the fightback was limited and quickly waned.

However, despite its failure, this movement politicised another generation of youth and educated them in struggle. It was an excellent example of how a struggle can erupt against a government 'reform' and become a real mass movement through the student assemblies and forming a united front with student leaders and other left forces (National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, the London Assembly). Such bold initiatives are a vital part of what even small socialist groups can do – "a sharp axe hews heavy beams". There are always objective limits, however, particularly when applied to trade unions where

the bureaucracy is a very heavy beam to chop through. Moreover, the single-issue nature of the campaign, initially a strength, became a limitation once parliament passed the reforms.

Union response

As the attacks on the public sector escalated, outlined in the Spending Review announced on October 2010, pressure mounted on the TUC to hold a demonstration against the cuts. They purposely called a march for six months later, on 26 March 2011, but this call was met with an overwhelming response as trade unions, as well as anti-cuts organisations, mobilising half a million people onto the streets.

This was followed with national strike action three months later on 30 June (J30) and another five months later this action was escalated into 30 November (N30). Between the two strikes, the teaching and civil service unions tried to form a wider coalition around the defence of public sector pensions, focusing on persuading other unions to vote at the TUC for a coordinated strike.

The debate at this congress focused on whether to pick pensions or the NHS as the big issue. The decision of the TUC to launch strikes limited to the issue of pensions at a time when the whole working class faces unprecedented austerity meant that only public sector workers were mobilised and this lowered the horizons of those taking part.

The pensions issue was picked over the NHS because the trade union movement could launch legal and what they consider to be 'well-supported' strikes. A TUC strike over the NHS would have entailed illegal and more overtly political strikes, and involved those outside the trade union movement. In addition, the TUC made a conscious decision not to strike over three pressing issues – pensions, pay and jobs – at the same time and, importantly, not to add privatisation to that list.

N30 was possibly the largest strike since 1926 and motivated huge numbers of public sector workers to fight back in defence of their pension, but after N30 the right wing union leaderships pulled out of the fight and signed up to the sell-out. This gave the "refusenik" union leaders the opportunity to duck the fight, so that only London NUT and UCU members were out on strike on 28 March (see page 6 for more analysis on the pensions dispute).

Alongside the students and work-



ers waging battles against specific cuts, #Occupy has raised the idea of general resistance to cuts and capitalism, and the summer riots exploded in reaction to the general impoverishment being imposed on the working class and unemployed, as well as the criminalisation – and brutal repression – of young people.

The revolutions in the Middle East also brought ideas about democracy and civil rights, as well as using mass resistance to fight for these goals. The general strikes across Europe got less positive coverage in Britain and certainly with regard to Greece were framed as an argument about what realistic options there were for various countries and how their actions would impact on "our" economy. However, there was still broad support for these movements and they were certainly inspiring.

#Occupy seems to have been demobilised by cold weather and evictions, but the Egyptian struggle is far from over and we could see a further uprising. If this does happen then we can be sure that the media coverage of

it won't be quite so positive as before, but we can expect many of those who took inspiration from the first stage of that revolution to continue to support it and perhaps learn from the Egyptian working class and youth.

Fragmentation of the movement

Despite the enormous potential demonstrated by the student and workers' struggles, and the politicisation brought about by the Egyptian revolution and the subsequent #Occupy movement, the anti-cuts movement in Britain remains fragmented.

All the anti-cuts issues – education fees, disability and other benefits, funding for local services and charities for youth, women and minorities, the NHS, etc. – remain either sectionally divided or at best are only locally coordinated. Local anti-cuts committees remain at best gatherings of activists rather than the delegate-based councils of action we need. They are largely limited to small local demos, symbolic occupations or supporting local trade unionists' or

services users' struggles. Important as this is, it does not constitute a wave of mass resistance.

The Socialist Party's (SP) initiative, the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), existed before the economic crisis and was a vehicle for creating a broad left alliance across the unions and gaining influence in those unions where they don't yet have members. Early on this network did involve activists beyond the SP until they tried to launch a separate anti-cuts campaign; those outside the SP left in protest, arguing for unity with existing anti-cuts campaigns.

The Socialist Workers Party's (SWP) first campaign was Right to Work (RtW), which was established around the problem of rising unemployment at the start of the crisis but has since taken on a broader remit and focuses on organising protests at Lib Dem and Conservative party conferences with varied success. It recently received media attention around the anti-workfare protests.

Counterfire established Coalition of Resistance (CoR) as an attempt to

How we can save the NHS



Workers Power conference debated and passed another resolution specifically on the fight to stop the destruction of the NHS, recognising the political importance of this struggle

THE NHS Bill has been pushed through the House of Commons with a sizable majority of 80 – without a campaign of mass demonstrations and strikes against the bill. In addition, the Lib Dems did not split and splinter as they did under the student mobilisations. The near-complete inaction of the national unions and Keep Our NHS Public (KONP) campaign, with only one lobby on 7 March, contrasts with the widespread acknowledgement – even among Tory MPs – that the NHS could be the Coalition's poll tax.

The responsibility for this terrible blow to the working class lies squarely with the union bureaucracy. The unions, particularly Unite under Len McCluskey, have been happy to pump money into the liberal KONP campaign so long as it maintains a focus on pressuring MPs and Lords.

A mass campaign against Andrew Lansley's Health Bill, in the context of the unresolved pension struggle, would have increased demands from below to revive the N30 movement, and the possibility of industrial and political struggles flowing into one another, threatening the union tops' iron grip on the move-

ment. Thus the TUC and unions avoided even the obvious tactic of a second 26 March mass demonstration focused on the NHS.

One alternative is that a mass movement now develops, launched "from above" or assembled through a series of local grassroots struggles against cuts to the NHS. However, another alternative also exists – that such a massive attack on a key popular institution goes through without a serious fight and creates a wave of demoralisation and dampens struggle, particularly in the context of the pension sell-out.

As socialists, our point of departure has to be identifying the possibilities of a mass movement in defence of the NHS, and take initiatives such as drawing up and circulating trade union model motions and agitating in meetings for such a movement to come into existence. We need to be putting forward the slogans and tactics to make resistance as effective as possible and lead the movement into a direct confrontation with the government.

There are positive signs of struggle: the deep unpopularity of the bill has forced Labour increasingly to come out against it, indicating it will make the NHS its main campaign

issue for the coming election and that it will repeal the bill once in office. Local vigils called by Labour are likely to be followed by participation in campaigns against cuts and closure, as activists and union officials are given the green light to campaign on this safe issue.

The anti-cuts movement, union militants and the left should demand that the labour movement calls a national demonstration, and begin to organise it themselves through unions, KONP and anti-cuts groups. The lobby of parliament on 7 March was well attended by trade unionists, as well as NHS campaigners, which shows the potential to develop such pressure.

While the campaign for a national demonstration should be raised in the unions, anti-cuts groups and local KONP groups, ultimately local delegate-based action committees involving all those organisations against NHS privatisation, as the basis for a delegate-based national coordinating body, are the way to unleash a truly poll tax-style movement of mass action and strikes.

A mass movement around the NHS, an issue that affects the whole working class and sections of the middle classes, has real potential to

force the unity of the anti-cuts movement into a Stop the War-style coalition. The NHS could be the issue that unites the anti-cuts movement or establishes a mass movement that transcends its current fragmentation and transforms it into a genuine national movement. Even without a national movement, struggle will begin and intensify over the coming months and years as cuts, closures and privatisation all lead to deteriorating healthcare and increased anger. The Whittington Hospital demonstration in 2010 shows what sort of response these attacks could meet – with the unions and whole communities mobilised in defence of public services, alongside local Labour activists.

In this context, strike action against attacks on jobs, pay and working conditions, as part of the mass movement, is a key feature of resistance. Local strikes by health workers, backed by the public, could begin to redevelop a militant anti-cuts movement and provide the basis to launch a national united campaign and ultimately a national health strike. While this might be illegal, depending on the degree of fragmentation of the health service at the time, such a strike would meet

with mass support among wide sections of the population.

Following on from this, socialists should argue that the NHS is a class-wide attack and that ultimately requires a class-wide response using our strongest weapon – the ability to shut down production, grind society to a halt and run its essential aspects under workers' control. Cameron's push to get the bill through parliament despite its unpopularity shows the Tories determination to slash and burn the welfare state and leave it fatally damaged by the time of the 2015 election.

The workers movement has shown it can mount mass action with N30. If it can develop a rank and file movement across the unions, bolstered by public support, the NHS movement could help develop the industrial struggle too, and ultimately the basis for generalised strike action against all the cuts. Just like the poll tax movement got rid of Thatcher and had the potential to kick the Tories out completely in the 1990s, the NHS will remain a radicalising feature of the class struggle in Britain and provides the same potential to bring down the Tories.

Sri Lanka: a new party?

In the aftermath of Rajapakse's victory in his war against the Tamils, the JVP, the supposedly Marxist party that backed him, has split apart. Peter Main outlines the history behind the split and the prospects it has created.

THE SPLIT in the JVP opens up the potential for a regeneration of the entire working class movement in Sri Lanka. Ever since the defeat of the general strike in 1980, the movement has been fragmented and effectively paralysed. More than 1700 unions represent less than 2 million workers, there is no central trade union confederation and no workers' party. The long-standing oppression of the Tamils, in which the JVP played a scandalous role, has created inter-communal tensions that will not easily be overcome.

The Movement for People's Struggle, MPS, is undoubtedly a left split away from the JVP. Although it is yet to publish its new programme, its leaders have spoken of the need for a new party that will be a "party of the Left" committed not only to open collaboration with other left groups but opposed, in principle, to coalition with bourgeois parties. They have also rejected Sinhala chauvinism and have made it clear that they are conducting an internal debate over the right of self-determination of the Tamils.

It is these, apparently fundamental, changes in political principle and strategy that could allow a re-alignment, possibly even a re-unification, of the workers' movement.

However, this is still very far from guaranteed. This is not the first time that the JVP or, more properly, the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Bolshevik), has tried to resurrect itself in the aftermath of disaster caused by its own political strategies. The danger now is that the MPS will do no more than rejuvenate that tradition in yet another reorientation, this time towards a more "democratic" and working class strategy.

For some on the Sri Lankan left, this is virtually a foregone conclusion. However, the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka, the section of the League for the Fifth International, believes that it is necessary to take every possible opportunity to convince the MPS, in particular its rank and file, and even the rank and file still in the JVP, to complete the break with their past strategy and work towards the founding of a new workers' party.

Indeed, recognising that this is a strategic need for the working class in Sri Lanka, the SPSL has pursued a united front policy, even towards the JVP and its unions, for several years. While the JVP was in government with Rajapakse we demanded that its trade unions fight to defend their members' interests against government economic policy. When the JVP split, we welcomed the formation of the MPS and worked together with it on the symbolic convoy from Colombo to Jaffna and in the newly formed Committee Against Abductions and Disappearances.

In response to the MPS' decision to found a new party, we have published an Open Letter to the whole of the Sri Lankan left and working

fifthinternational.org



class movement. In it we propose a conference to launch a campaign throughout the country to found not a new organisation for the 5,000 who have left the JVP, but a new workers' party based on the mass organisations, primarily the trade unions. Through this campaign the programme and organisational statutes of a new party can be widely discussed in preparation for a national conference to adopt drafts that could, after further discussion, be adopted at a founding congress.

For our part, we have proposed our existing Action Programme, which applies the strategy of Permanent Revolution to Sri Lanka, as the programmatic basis for a new party. We have urged other left groups to formulate in writing their own strategies for achieving socialism on the island. We are, of course, prepared to amend our programme in the light of developments and proposals from other groups. Provided any new party recognises the rights of minorities within it, we would be prepared to implement majority decisions with which we disagreed, providing they were not in themselves unprincipled.

As we say in the Open Letter, the supremacy of the Rajapakse clan

"has opened the way for the imposition of a model of development in which the prosperity of the few is to be ensured through a low-wage economy and Free Trade Zones, while the country itself becomes a pawn in the rivalry between China and India."

If such a development is to be avoided, the fight against it must have as its strategic goal not a period of stable democratic capitalist development, but the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' and farmers' government committed to socialist development and the internationalisation of the revolution to create a Federation of Workers' States of South Asia.

The twists and turns of the JVP

The Janath Vimukthi Peramu [JVP], is a product of the decay of the Stalinist movement after the split between Beijing and Moscow in the early Sixties. Its founder, Rohana Wijeweera, was influenced by both Mao and Guevara and developed a strategy in which a new party, the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Bolshevik) would mobilise the youth of the majority Sinhalese community via this militarised political front

organisation.

The name, which means National Liberation Movement, expressed Wijeweera's belief that imperialism was planning to re-assert control via an Indian invasion supported by the "Indian Tamils", that is the descendants of those transported from India by the British to work the tea plantations.

The JVP was presented as the revolutionary alternative to the "old left", the Lanka Sama Samaj Party, LSSP, (Fourth International) and the Communist Party, that had entered into coalition government with Sirimavo Bandaranaike of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, SLFP, in 1964.

By 1971, Wijeweera was ready to implement his strategy. The rising began on April 5th (to honour the Paris Commune of 1871) but was crushed with ferocious barbarity by the Bandaranaike government, leaving as many as 20,000, mostly youthful, fighters dead, and as many again interned.

The terrible defeat prompted a revision of the JVP's strategy. It criticised its previous positions as "Menshevik". The new General Secretary, Lionel Bopage, supported the right of self-determination of the Tamils

and the party oriented towards the urban working class as well as the rural masses. In the late Seventies, it collaborated, briefly, with the Neva Sama Samaj Party, NSSP, the reformed Fourth International section and other Left forces but then turned against them in the general strike of 1980, thus assisting the government in breaking the strike.

In 1983, the JVP participated in communal riots that led to the UNP government banning all the Left parties. The JVP responded by turning to guerrilla warfare against the "threat" of Indian occupation and against the Left who supported the Tamils' rights. Some 60,000 died in their campaign, which only ended when state forces liquidated virtually the entire JVP leadership; reputedly only one of whom survived.

Once again, a new leadership adopted a new strategy; a turn to electoral politics and alliances and renewal of working class organisations. During the Nineties, this slowly revived the party's fortunes. Once again, Sinhala chauvinism was the principal policy against a UNP government that was prepared to strike a deal with the bourgeois Tamil forces and India against the separatism of the Tamil Tigers.

In the elections of 2001, the JVP won 16 seats. In April 2004, it won 39 as part of an alliance with President Chandrika Kumaratunga's SLFP. In the Presidential election of 2005, it backed Mahinda Rajapakse of the SLFP on an anti-Tamil programme. When Rajapakse won that election, the JVP were rewarded with four cabinet posts and enthusiastically supported the most barbaric offensive against the North and East, which were under the control of the Tamil Tigers.

Bizarre as it might seem, there were many within the party, including in the politburo, who still saw participation in government as a prelude to revolution. Despite the Sinhala chauvinism, collaboration with Rajapakse was not popular with working class JVP supporters. To retain their support, the party began to distance itself and, in April 2008, instructed its parliamentary fraction to vote against the Budget in order to force a general election.

However, 10 JVP MP's disobeyed and kept Rajapakse in office. This overt split led the party to support the Head of the Army, Sarath Fonseka, when he proposed to stand against Rajapakse in the Presidential election of 2009. This was completely thwarted by the arrest and imprisonment of their new found ally. The final act in the drama was the annihilation of the JVP in the parliamentary elections of April 2010 when they lost 70% of their seats.

It was against this background that members of the politburo led the split in the JVP that resulted in some 5,000 leaving to form the Movement for People's Struggle, MPS.

Blood on your iPhone

Peter Main

A REPORT by the Fair Labor Association into working conditions at three plants in China that supply Apple with iPads and iPhones has confirmed gross violations of Chinese labour law and unacceptable management practices.

The plants are owned by the Taiwanese corporation Foxconn and Apple finally agreed to call in the FLA after two well-documented reports published by the Hong Kong-based campaign group SACOM revealed the conditions which had driven 15 workers to suicide.

The FLA report found unsafe working conditions, with 43 per cent of workers having witnessed accidents at work. Excessive overtime meant that 46 per cent of workers worked more than 70 hours a week, although the legal limit is 49. Between November and January, 33 per cent of workers had not even had their statutory entitlement of at least one day off per week! Worse still, overtime is paid in 30 minute increments and workers are often told to stop just before completion of an increment.

A particular concern raised by earlier reports was the misuse of “internships” in which young students are “given” work placements in Foxconn, often with the collusion of local government and education institutions. The students were found to be working the same shifts as other workers, including nights, in a flagrant breach of legal limitations.

Despite these revelations, and Apple’s assurances that it will ensure implementation of all the report’s recommendations, there are still grounds for serious concern about the real conditions in Foxconn’s plants. As SACOM has pointed out, Apple provides financial support to the FLA and this immediately puts in question its impartiality. Although the FLA described its inspection as a “full body scan” lasting one month, which sounds impressive, it actually only covered three plants, employing 178,000 workers. Foxconn has plants all over China and employs some 1.2 million in all.

Moreover, Foxconn had advance warning of visits and ample opportunity to prepare both the plants and the workers to present as good an

impression as possible. By contrast, a third report by an international team of university researchers, soon to be published by SACOM, was based on 14 plants over 18 months during which some researchers worked at the plants and lived with the workers. This found not only widespread breaches of labour laws, collusion between Foxconn and local authorities and dangerous working conditions, but also far more extensive use of student workers and the effective elimination of a well-publicised wage increase through increased deductions and higher production targets. There have also been more suicides.

In March, Apple announced that it was to pay a dividend to shareholders for the first time since 1995 in order to bring its cash reserves of \$97.6 billion down to \$87.6 billion. That mountain of past profits is a direct measure of the exploitation of the Chinese labour force that make its products. No amount of slick publicity and expressions of concern for workers’ welfare can obscure the reality that Apple relies on the systematic mistreatment of the workforce.



China: No coup - many plots?

Peter Main

ON 19 MARCH, China awoke to widespread rumours of a coup in Beijing. The internet was alive with tales of troop movements, artillery fire in the capital and splits in the ruling Communist Party. Within hours it was clear that there was no coup, but every reason to believe that the splits are real enough.

Clues to disagreements in the party-state apparatus can only be found indirectly from possibly unconnected reports and events. What is not in doubt is that the party leadership, currently under President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, is going to be changed at the 18th Party Congress in November. It

has been taken for granted for at least a couple of years that they will be replaced by Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, respectively.

Equally predictable, it was thought, was the rise of Bo Xilai, the head of the Party in Chongqing, onto the nine person Standing Committee of the Politburo – the actual ruling body in China. However, on 14 March, Bo was sacked from his post, apparently as a result of an attempt by Chongqing’s police chief, Wang Lijun, to seek political asylum in a US consulate. His application was rejected and he was reportedly handed over to the Chinese authorities.

Since then, it has been suggested that he has revealed plans for a coup,

led by Bo, to be staged next spring. A further twist in this curious tale came with a request from Britain for the re-opening of inquiries into the death of Neil Heywood, a British businessman (or should that be “businessman”?) who had links to Gu Kailai, a wealthy lawyer in Chongqing – and the wife of Bo Xilai.

The plot thickened when rumours began to circulate that Zhou Yongkang, a member of the Standing Committee, head of the country’s police system, controller of the state oil industry and a known ally of Bo, has also been removed from office.

Is there a connection between all these events? Is it significant that all of these figures have links to Jiang Zemin, the previous President? His

policies were largely set aside by the current leadership who are thought to favour the free-wheeling capitalism of Shanghai rather than the more state-supervised model associated with Jiang and the armed forces. Indeed, are the armed forces themselves flexing their muscles as China’s imperialist appetite becomes clearer?

Or is the whole web of stories and rumours simply a product of a conspiracy by China’s enemies, orchestrated by the hysterically anti-Marxist, US-backed Falungong cult and its newspaper Epoch Times? It was banned and its members severely repressed in 1997, when Jiang Zemin was President.

Whatever the details, what is clear is that there are serious factional divi-

sions within the Communist Party. Because the party has opened its doors to capitalists at the same time as transforming previously state-owned industries into capitalist corporations, the contending interests of different capital blocs now clash within the Party itself. The continued slowing of manufacturing industry and the prospect of a collapse in the real estate markets, which would create serious difficulties in the banking sector, are focusing minds on strategic policy issues. Those issues will have to be settled by the new leadership to be installed in November and that is why the internal disputes are now so sharp that they are beginning to be visible in public.

Portugal’s resistance needs unity and radicalism

Joana Pinto

ON 22 MARCH Portugal witnessed its second general strike in less than four months. To a British audience this might seem remarkable but with an expanding austerity programme and soaring unemployment it was no more than could be expected. However, this month’s general strike saw lower numbers taking part, with the main trade union central CGTP not being able to mobilize private sector workers to come out with their public sector colleagues.

The reason for this phenomenon is simple; the private sector is still more stable than the ever shrink-

ing Portuguese public sector, jobs are more secure, and in an political and economic environment like Portugal’s there is a great fear of losing one’s job over even a day’s strike.

The lower level, and slower pace of resistance led a recent *Guardian* article to call Portugal the “teacher’s pet to Greece’s rebel”. There is an element of truth in this; the strike was not nearly as radical or as big as it should have been.

Yet, it would be wrong to place the blame on workers either private or public. Divisions between the unions are dogging the fightback.

Portuguese comrades from the Platform 150 (a grassroots organi-

sation uniting activists and the organised left) told Workers Power how, while the main demonstration of the day was called for 4pm, the CGTP (which is openly controlled by the Portuguese Communist Party – PCP) called its own march, with the same route, starting two hours earlier.

What is worse, some members of the Left Bloc – a new left party – decided at the last minute to abandon the original plan to protest alongside the 4pm demo and join the sectarian ranks of the trade union bureaucrats. Thankfully, younger members of both Left Bloc and Platform 150 were able to bring everyone back together in time to join

arms against the increasingly violent riot police. If they had not done this the consequences of the day’s police brutality could have been even worse than four people with multiple head injuries.

The state of affairs in the Portuguese left is worrying. This shows how seriously out of tune the PCP and certain wings of the Left Bloc are from the general population. The demonstrators’ numbers were low, as were the numbers on strike.

If Portugal is to get out of its crisis there is only one way forward. That is unity and radicalism. It is a path that requires the mobilisation and organisation of the unemployed, the

precarious workers, the pensioners, the civil servants and the private sector. The way out of the crisis that the capitalists are trying to make the people pay for is defiance of the anti-union laws that restrict general strikes to harmless one-day events.

Portugal cannot afford to be the teacher’s pet any longer. In fact, it needs to go much further than Greece in its rebellion. The next strike Portugal should stop the country indefinitely and bring the government to its knees. It should create a government, based on the workers’ organisations of struggle, which can fulfill workers’ demands and put an end to capitalism for good.

Spanish general strike unites millions against austerity

By Kady Tait

The 29 March one-day general strike witnessed massive participation across Spain as millions rallied to the unions' call to resist government attacks on fundamental workplace rights.

After three years of vicious austerity, 5.3 million people, a quarter of the workforce, and 50 per cent of young people are unemployed. Spain has entered a second recession in the same period, one that can only deepen as a result of these massive cuts. Against this backdrop, popular anger exploded on the streets of Spain's major cities - with up to a million people occupying Madrid's Plaza del Sol.

Workers, unemployed and young people were determined to voice their opposition to further and more savage cuts. The strike came on right-wing Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's 100th day in power - the day before his People's Party (PP) announced €22.5 billion worth of cuts to jobs, wages and public services.

In addition, "reforms" to labour regulations shift the balance of power decisively in favour of the bosses - making it easier to sack workers, cut wages and worsen employment conditions. These reforms are the opening salvo in a campaign to demolish Spain's welfare state and the four million jobs reliant on it.

The strike saw the biggest turnout for many years. The leader of the UGT union federation put average participation at 77 per cent, rising to 97 per cent in industry with practically all workers at Nissan, Renault, SEAT, Ford and Volkswagen car factories out. 85 per cent of food workers were striking, backed up by early-morning flying pickets that blockaded wholesale markets, transport depots and drove off police protecting scab workers.

After a huge grassroots mobilisation from ordinary union members, reinforced by students and unem-



ployed workers' organisations, the strike reached deep into most sectors of the economy. Electricity use was down 20 per cent and 30 per cent of private bank employees joined the action. Students organised to block major roads into Madrid and Barcelona, strengthening the overall impact of the strike.

Friday's budget was delayed to avoid antagonising voters during regional elections, but voters knew what was coming: the PP saw its vote drop between 5-10 per cent and in some places it was kicked into third place.

The cuts are nothing short of devastating: €22.5 billion come on top of the €15 billion slashed in December's emergency budget - amounting to a further 17 per cent cut to each department. Public sector workers who still have their jobs will see their wages frozen, piling on the pain from previous pay cuts and inflation which are demolishing their purchasing-power. Gas and electricity bills will rise 5 per cent and

7 per cent - the sole aim of this budget is to make ordinary Spaniards pay for a crisis they didn't cause.

While Thursday's mass protests, and the violent clashes with police seen in southern cities, reflect the deep anger against the PP's pro-market, pro-banker and pro-rich policies, there is also huge anger against the EU and 'international bond markets', which many people are starting to recognise as the real puppet-masters pulling Rajoy's strings.

Many Spaniards are questioning why their country, which has not yet been bailed out by the EU, is being made to suffer an austerity which is deeper, faster and more painful than austerity plans imposed on bailed-out countries like Portugal and Ireland.

It's true that Rajoy, like Zapatero before him, is carrying out the economic policies demanded by an economic elite who insist that the debt crisis is resolved by cutting jobs and services, rather than making the profiteering speculators, moneylenders and

hedge-fund managers pay for their own crisis.

It's also true that it was the manic austerity policies started by the previous "socialist" PSOE government, and continued by Rajoy, that plunged Spain into a double-dip recession. The raising of the pension age, the 15 per cent public-sector wage cuts, and other 'belt-tightening' measures mirror the attacks that the Con-Dem government is trying to impose on workers in Britain.

However, the reason why Rajoy's government has stressed its refusal to compromise is that it recognises that an EU bailout of Spain would provoke a serious crisis for the entire EU project. The Spanish economy is bigger than the combined economies of Greece, Ireland and Spain. A bailout of Spain or Italy would require austerity on a scale dwarfing the attacks seen so far - forcing France and Germany to kick bankrupt countries out of the EU rather than attempting to make their own populations fund further bailouts.

The terrible social and economic consequences of austerity measures that place paying back corrupt bankers above defending employment, housing and healthcare rights are plain to see in Spain and Greece. They are a stark forecast of what lies in store for the working classes of Britain, France and Germany.

The international financiers and speculators are not prepared to take a hit on their loans - the Greek solution cannot be applied to Spain. The national and EU politicians who represent these capitalists are neither willing nor able to compromise on austerity.

Resistance is widening and deepening, as workers with their backs to the wall find the only option is to fight back or go under. The capitalist governments are committed to driving back every social advance in order to feed the insatiable debt markets.

The massive general strike shows that Spanish workers and youth are not buying the lie that 'we're all in this together'. But, to win, they need to go beyond the failed strategy of one-day protest strikes.

The huge mobilisations must now develop a strategy for victory. By organising the millions of dispossessed, frightened and angry workers into councils of action, the Spanish people can force their union leaders to fight back or face becoming irrelevant.

Councils of action, drawing in grassroots union members alongside the precarious youth and unemployed, can unite opposition behind a strategy to stop the bosses' attacks in their tracks - by launching an all-out general strike to refuse austerity and bring down the government.

These councils can form the basis for a workers' government, placing power in the hands of the millions and preventing the return of another pro-capitalist party with a different name but the same policy of making the millions pay for the millionaires' crisis.

Italy: resistance mounts against Monti

By Dave Stockton

Italian workers have downed tools as political opposition grows to labour reforms. Unelected Italian Prime Minister, Mario Monti, is facing serious opposition to his plans to "free up" labour contracts. In fact, as with similar "reforms" in Spain, his aim is to allow employers to sack workers with near-impunity, as they can in Britain.

The reforms amend Article 18 in the labour code, which obliges employers found to have unjustly sacked workers to rehire them. The measures follow hard on the heels of austerity measures and cuts to pensions.

Monti claims that the measures will "create a dynamic, flexible and

inclusive labour market, one able to contribute to the country's economic growth, create good working conditions, stimulate development of businesses".

In reality, they are a massive attack on the rights, living standards and working conditions of Italian workers. Their aim is not only to give bosses the right to sack even more workers but to break the well-organised sectors like the metal workers of the FIOM and to slash real wages even further.

After four months of a relatively easy ride, thanks to the support of all the main parties, including the Democratic Party, and the passivity of the main union federations, Monti is now beginning to face a mounting wave

of resistance.

On 22 March, FIOM, the metalworkers' section of the six million strong CGIL, the largest and one of the more militant of the Italian union federations, launched a countrywide day of action in protest against the attacks on labour rights.

Factories struck in the Milan area. In La Spezia and Genoa, workers from shipbuilder Fincantieri struck and occupied their factories. In Pisa, strikers at the Piaggio factory blocked the Florence-Pisa-Livorno motorway. In the far south, workers took action at the petrochemical plants of Priolo, Melilli and Augusta in Sicily, at the Indesit plant in Caserta, near Naples, and at factories in Taranto in the heel of Italy.

'Precarious' contract workers demonstrated outside Monti's office in the Palazzo Chigi, in Rome, to expose his claims that his reforms will create more full-time jobs. More than 30 per cent of 18 to 24-year olds in Italy are unemployed, and only about 57 per cent of Italians have a job, one of the lowest employment rates in the euro zone.

The protests were accompanied by a call from the CGIL for a national stoppage - 16 hours of rolling strikes. Under pressure to back down from the media, the CGIL's first woman secretary general, Susanna Camusso, said: "There is no element that makes us go back on this decision. On the contrary, it must be reinforced." At first,

the less militant federations, the CISL and the UIL, supported the "reform". Now, all three have agreed to a joint national demonstration on April 16 and the UIL metalworkers' section (UILM) has promised a four-hour national stoppage.

Clearly there is a developing mass pressure from below on the union bureaucracies. Nevertheless, they are trying to divide the forces of the working class and divert them into a series of half-day, or one-day actions that will not be enough to force Monti to back down.

As in Greece, Spain and Portugal, only an all out strike can stop these savage attacks on trade union rights and social gains, and drive the austerity regime from power.

The Socialist position on the Malvinas War

Thirty years on from Britain's imperialist adventure against Argentina that became known as the Falklands War, the British establishment prepares - amid renewed tensions over the status of the islands properly called the Malvinas - to celebrate their subjugation of the semi-colonial country that dared to challenge them. In this reprint of a *Workers Power* Q&A from May 1982, many important arguments are presented which provide not only interesting historical reading, but also real and lasting lessons for socialists struggling against imperialism to this day.

You socialists talk a lot about "democratic rights", but what about the rights of the Falkland Islanders? Don't we defend their right to live where they are and under what regime they choose?

The Falkland Islanders are not a distinct nation with their own culture, tradition and language. Their hold on the Falkland Islands depends on the power and commitment of British imperialism to hold on to these South American islands. In fact, they are all British settlers who were moved into the Malvinas after they were seized by the British from Argentina in 1833.

They have never expressed their desire to exercise any "rights of self-determination", i.e. to become an independent state. Of course, in practice this would be impossible for 1800 people on an isolated island. Their practical dependence on Argentina has already been demonstrated. It was the soldiers of Argentina who built the only airstrip on the islands, which has now been blown up by the British. It was the Argentine air force which provided the only air services to the islands, Argentine hospitals which provided for the seriously ill, and Argentine colleges which provided the only route to higher education for the islanders.

What the islanders have declared in favour of is remaining part of the British Empire. Socialists can have no truck with this desire. To do so would allow every group of British settlers, or British citizens who benefit from imperialism to continue to occupy someone else's territory.

The Malvinas are South American islands, claimed by Argentina as early as 1820 after her struggle for independence from Spain and settled by her.

The British settlers have two choices: either to live under Argentine rule and - we would hope - join with their fellow Argentinian workers and small farmers in the fight to overthrow the dictatorship; or to

leave the islands for somewhere of their own choosing.

But doesn't support for Argentina mean supporting a fascist junta that is an even more ferocious enemy of the working class than Margaret Thatcher?

Not at all. We support the demands of the Argentinian people against British imperialism, not the junta that is trying to solve its own crisis by fighting for those demands.

The blood-stained junta hoped it would deflect attention away from the 13 per cent unemployment and 130 per cent inflation through a diversionary action that was certain to be popular with the masses. They hoped that exercising their rights over the Malvinas would head off mounting opposition from the working class.

However, the junta has met with resistance. Its invasion of the Malvinas was popular, but it has not made the tyrannical junta itself popular with the masses.

Demonstrations in Buenos Aires have called the anti-imperialist credentials of the junta into question. Peronist forces in the unions have openly taken to the streets with their own banners and slogans. The left has been able to distribute leaflets and papers against the junta and for Argentina's right to the Malvinas.

Under pressure, the junta, which is committed to the imperialists' stranglehold over the economy, was forced to block the repatriation of foreign profits and halt the removal of foreign investments on 21 April.

The nationalist sentiments of the masses, which the junta is trying to exploit, are rooted in the imperialised status of Argentina. The flag waving patriotism of the British, to the extent that it is not a media creation, is rooted in Britain's imperialist past - and present. The task we set ourselves is to drive a wedge between the workers and the junta, not to deny the rights of the Argentinian

people, even if these happen to be advocated by the junta at the moment.

The Argentinian workers can break with the junta by developing and extending the struggle against imperialism, including the struggle for the Malvinas. Anyone who say the Argentinian masses only have the right to fight British imperialism once they have dumped the junta is, whatever their claims, siding with the imperialists against the Argentine workers.

The workers of Argentina must take the opportunity the army gives them to take up arms and be trained in their use. They should take advantage of the present situation to strengthen and extend their own organisations. They should refuse to relinquish their arms when the junta feels its adventure has gone too far.

Against the 'anti-imperialist' junta of Galtieri, which is selling off state industry to international capital, they must fight for all imperialist holdings to be nationalised under the control of the workers themselves.

Of course, it is possible that the junta might win a victory in the Malvinas over Thatcher and leave Esso and Royal Dutch Shell unscathed. Such a victory would not be a lasting one for the workers of Argentina. It would still leave them under the heel of imperialism. But a defeat for Thatcher would weaken one of the major props of the junta and its like throughout Latin America. It would have served to arouse the workers themselves and weakened the base of the Galtieri regime.

But wouldn't a defeat for Argentina serve to weaken and undermine the blood-stained regime far more immediately and dramatically?

By no means. Firstly, it would be a significant and potentially highly demoralising defeat for the oppressed Argentinian masses themselves. Secondly, there is no shortage of potential pro-imperialist right-

wing dictators to take Galtieri's place should the masses be demoralised and beaten back by Thatcher's imperialist war machine.

Neither can we guarantee that the outcome would not be the chance for a Peron-type populist demagogue to come to power. Such a figure could use injured nationalism to further enslave the working class. A victory to Thatcher could even serve to tie the masses to the Galtieri regime.

Whatever the outcome of such a defeat, the oppressed masses of Argentina have nothing to gain from British victory. In fact, the whole question of the credentials of the Argentinian regime is a complete red herring from the Labourites.

There was no dearth of opportunities for Labour's leaders to attack the regime before the Malvinas crisis. But the last Labour government was supplying 30 per cent of the junta's arms between 1974 and 1976. Diplomatic relations were only broken because of friction over Britain's colony in the Malvinas - not because of Labour's anti-fascism.

Imperialism will always declare that its wars are directed against tyranny. Doesn't it claim that its nuclear arsenals are directed against the Russian dictatorship's threat to the 'freedom' and 'liberty' of the capitalist world? Didn't it claim that the Allende regime in Chile was undemocratic and unrepresentative? Wasn't the Vietnamese regime portrayed as being despotic and totalitarian when it took on the armed might of the US forces occupying Vietnam?

Supporting imperialism in the name of democracy pits Labour's anti-fascists behind the murderous Reagan/Thatcher war drive and against those struggling against oppression and exploitation at the hands of imperialism.

But wouldn't the best solution be to hand the question over to the UN? That way it would be out of the hands of both Thatcher and Galtieri?

No, it wouldn't be out of the hands of British imperialism. The UN was formed after the Second World War to replace the previous 'world organisation', the League of Nations, which Lenin described quite rightly as a "thieves kitchen of the imperialists".

The great imperialist powers, Britain, France and the US, together with the USSR and China, all have a complete veto over any actions that they think affect their direct interests. The Stalinists participate in the UN as part of their pursuance of a *modus vivendi* with imperialism, and are quite willing to sell out the interests of the oppressed nations if it suits their own purposes.

The history of the UN confirms that its major role has been settling disputes in the interest of imperialism.

In 1947-48 it played a major role in the setting up of the imperialist settler state of Israel, with the USSR voting in favour. In 1950, it acted as the collective armed force of western imperialism in the Korean War, at one time advancing across North Korea almost to the Chinese border, while its General Assemblies called for the unification of a capitalist Korea.

In 1960, the UN was used to intervene when Belgian imperialism was threatened in the Congo. It played a devious role in the secession of Katanga, a copper mining area of the Congo, only moving to end the rebellion when the Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, who was seeking aid from the Soviet Union, was removed and murdered. By the time UN forces left in 1964, the Congo was once again safe for imperialism, having been re-divided between Belgians and the US.

To hand over the Malvinas question to the UN would be to let the imperialists barter for which of them should have the biggest slice of the cake. The future of the Malvinas question is one for the Argentinian people to decide, not the collective arm of imperialism.

The murder of Trayvon Martin

By Simon Hardy

THE KILLING of 17 year-old black teenager Trayvon Martin by an armed Neighbourhood Watch man in Sanford near Orlando, Florida has sparked national outrage. George Zimmerman was detained after he shot and killed Martin, but was then released by police without charge.

His death is the latest in a long line of racist killings of black men across the country, often by police, but in this case also simply by an armed civilian. Zimmerman claimed that Martin was acting suspiciously, that Martin confronted him and attacked him for no reason and that he acted in self-defence.

But within days this story was so full of holes that there are mounting calls for Zimmerman's re-arrest. First, Zimmerman had no obvious signs of having been violently attacked (he claimed Martin had "slammed his head" into the pave-

ment repeatedly and broke his nose).

Secondly he claims that Martin followed him shouting abuse before attacking him, but other eyewitnesses claim it was the other way around - that it was Martin who was trying to get away from Zimmerman. Initially some eyewitnesses had identified Martin as the aggressor, but it later emerged that the police had "corrected" their testimony to reflect what they assumed had happened.

The police took Martin's body to the morgue labelled as "unidentified" and made no attempt to contact his family, who did not find out their son was dead until three days later.

Despite the circumstances around his killing, the backlash in the media saw a disgraceful character assassination of Martin take place. Newspaper hacks dug up the fact that he had been suspended from school for possession of marijuana. They began

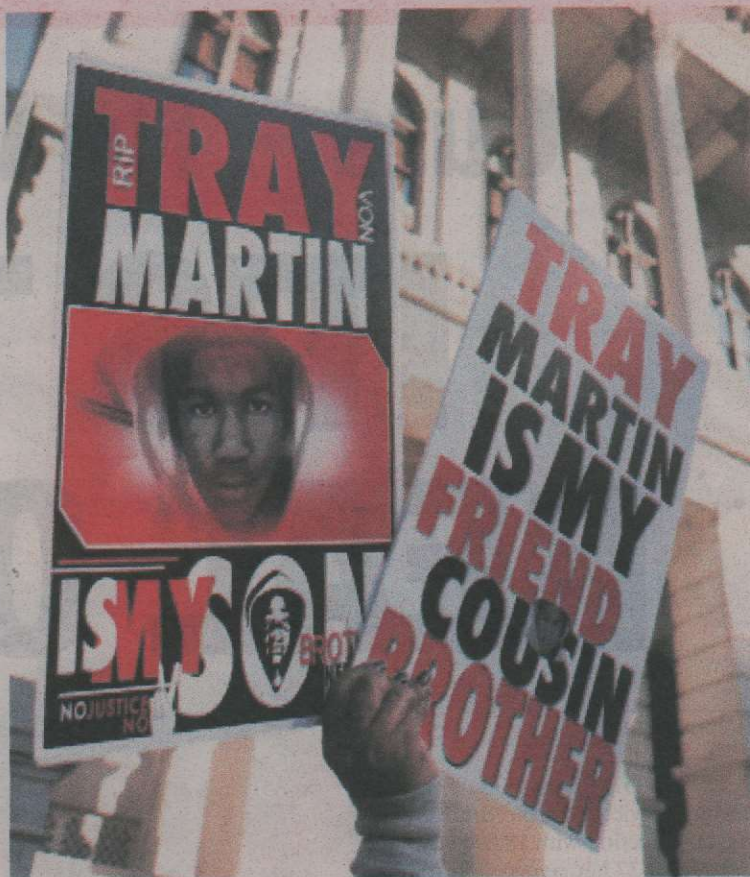
to build a picture of Martin, involved in drugs, with behavioural problems and wearing a hoodie - the implication was clear: he had it coming.

The media was less interested in investigating Zimmerman's past indiscretions, including a restraining order from his ex-partner due to domestic violence.

In response to this tragedy, in particular when Geraldo Rivera of Fox News said that Martin's hooded top was as much to blame for his death as Zimmerman's gun (the infamous fear of hoodies is an international phenomenon), many prominent black men - from politicians to sports stars - have worn hoodies in public in an act of solidarity with the murdered teenager.

President Obama had a real opportunity to highlight the realities of race in the US. Especially coming from the first black president, it could have been a defining moment in shifting the political discussion in a progressive direction. But as a Democrat he was unwilling to say anything that carried any risk - he emphasised the personal tragedy of the Martin family instead of the political issues of race and racism, his comments going no further than, "If I had a son, he would have looked like Trayvon."

What links the killing of Trayvon Martin to so many other deaths and beatings across the country is racism. From the lynching of Emmett Till (1955) to the beating of Rodney King (1991) to the murder of unarmed black men by police and the routine establishment cover-ups, the US has a history of such acts. Every time it happens the politicians call for soul searching, but they don't need to think hard about where



this racism comes from. After all, the racist Jim Crow laws only ended in 1965; many Black people alive today in the South remember being made to sit at the back of the bus, the abuse and the burning crosses.

In the US today unemployment amongst Blacks is close to 17 per cent whilst for whites it is at 8 per cent. Black teenagers are much more likely to be suspended or excluded from schools. Black people make up 16 per cent of the general population but 40 per cent of the prison population.

The United States is a country founded on slavery and ethnic cleansing - a nation that enjoys its wealth and privilege because it sucks the third world dry; in this nation, built on systematic inequality and prejudice, the execution of people like Trayvon Martin will continue until the whole system is torn down and rebuilt from below. Capitalism and racism are the mutually reinforcing foundations of our society's economy and politics: the one is dependent on the other; both must be abolished.

Met officers' racist outburst

The transcript of a recorded exchange between a 21 year-old black man and two police officers has been sent to *The Guardian*. The man was driving his car in Beckton, East London, the day after the riots - though completely unconnected to them. The police admitted that they strangled and then racially abused him.

Man: "You tried to strangle me"
Police Officer A: "No, I did strangle you."

Man: "Why did you strangle me?"

Police Officer A: "Because you're a cunt."

Police Officer B: "The problem with you is you will always be a nigger, yeah? That's your problem, yeah."

Man: "I'll always be a nigger - that's what you said, yeah?"

Police Officer B: "You'll always have black skin colour. Don't hide behind your colour, yeah." He adds: "Be proud. Be proud of who you are, yeah. Don't hide behind your black skin."

Anthony Grainger executed by police

Helen and Chrissie Hadfield

On 3 March Anthony Grainger, 36, was executed by police in a car park in suburban Manchester. He was sat, unarmed, in a stationary vehicle, having been followed by police in a pre-planned operation.

Anthony's death shocked thousands of people, and left many close to him - including his partner and two young children - devastated. He had no previous convictions for violent offences, and presented no threat to the masked police, armed with machine guns, who surrounded him in several cars.

He was suspected of carrying out a robbery. But this is no justification for murder. What gives the police the right to take an innocent life, and not suffer the consequences of their actions?

Anthony was not resisting arrest, he was unarmed, and he was immobilised by a CS canister thrown through the window of his car. He was a defenceless man murdered by Greater Manchester Police.

We - his family, his friends, and

all those opposed to a police force operating above the law - want answers. We want the officer who fired the fatal shot to be charged.

There have been 333 deaths at the hands of police officers in the past ten years, and not a single officer has been convicted. We are demanding answers and fighting for justice.

The number of innocent deaths at the hands of the police is growing - rapidly. Harry Stanley was shot from behind whilst carrying a table leg in a bag, which police suspected was a gun. Jean Charles de Menezes was shot 7 times in the back of the head after being "mistaken" for a terrorist. Smiley Culture and Mark Duggan were both murdered in unexplained circumstances. The list goes on.

The death sentence was abolished for many reasons, one of them being innocent people were losing their lives, but with trigger-happy police shooting people down, guilty or not, how is it any different?

Police officers who take away the lives of innocent people should be tried, convicted and subject to the

same punishment as other murderers.

Our campaign has touched the hearts of many, and there are thousands who think this is a disgrace. This is seen on the comments on twitter (#justice4grainger) and facebook, with people writing and commenting daily. There are banners on houses all over the Northwest, and photographs of people with posters calling for justice.

Leaflets have been posted and handed out all over Manchester, Salford, Bolton and many other areas. Wristbands and hoodies have been made with the campaign name to raise money for his children, their education, and their life without a father.

Our campaign is a campaign for all the victims of extrajudicial killings by a police force, which is out of control and thinks it is above the law.

There will be a demonstration in Manchester, Piccadilly Gardens, on June 17th - Fathers' Day.

Spread the details of the demo and join the Facebook group #Justice4Grainger to show your support.



workers power 5

No Cuts – No War – No Privatisation IT'S TIME FOR REAL OPPOSITION

Richard Brenner

LEFT WINGER George Galloway stormed to victory in the Bradford West by-election with 18,000 votes and a huge 37 per cent swing from Labour.

This extraordinary event, in which thousands of young people in Bradford, white and Asian, rallied to an anti-cuts candidate and delivered him a 10,000 majority, has opened a new opportunity for the left in Britain.

Galloway won because he spoke out against the Tories' vicious cuts, against the bloody war in Afghanistan, against tuition fees and against the sell off of the NHS.

The Tories are lagging badly in the polls, a full 10 points behind Labour. Cameron and Osborne's vicious budget, which taxed the old so the rich and corporations could pay less tax, disgusted people across the country. So did their reckless call for people to store fuel in their homes to break the tanker strike, causing at least one woman near fatal 40 per cent burns.

But worst of all was the news that millionaires can buy access to the PM in the form of dinners at Chequers and Downing Street. Talk about government of the rich, for the rich. Polls recorded a full 17 point Labour lead as the scandal broke.

And yet still Labour couldn't win in Bradford. Why? Because Labour won't oppose the Tories' hated policies of cuts and war.

Shadow chancellor Ed Balls says Labour will support "all" the Tories' cuts. Labour leader Ed Miliband, who got his job thanks to votes from the unions, kicked his backers in the teeth by supporting the Tories' freeze of public sector workers' pay. And when two million of those workers struck to defend their pensions in the biggest day of action since 1926, Miliband urged them not to do it.

And what about the war – that sickening, endless succession of teenage British soldiers killed and Afghan villagers slaughtered – does Labour oppose that? No, they started it, when Blair backed Bush



in 2002.

Labour is ahead in the national polls because they aren't the Tories. But in Bradford all Labour's long history counted for nothing at the by-election. Because Galloway, a recognised figure with a clear voice, offered some real political opposition to the Tories and their hated policies.

New party

Not just in Bradford but across the country, tens of thousands of socialists, trade unionists, young people, opponents of cuts and war, are celebrating Galloway's win. Their attention will be turning to the next big question. How can we create something that can supplant New Labour, and be a real voice for working class people nationwide?

The answer must surely be a great national Convention or Congress to discuss founding a new mass party of the working class.

Who could take part?

Trade unionists sick to the back teeth that Unite, Unison, the GMB and the CWU are forking out millions to Labour and getting nothing in return. And members of unions that are not affiliated to Labour, like

the PCS, the NUT, the FBU and the RMT, who increasingly see the need for a political voice for their fight against cuts, privatisation and pay restraint.

Electoral alliances like the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which is standing in the May elections in London, Manchester, Liverpool and elsewhere in on an anti-cuts platform. TUSC candidates in London include several key figures from the unions, like rank and file electricians' leader Mick Dooly and leading rail worker Steve Hedley.

Political organisations like the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party and Respect itself. While the Communist Party, for example, has opposed the idea of a new party in the past, basing its strategy on the idea of a leftwing Labour government coming to power, events have proved that that is unrealistic. Now it is raising the possibility of a new party of labour.

Rank and file groups like the construction workers' Rank and File Committee, the Unite Grass Roots Left, and the students' National Campaign Against Fees

and Cuts.

New initiatives like the Occupy and UK Uncut campaigns, and the Anticapitalist Networks in Manchester, Leeds, Brighton and London.

Struggle for power

Of course some will say that we do not need a new party, that movements like Occupy and the Arab Spring show that parties are obsolete in the online age. Bradford proves them wrong.

We need a political party to give a clear message of what we are for. We need a party so we can decide on our policies collectively within a democratic structure. We need a party so we can work in a disciplined way to secure real victories. And we need a party because we are not just struggling against the Tories and their millionaire backers, we are struggling for the working class to bring them down and rule in their place.

So across Britain let the call go up for a huge convention of delegates from every campaign, every organisation, every branch of the working class and socialist movement, to found a new party and begin a new future for socialism.

US economy no model for socialists

WRITING IN the *New Statesman*, Respect party leader Salma Yacoob said Britain should learn from America:

"Respect's solution on the doorstep was to argue that we need investment not cuts in order to re-energise our economy and create the growth to deliver jobs. This is not some loony-left pipe dream; it is the experience of the American economy where old fashioned Keynesian intervention is driving down unemployment while discredited Thatcherite neoliberalism drives it up here."

But over the last five years the US has been in a deep crisis. Huge numbers lost their jobs. Homelessness has soared.

There have been deep, vicious cuts in welfare, services, pay and jobs.

Across the US, homeless people, unemployed and young people have occupied city centres in a new movement against capitalism and its crisis.

America's painfully slow recovery today – when every month still sees thousands of jobs lost – is caused by capitalism's cycle, not Obama's stimulus.

It shows that Respect's policy of "investment not cuts" is not enough. It dodges the question: whose investment? Capitalist investment – for maximum profit at the expense of reduced wages and workforces? Or public investment for socially useful projects? We also need to nationalise the banks, without compensation, and merge them into a single state bank, with democratic control over investment decisions. That would mean planning the economy to meet need.

That's no pipe-dream. It's a socialist policy. A new working class alternative to Labour will need plenty of them.