

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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**NATIONAL DEMO: DEFEND EDUCATION, FIGHT PRIVATISATION
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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
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- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
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Resisting "riot" evictions

By Kojo Osei

On 12 August, three days after the England riots had come to an end, Eric Pickles, the Conservative Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, declared "looters should be evicted".

Later that day, David Cameron gave his "full backing" for councils to evict entire families.

Wandsworth Council had already served an eviction notice on Maite de la Calva even though her 18-year-old son, Daniel Sartain-Clarke, is still yet to be convicted with riot related charges. The mother of two, who took no part in the London riots and has stated her fear for her eight-year-old daughter's education and well-being, has accused the local authority of behaving like "fascists".

Four London councils

had publicly stated they would evict "rioters": the Conservative-controlled Westminster and Hammer-smith & Fulham, and Labour's Southwark and Greenwich.

Within a few days of Southwark's announcement that 35 households had received a cautionary letter from the council a demonstration was called via Facebook. Around 40-50 people protested outside Southwark Town Hall. After a haphazard start, it was co-ordinated by activists present and Southwark Save Our Services. Although the demo was entirely peaceful, there was a significant presence of private security guards and community wardens wearing stab-proof vests, standing prominently in front of the Town Hall.

From this demonstration a number of residents and campaigners organised a mailing list to discuss the next steps and ensured an

anti-"riot evictions" presence at South London council public meetings and "community conversations".

Some Southwark Liberal Democrat councillors argued in meetings against any evictions but have not supported the locally organised campaign. Since then Southwark Council has backtracked and no evictions or further action have taken place.

Greenwich Council have started legal proceedings against a tenant of a single occupier tenancy in October. Defend Council Housing co-ordinated a demonstration and council sources have said that the Labour council have budgeted to spend hundred of thousands of pounds to pursue at least 20 riot evictions; yet they expect to lose.

The legal underpinning for these riot evictions is a housing civil law which enables a judge to cancel a

tenancy if the tenant, or a visitor of the tenant, causes a nuisance within the locality. As the riots took place largely away from housing estates, these legal grounds are shaky (though "locality" has no legal definition).

However, Eric Pickles supports changing the law to allow councils to evict people from social housing even if the anti-social behaviour happened outside the local authority. He says this will prevent what he called "riot tourism".

Last week the socialist lawyers' group, the Haldane Society, held a meeting to back the campaign against the riot evictions. The Unite Housing Workers branch 1/1111 have given full backing to fight all evictions.

The campaign also has the support of one Wandsworth Labour councillor, the SWP and the Socialist Party.

Labour wins Irish presidency

By Liam McNulty

The victory of the Labour Party's Michael D Higgins in Ireland's presidential election should be welcomed.

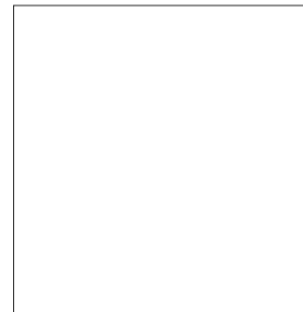
The presidential office is largely symbolic, but Higgins, a poet and long-time anti-war activist, is preferable to both the Fianna Fail-backed businessman and the former sectarian paramilitary godfather who took second and third place.

Let's not rejoice in the personalised pageantry of bourgeois politics, rather assess what this development might mean.

The election of Higgins and the pitiful 6.4% scored by Fine Gael's Gay Mitchell may not be what it appears to be: a rejection of the dominant partner in the Fine Gael / Labour coalition government.

Mitchell was universally regarded as a weak candidate. In a *Sunday Times* / Behaviour & Attitudes poll published in early September, Fine Gael did well, polling 44%, as compared with a mere 12% for Labour.

Mitchell was evidently less popular than Fine Gael; and Higgins seems to be much more popular than his beleaguered party, which, after gaining popu-



Michael D Higgins

larity in opposition to the previous Fianna Fail government, is now bearing the brunt of being in the coalition government.

The presidential election reminds us of the sheer inadequacy of bourgeois republican institutions. Of course, we defend existing democratic rights and freedoms because they were hard won by our class and provide vital breathing space to organise. But we must also expand the limits of democracy as a step on the road to socialism.

Trotsky, writing in 1934 about France, argued that socialists should "draw inspiration from the ideas and methods not of the Third Republic but of the Convention of 1793". In other words, the presidency should be abolished and "deputies would be elected on the basis of local assemblies, constantly revocable by their constituents, and would

receive the salary of a skilled worker."

In the context of a coalition government in Ireland carrying out the programme of the IMF and the European Central Bank, Trotsky's warnings to social democratic workers have particular resonance. "It is not enough to defend democracy," he wrote; "democracy must be regained" from the dominance of finance capital.

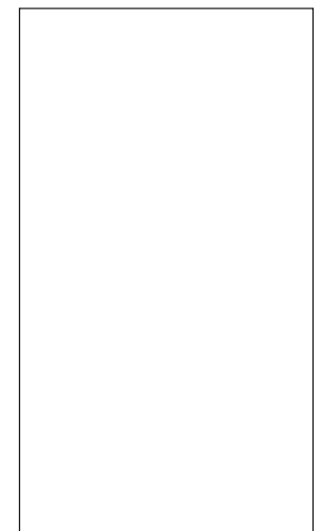
The election of Higgins and of his colleague Patrick Nulty in the Dublin West by-election, runs the risk of sowing illusions among Labour Party activists and supporters about the true state of their party. It may be over four years until the next general election, with the crisis of capitalism showing no signs of abating. If the class struggle intensifies over the next period, Labour Party celebrations may prove to be short-lived.

If Labour is to survive, it must break its links with Fine Gael and repudiate the austerity agenda.

Militant activists inside Labour must fight for a programme of working-class independent politics; their programme should be one of fighting for a workers' government based on and accountable to the workers' movement.

Qantas

Australian tribunal orders Qantas unions back to negotiations after bosses declare a lock-out. See: alturl.com/d3fd9



11 people were out on Notts Save Our Services stall on Saturday 30 October for the launch of their campaign for a "needs based budget" in Nottingham. The Robin Hood theme formed part of the day.

The city council looks set to make considerable cuts in the new year on top of last year's cuts.

Notts SOS regulars were joined by "occupiers" from the Market Square to leaflet and petition.

Greece: from the No to the Yes

By Theodora Polenta

New Democracy (Greece's equivalent to the Conservative Party) and Laos (an ultra-right populist party, similar to UKIP) were emphatic in their support for the official parades disrupted by anti-cuts protests on 28 October (see back page).

The leader of Laos accused the government of "losing control of the state" and "being unable to enforce law and order" and attacked the government for not "ordering the police forces to be more heavy handed with the protesters".

New Democracy leader Antonis Samaras said: "Although we think Pasok is a disastrous government and we understand the people's discontent, New Democracy totally opposes and condemns the stoppage of

parades".

We should remind the leader of the New Democracy party that his political predecessors cooperated with the German invaders and later militarily attacked the Greek workers and national resistance fighters with the assistance of the English imperialists, from December 1944.

In any case, the much-celebrated "no" to Mussolini by Ioannis Metaxas in October 1940 is grossly misrepresented. Metaxas was not a democratically elected Greek prime minister. He was a dictator. He established a fascist regime in Greece, crushing the working-class movement.

He was ideologically close to the Italian and German fascist regimes, but aligned with English imperialism because Greek capitalist interests were interlaced with those of English imperialism.

Syriza participated in the protests, but they denounced the heckling of Greek president Karolos Papoulias. In their words: "The president of Greece is considered the representative of the Greek constitution and parliamentary democracy. The institution of presidential democracy is the embodiment of democracy and the unity of the Greek nation".

However, Papoulias, as he was leaving the saluting stand, declared: "The decisions being made by the EU summit on 26 October are positive... We should all help to make Greece a healthy economy again". He used his supposed neutrality to cover up the austerity measures of the Pasok government.

The mainstream media totally misrepresented the people's protests as the actions of a lawless, anarchic mob under the control and manipulation of the Syriza party and trade union factionalists.

Journalists and politicians tried to make a distinction between "peaceful demonstrators and anti-austerity measurement protesters that respect the law and the Greek constitution", and the "violent, disrespectful and unlawful protesters that stop the parades, verbally abuse politicians and injure our national celebrations".

But the 28 October

protests were the continuation of the Greek working-class struggles of the last two years. They were "organised" by the rank and file of the trade union movement, the community movements, the student movement, and all the people that have had enough of the escalating attacks on their living standards and working conditions.

Today's struggles are the best tribute to all those that fought against the Italian and German fascist troops and their Greek collaborators. They are a tribute to all those that fought for national and social liberation.

TROIKA

The historical memory of the 1940 resistance was truly honoured by the continuation of the Greek and migrant workers' resistance against the Greek capitalists and the EU-ECB-IMF Troika's economic invasion.

Left-wing groups had long opposed the traditional militaristic and nationalistic parades of 28 October. This year there was both a quantitative and a qualitative change.

Thousands of people spontaneously participated in the stoppage of the parades. Heads were turned to the left, to salute protesters, and not to the right, to salute politicians. Massive

demonstrations stated clearly the people's disrespect for all factions of the political establishment and the Greek ruling class.

The whole of Greek society is in turmoil. The revolution has not yet come but the social rebellion has already commenced. Maybe the social rebellion has come in a period where the revolutionary left is unprepared both qualitatively (in politics) and quantitatively (in numbers).

The challenge is there for the revolutionary left to win the most militant workers and youth; for all of the revolutionary left to contribute to the build-up of a real revolutionary party around the organised labour movement.

It is the historical duty of the revolutionary left to politically translate the "no" of this year's 28 of October.

- No to the Pasok government that said yes to the EU summit and the Troika occupation.

- No to all the bourgeois parties.

- No to the Troika, to financial speculators, to productive and unproductive capitalist asset-strippers and predators.

- No to the Greek debt. Not a penny to the creditors.

- No to payment of government-imposed taxes.

- No to cutbacks, privatisation and austerity packages.

To go from those "nos" to positive "yeses":

- Yes to nationalisation under workers' control of the banks and the big business with no compensation.

- Yes to workers' control of prices, wage increases, reduction in working hours, work for all.

- Yes to pension increases in line with wages, reduction in the retirement age.

- Yes to banning redundancies. Unemployment benefit in line with wages.

- Yes to a public sector in the service of the people and society's needs against today's public sector tied up with corporations, contractors and corruption.

- Yes to extending education, health, transportation and welfare state provision.

Which would all add up to the big yes for another society, which has our needs as its priority, a socialist, truly democratic, and accountable society.

It is the duty of the revolutionary left to organise, participate in, and encourage every battle, small and big, and to win to our ranks the most militant workers and youth.

Every workers' victory is a step closer to the working class becoming the decision-makers of history.

It is a step closer to winning the final battle and opening the doors to socialism from below.

Cameron: "timezone saves us"

Desperate, or what? Trying to talk away the evidence that the UK economy faces depression along with the eurozone, David Cameron wrote in the *Financial Times* of 31 October.

"Whatever the obstacles to growth today, we still boast some of the best universities in the world, the most favourable time-

zone in the world, and the world's first language. I passionately believe that the global economy is presenting us with opportunities, not threats — and we must seize them". And the British weather? Very boom-enhancing, too?

The government is making cuts in the name of a plan reduced to clutching at straws.

Two views of the Occupy London camps

Luke Atterton has been taking part in the camp at Finsbury Square and has just joined the AWL.

On Monday night there was a discussion at the St Paul's assembly — around 200 people — about where the movement is going politically.

We split into smaller groups to facilitate discussion, and most people in my group were sympathetic to socialism and class politics, not just general ideas but also demands like linking up with trade unions.

Partly that was because there was an active socialist in my group, making the arguments. In general things are still quite unformed politically. A lot of people are not really anti-capitalist, more social democratic but without a clear idea about who will carry out their demands. Some people understand what's going on in terms of corruption, not the basic drives of the system.

There are some anar-

chists and a few Stalinists around the edges. Then you've got wackier people like the Venus Project and Zeitgeist, and New Age religious types.

In terms of genuine socialists, I think our impact has been pretty limited — despite some good initiatives, like the AWL doing the "bread trick". I keep plugging away! One of the problems is that people react badly to the word "socialism". Even people who are sympathetic to your arguments recoil when they hear the word.

So far there haven't been any amendments to or direct debate about the nine point programme agreed at the start. It's been said there will be, but who knows when. The process here moves very slowly — every day there are newcomers, which is great, but it means you re-cover a lot of ground.

So far, believe it or not, there's not much discussion about what to do if we are evicted. The threat hasn't sunk in yet. No doubt it will as the deadlines get closer.

D is a London Underground worker, based in the City of London

I've regularly attended the camp throughout the day and most evenings. I've enjoyed sitting down and chatting. I felt inspired being there. The more I attended, the more I wanted to go back.

The first day at the camp, the protesters appeared disorganised but that soon changed. They had a kitchen area, a donation area, a first aid tent, and were even keeping on top of all the rubbish build-up and recycling their papers and plastics. Throughout the day they invited speakers down, organised debates and discussions and even educational sessions. It was a fantastic atmosphere — everyone sharing, and helping each other. It truly lifted my spirits being there.

I've seen mixed reactions from colleagues at work and the public in general. Some believe that the pro-

testers are just causing a nuisance and shouldn't even be there, that they are obstructing the cathedral. Many people I've spoken to say they find politics "boring".

I thought that once, but I've found that a subject that's perceived as "boring" is often due to the fact that it's not fully understood. When something doesn't make sense people have the tendency to switch off. I genuinely believe that if that is the case, people should take the time to try and develop their knowledge further. Knowledge is, after all, the greatest weapon.

The demonstrators want people who are unaware of their cause to take the time to stop and talk. Ignorance is nothing to be proud of. Politics does matter and people should be open-minded about the world in which we live.

There have also been many others like me who are sympathetic to the cause, and are happy to pop by after work, donating food and blankets.

The occupations highlight the greed and corrup-

tion among the elite, and expose the fact that workers across the world are being exploited and are having to pay for the crisis with attacks taking place across the public and private sectors. Jobs, pensions, NHS cuts, education, pay freezes... the list goes on. This is what workers are fighting every single day.

The occupation gives us an opportunity to explain to people that there is an alternative, and that the attacks we're facing aren't about "the deficit Labour left us", but the Tory ideology of the Coalition government.

I believe there needs to be a bigger presence of unions. Some individual union members have attended off their own bat, which is fantastic, but it needs more. The unions showed practical solidarity with Occupy Wall Street and that's exactly what needs to happen here.

Continued support is absolutely vital, and essential for building the occupation and spurring the protesters to keep fighting and standing strong.

Oakland, CA

Violence has increasingly marred anti-capitalist protests around the world as police have attempted to clear occupations away.

Last week Oakland in the US saw particularly coercive tactics deployed by the police, who used tear gas to break up hundreds of protesters marching on City Hall.

The police justification for using force on unarmed protesters was to claim that the demonstrators were throwing rocks and bottles at them. It has since come to light, however, that the trouble may have been started by an undercover police officer who was embedded in Occupy Oakland's camp from the start.

Back in 2003, Oakland's acting police chief, Howard Jordan, had this to say about the policy of embedding officers in protests:

"You don't need to have some sort of skill to be able to infiltrate these groups. If you put the people in there from the beginning, I think we'll be able to gather the information. And maybe direct them to do something we want them to do."

Letters



Stalinism follows?

I find Martyn Hudson (October and its discontents, *Solidarity* 222) unconvincing.

His main argument is that the rise of the Stalinists in the Soviet Union was “a summation and extension of all that went before ... not a decisive break with Bolshevism.” And: “Stalinism was an extension of October not a counter-revolution.” And: “Our tradition should know better than simply defending the assaults on liberty that led to the final victory of the bureaucracy.”

In passing Martyn accuses Trotsky (without explanation) of arrogant abstention from the struggle (presumably against Stalinism).

It is true that the post-1917 workers’ state took some steps to curtail liberties. The Stalinists also curtailed liberties, going very much further. So, the argument goes, Bolshevism begins, and Stalinism follows as a more brutal extension of the same thing. Obvious, isn’t it?

“Obvious” only if the context, scale, reasons for, intentions and perspectives of the participants and the results are ignored.

“Obvious” only if the decisive break with the past made by the Stalinists (the destruction of Party democracy, free speech, trade unions and workers’ control; forced collectivisation and slave labour; the purges and murder of an entire revolutionary generation; the forced Ukrainian famine; sabotage in Spain; pacts with the French and then the Nazis, subjugation of Eastern Europe etc.) is ignored.

And “obvious” only if the struggle of Communists — including Lenin as well as Trotsky — against the rise of Stalinism is side-lined or faded out.

In other words Martyn’s argument only hangs together if politics is ignored.

The steps of self-defence taken by the workers’ state in, say, 1919, to defend workers’ power against the Whites and the invading imperialist armies, amid famine and utter devastation, were wrong? I think the Bolsheviks made mistakes (e.g. allowing the Cheka to operate outside the law). But the intention of their efforts was to defend workers’ power and the international workers’ revolution and the goal of human freedom. It was not their wish to restrict freedom, but something they felt they had to do to save the revolution. They were absolutely right to fight to maintain a bridgehead of revolutionary victory in a world seething with potentially revolutionary crises.

The intention of the Stalinists and the aim of their repression, however, was the opposite: to maintain and extend the power and privilege of the Russian elite in opposition to workers’ power and the international revolution.

Martyn speculates that maybe it would have been better that the revolution be drowned in blood — another glorious failure, like the Commune. And, in the abstract, I might even agree with him. But that’s not how we approach history. Imagine that in five years time there is a clerical fascist regime installed in Libya. Maybe we would look back and say the rebels were wrong to fight? That the rebellion had simply made things worse? Of course not — we’re participants in the here and now, just as the Bolsheviks were.

Instead of locating the pressure that created Stalinism in the backwardness of Russia and the failure of the European workers’ revolutions, Martyn sees it (at least in part) in Bolshevik ideas and practice. In doing so he also appears to ignore or downplay the democratic objectives and acts of the Bolsheviks and the fight against the emerging bureaucracy.

He locates the choices people made as abstract “germs” inside people, rather than as concrete choices made by real people under great pressure.

Mark Osborn, south London

Black Blocs

In France the Black Blocs [see Theodora Polenta’s article on Greece, *Solidarity* 222] are a very broad current.

This current groups together, or in it can be grouped, people who participated in the squatting movement in the 80s and 90s, Italian refugees in France who have contact with Italian insurrectionists, radical youth who want immediate action and are impatient to fight the police, and some supporters of late-period Toni Negri (called “garantistes” because they are for a guaranteed basic income for all).

In short, these are people who in general do not vote, and who are very hostile to the unions and the left parties, so never willing to ally with them even when they are victims of repression and could benefit from support from this or that CP and SP member of parliament. It is difficult to have useful political discussions with them.

There is a lot of discussion on this current on the web, much of it around the book by Francis Dupuis-Déri.

Yves Coleman, Paris

• bit.ly/dupuisderi

G is for General Strike

ABC of Marxism

By Tom Unterrainer



The recent fights sparked by the economic crisis have inspired some sections of the left to make calls for a general strike. It is a slogan the left has used before. But not everyone uses the call in the same way.

For some, a general strike (mass industrial action for a limited or an indefinite period) is the immediate cure-all for a particular problem or for the problems of society in general. For others, the slogan is used to help build some élan around their own organisation and to differentiate themselves from other revolutionaries and in the labour movement. Marxists should have a different approach.

Marxists believe that re-making the world requires mass action — including actions such as mass strikes — by the working class. In history general strikes have had a decisive, positive impact on revolutionary situations. At other times, the failure of general strikes has thrown our class into a period of disunity and disorder. So a “general strike” doesn’t necessarily fix everything!

Writing in 1935, Leon Trotsky identified four general “types” of situation in which a general strike may occur.

The first, where the a weak government “takes fright” at the general strike or threat of one and immediately grants some concession to the strikers. Trotsky points to the Belgian general strike of 1893 and the general strike during the revolutionary events of 1905 in St Petersburg, Russia.

Second, where a general strike is organised to “frighten” the government, rather than as a tactic in a campaign with specific goals. Such a general strike is a sign of “utter impotence” on the part of the workers’ leaders. Such a general strike is easily dealt with by the government without the granting of concessions. If the government is not already frightened, then a general strike will not make it frightened but rather, make it more determined not to back down!

Third, a general strike where the official leaders is quickly ready to make concessions and agreements with the government to end the action, imposing their weight “from above”, without reference to or consultation with the wider movement. Such a situation can lead to the granting of concessions by the state, but not always. The British general strike of 1926 is an example of this scenario.

Fourthly, a general strike that “leads directly to the barricades” (Engels’ term). Trotsky writes that a “strike of this

sort can only lead to complete victory or defeat”. Here, he is writing of general strikes that pose the immediate question of “who rules society?” Such general strikes are carried out in the context of other forms of revolutionary struggle and can carry over into other forms of co-ordinated mass strike action.

In *The Mass Strike* Rosa Luxemburg analysed debates on this issue between labour movement and socialist currents. Her starting point was the role played by general strikes in the revolutionary movements of Russia in 1905.

Luxemburg makes the important point that mass strikes are the culmination of a historical and material process: such strikes cannot simply be plucked out of thin air.

The general strike — no matter the circumstances within which it originates — always poses new and acute political questions. A general strike isn’t just a tactic to back up the parliamentary political process, as some Second International socialists contended, but has a political life and dynamic of its own.

A specific call for a general strike does make concrete political sense sometimes, and Rosa Luxemburg herself argued for the German socialist movement to prepare for such a call in 1910. There have been at least two such points in Britain in the past forty years: in 1972 when a series of mass, unofficial solidarity strikes and factory occupations challenged a Tory government which was trying to do what Thatcher eventually did in 1979-80; and in 1984-85 during the miners’ strike.

In July 1972 the TUC called a one-day general strike... and quickly called it off when the government backed down a bit. In 1984-85, the call came from sections of the movement (including, in coded terms, miners’ leader Arthur Scargill, and in uncoded terms, left Labour MPs close to him). It went unanswered. At both times, the realistic potential for general strike action existed in conditions that would have brought about decisive political change.

Such conditions do not exist now. To demand that the working class bridge the gap between historically low levels of militancy to general strike action at the drop of a hat is unrealistic. The call for a general strike becomes not serious agitation but catchpenny phrasemongering to fulfill the narrow needs and expectations of the group making the call.

However, conditions can change very quickly and the immediate responses of our class to the cuts onslaught may quickly turn things around. In such a situation the organised left will need to keep its head.

• Further reading: Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, Leon Trotsky, *The nature of the general strike: critical observations*, *New International*, October 1947

Socialist Worker and the Palestinians’ UN bid

The Left

By Sacha Ismail



On 31 October, the Palestinians won the first victory in their bid for recognition of an independent state at the United Nations, when the UN Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO) voted to recognise Palestine as a member state.

The vote was 107-14, with Britain abstaining and Israel and the United States voting against. In UNESCO UN Security Council powers cannot exercise a veto, as the US says it will when a vote on full UN membership for the Palestinians come before the body.

As we commented when the bid was launched: “Democrats and socialists should support the Palestinian[s]... Firstly, because the Palestinians have a right to a state of their own. Secondly, because the situation in which the Palestinians are now locked is one in which they cannot win. The declaration of a Palestinian state focuses the fundamental question — two states as the only possible solution... The declaration of a sovereign Palestinian state will not of itself change [anything]... But it is a symbol, and symbols are powerful things.”

The Socialist Workers Party has responded differently. At the start of October, *Socialist Worker* printed a short piece by Sian Ruddick entitled “Abbas plan won’t bring justice for Palestinians”. The title was typical of the rest of the article, using language to evade rather than clarify the issues. For sure the bid will not “bring justice” by itself; but is it a legitimate tactic to win a legitimate demand as part of a broader struggle?

SW does admit that some supporters of the bid “have no

illusions in the UN” (it would be interesting to know who Ruddick has in mind, as most broadly pro-Palestinian people do, indeed, have some illusions in the UN). So what’s wrong with supporting the Palestinians’ demand for recognition?

“Abbas has not demanded the return of all the territory of historic Palestine... Abbas is only demanding a return to the borders before the 1967 war with Israel... This still hands huge swathes of land to Israel”. So in other words, the bid is wrong because it does not seek to destroy Israel — the basic disagreement between the SWP and the majority of the Palestinian national movement, but which the SWP does not want to admit openly (unlike our disagreement over boycotting Israel, which is perfectly open).

And the plan “drops the demand for the ‘right to return’ for Palestinian refugees. People who had been driven from land now within Israel’s borders would be left without justice.”

In fact the vast majority of Palestinians driven from Israel or Palestine in the 1940s are now dead. SW is not bothered about the Arab states denying many of the descendants of these refugees citizenship. But in any case, the best — the only real — hope for justice for the Palestinian diaspora is an independent state to which they can “return” freely and a peace deal with Israel which at least opens the possibility of fighting for freedom of movement.

“And the presence of Tony Blair as special envoy offers little hope to those who want a just peace.” Really? And that settles this question how, exactly?

“It is the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East that can offer the Palestinians real hope.” What Ruddick means here is that SW wants the surrounding Arab states to go to war with, and crush, Israel.

Heaven forbid that the Palestinians should exploit the new situation in the region by stepping up their campaign for the basic democratic demand of an independent state.

Want to go to Uni? Not if you're poor, say Tories

On 9 November students march to protest against fees, cuts, the scrapping of Educational Maintenance Allowance for older school students, and the Government's plans to further "marketise" universities.

Access and foundation courses — through which working-class students without the necessary A-levels can qualify quickly to get a chance to take a degree — will suffer specially under the Government's new plans for universities, set out in its June White Paper.

Universities, keen to cut costs, will outsource such courses to private companies, like Apollo. Apollo runs "sub-prime" universities in the USA, like the University of Phoenix, where only 16% of students actually graduate, despite racking up huge debts.

The White Paper plans also mean that "contextual offers", whereby a university offers to accept a student despite poor test scores because of their disadvantaged background, will disappear. Under the new rules, universities will lose out financially by accepting low-scoring students, irrespective of their background. Universities must follow the money.

Bursary schemes will be changed. Rather than being used as a means of providing access to education for poor but gifted students, they will be used as a means of attracting AAB-scoring students.

Already Queen Mary University in London and Kent University are offering "Excellence Scholarships" for high-scoring students. Increasingly we will see bursaries handed out to well-off students with good test scores.

AAB

Under the White Paper plans, a complicated system of quotas means that universities must focus ruthlessly on recruiting more "AAB" students (students who get AAB or better at A-level) to get Government funding, or choose to aim low and provide stripped-down, low-cost courses at lower fees.

Inevitably existing schemes to promote access for poor students to universities will suffer.

The basic aim is to drive the market into every part of the education system, to permeate universities with the logic of profit and business.

It is to turn education into an "investment", an expensive gamble, made in the hope of future high pay.

Swindling cowboy firms like Apollo, INTO, and BPP will take over an increasing slice of the sector, while existing universities will be forced to function like businesses or go to the wall.

The White Paper will create a tiered education system, with full and rounded education for a few and stripped-down training for others.

Bursaries and access schemes are already woefully inadequate. For working-class students, they represent crumbs, morsels of charity held out to them by an education system heavily biased against them.

Education should be free, a right for all, paid for by soci-

ety, through taxing the rich. All students should be financially independent. Society is wealthy enough to offer all students a living grant. But the Government's scheme is a rolling-back of the advances made in the mid 20th century in access to education, and in acceptance that education should be a right for all rather than a privilege or an "investment" for a few.

In the 19th century, when the capitalist class first realised the necessity of creating a more universal education system, which would educate working-class young people as well as the sons of the wealthy, they were clear about the purpose of the new system.

Robert Lowe, the class-conscious Liberal politician who was responsible for the education reforms of the 1860s, said in 1862: "We do not profess to give [working-class] children an education that will raise them above their station and business in life; that is not our object, but to give them an education that may fit them for that business..."

Working-class people were to be given only the training that was necessary for them to understand written instructions and do simple sums, to function as manual workers in industry, or as soldiers for the Empire. Subjects thought to be ennobling and mind-expanding, like mathematics, the classics, and law, were reserved for the children of the ruling class.

Over decades, and especially after 1945, the labour movement won a huge expansion in access to education, and began to knock back much of the old elitist philosophy. From the late 1960s, comprehensive schooling gained ground against the old tiered system (grammar schools and

secondary moderns).

There was a large influx of students into universities. It became more of an established idea that education is a means of enriching society and individuals' lives, rather than for separating out a self-aware elite.

The Government's goal is not to return universities to the 19th century model, where only a small minority from wealthy families get to universities, there to study deliberately abstruse disciplines which nonetheless were deemed to qualify them to rule the country. Economically, the Government knows that today's capitalism needs mass-production of young people sufficiently educated to do many jobs requiring them to deal with much paperwork, and that fees paid by overseas students at British universities are an important part of the country's "export income".

In some ways it is worse. Social mobility (the ability of children from poor families to reach well-paid jobs) has already been declining alongside an expansion of university education. Now, almost all children of well-off families go to university, where before many didn't; a large proportion of better-paid jobs are reserved for graduates, where before only medicine, the law, and the church were; and most children of poor families are shut out.

POLARISE

The Government's plans would make Britain's university system more like the USA's, but without the USA's big publicly-owned state universities which charge lower fees and admit a wider range of students.

In the Government's scheme, Britain's universities will polarise even more. At one end will be a minority of well-off institutions with large endowments, able to attract many high-paying students from overseas; at the other end a mass of US-style "diploma mills"; in the middle, a range of universities, many undecided about whether to bid to join the elite or to try to beat the market as lower-cost providers of courses which may not teach you much but at least enable you to say "I've got a degree". Of the courses that are relatively widely available, more will be narrowly job-oriented.

US university education has traditionally been more democratic than Britain's. But, as the USA has become more unequal in recent decades, researchers find that "the high concentration in the nation's colleges and universities of youth from the top echelons of parental income and social class is disturbing and appears to be increasing..."

"The system thus seems to intensify and reinforce differences in economic status. Though college attendance rates are rising, college graduation rates for US students are growing slowly, if at all..."

The 9 November demonstration should be the start of a broad movement across Britain's universities, colleges, and schools, linking up with the trade union fight-back.

- bit.ly/us-unis
- anticuts.com

Education cuts

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) released figures in late October showing that public spending on UK education will fall by 14.4% between 2010-11 and 2014-15 — the largest cut in education spending over any four-year period since at the 1950s.

Councils in England are warning that academies will drain resources from conventional state schools that have not left their local authorities, disproportionately impacting the poorest students.

In colleges, an Association of Colleges survey shows 49% fewer students enrolled this September. Fiona McMillan, president of the Association of Colleges and principal of Bridgwater College, said that the loss of the EMA seems to have put off the poorest students: "For people with very little, any extra cost is too much," she said.

Support

By Clive Bradley

As winter draws in, the most important single achievement of the “Arab Spring” is the powerful new labour movement that has emerged in Egypt.

Last month (on 14 October), 149 new, independent unions launched a Democratic Labour Congress at a conference in Cairo. Prior to the January 2011 revolution there were only three independent unions (only one of them very big); otherwise Egypt’s workers belonged to a state-run federation whose contribution to events in Tahrir Square was to help organise attacks on demonstrators.

The Congress follows months in which new unions have been formed — in the public and private sectors — amid an unprecedented wave of strikes. In the last month alone, there have been strikes by textile workers, telecom workers, port workers (whose actions were decisive in the removal of Mubarak by the regime back in February), lawyers, judges — and, very significantly, the police.

Thirty thousand low-ranking police officers have been on strike around the country, demanding the “cleansing” of the force — which is generally hated, and which all but collapsed during the January revolution — and better pay. In the Red Sea town of Hurghada, hundreds of striking cops stormed security headquarters, forcing officials to smuggle their chief out the back door.

The ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has introduced extremely repressive new laws to curb protests, and has arrested 10,000 or more activists since the fall of Mubarak; troops have been used against strikers. But still the army is unable simply to assert its authority.

Parliamentary elections, originally scheduled for September, are to start this month. Presidential elections have been postponed until next year. There is widespread impatience with the slowness of the army to step aside and allow civilian rule.

ISLAMIST STRENGTH

The forthcoming elections pose a vital question. Before the revolution, it was widely believed that in any fair elections the Muslim Brotherhood would win a comfortable, if not overwhelming, majority.

Like most oppositionists they boycotted the last — blatantly rigged — elections; in the parliament before that, although the party was at best semi-legal and had not contested seats openly, it had 20 per cent of the MPs.

The Brotherhood, for sure the best-organised political group in Egypt, has established a new party to contest the elections — the Freedom and Justice Party — which in turn has tried to set up a broader coalition. Almost all the other parties originally involved in it (which ranged from the old-style nationalist Wafd to more extremist Islamists) have walked out. The FJP has broken initial Brotherhood promises to field candidates in no more than 50% of seats. Its leaders claim this is only because of the complex voting system, which includes both seats elected by proportional representation and first-past-the-post — that is, they still don’t expect to win an outright majority.

According to a political scientist at the American University in Cairo, “I think all Islamists combined will get around 35 percent of the vote; 25 percent will go to the Muslim Brotherhood.” (quoted in *Al Masry al Youm*, 19/10/11). That’s a lot — probably more than any other single party — but well below pre-revolutionary guesses.

Perhaps more significant, despite public opposition from the party’s own president, the FJP will not compete under the Brotherhood’s usual slogan “Islam is the solution” (instead they promise that “We bring good for Egypt”). This goes with a general toning-down of the movement’s Islamist message — for now, at least. Assertive Islamism has for sure contributed to hostility towards Egypt’s very large Christian population (see below), which the Brotherhood is anxious to disavow.

The Brotherhood has stood very close to the ruling military over the course of the year. In general, indeed, their record is politically conservative: they were slow to support the January protests.

An interesting possible barometer for Brotherhood support

1,500 people marched in London on Saturday 29 October calling for an end to the Syrian dictatorship. Similar protests were held in the US, Canada, France and Germany

Syria: resistance grows

By Dan Katz

Last week Amnesty International issued a report stating that injured protesters in at least four Syrian state hospitals have been subjected to torture, including by medical staff.

Injured dissidents are now refusing to be taken to hospitals, from where they can be kidnapped by police, and are turning to makeshift first-aid stations set up by the pro-democracy movement.

The number killed by the state during the uprising, which began in March, is now well over 3,000.

On 28 October a further 37 people were murdered by regime thugs during mass protests. The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 100 others were wounded and 500 arrested across several provinces.

Radwan Ziadeh, of the Damascus Centre for Human Rights, estimates the state has also detained 30,000 people: “The Syrian regime has cancelled the football championship because they turned over all the soccer fields to be detention and torture centres.” The Al-Fayhaa stadium in Damascus, the Assad stadium in Latakia, and the main stadium in the city of Daraa are all being used to hold thousands of prisoners, he added.

Last Friday’s marches took place under the demand for a UN-organised, Libyan-style no-fly zone. Such demands are gaining ground.

Leaders of the Free Syrian Army, a grouping of armed forces defectors, have been particularly vocal, saying a no-fly zone and a naval blockade could allow them to establish a base inside the country to launch a campaign to bring down Bashar al-Assad’s regime.

The Free Syrian Army is a merger of two movements of army defectors and says it has 22 “battalions” across the country with a central command based in Turkey. They claim 15,000 defectors from an army of 220,000. Such claims seem high, especially given how hard and dangerous it is to defect. The army restricts leave and mobile phone use, moves recruits regularly and mixes units to stop dissident groups coalescing.

Nevertheless the regime is highly alarmed.

It seems the role of army defectors is changing. At first they simply fled. Next they took part in defensive actions, aiming to protect crowds of protesters. Now they seem to have begun attacking convoys and checkpoints.

Fierce clashes have taken place in Homs. Other fighting has happened in Rastan, Idlib near the Turkish border and al-Bukamal on the Iraq border.

Earlier this week Reuters reported that seven soldiers were killed in Maarat al-Numaan, 230 km north of Damascus, when their armoured convoy came under attack from deserters.

And early on the morning of Saturday 29 October the Syrian Observatory reported that 17 soldiers had died in overnight clashes between troops and deserters in Homs. An activist on the ground quoted by the Observatory said, “More than 40 people were killed or wounded and two armoured vehicles destroyed,” after an officer and dozens of soldiers defected.

Clashes continued in the Duwar al-Rayess neighbourhood of Homs where a loud blast was heard after an armoured car was hit, the Observatory said, adding that smoke could be seen billowing from a government building.

But now he is back.

The struggle has many sides as Yemen’s dysfunctional state is also split by insurgencies in the north (led by a reactionary Shia sect) and secessionists in the South. The chaos has created additional space for Islamists linked to al-Qaeda to operate.

Even a competent, rational government would have difficulty dealing with Yemen’s multiple social problems. 40% of the population live on less than \$2 (£1.25) a day. Oxfam calculates that one-third of the population are hungry.

The UN has called on Saleh to step down. The Saudi-led Gulf Co-operation Council has also got a plan to ship Saleh out, replacing him with his deputy and granting him immunity from prosecution.

Yemen: Saleh staggers on

By Gerry Bates

Yemen’s President Ali Abdullah Saleh is resisting calls for him to step down, as the mass pro-democracy movement in the capital, Sanaa, continues to mobilise against him.

Protests began in January, and since then hundreds have been killed and many more injured.

However power is also contested in the capital by rival sections of the elite. In March several senior army commanders defected, and tribal militias fought the President’s forces in May and June.

Salah was badly injured by shell fire in June and left for treatment in Saudi Arabia for several months.

Egypt's unions

From Benghazi

Lucinda Lavelle of the British-Libyan Solidarity Campaign spoke from Benghazi to *Solidarity*

What is the general response among Libyans to the capture and death of Qaddafi?

Forty-eight hours after Qaddafi's death, the friends I was staying with in Benghazi decided to go out to watch Jalil making the official announcement of Libya's liberation. I felt mixed emotions. The manner in which Qaddafi was killed had robbed me of the elation I should have felt after six years campaigning against the regime. At the same time it was a historic moment and I wanted to be part of the celebrations.

It was impossible to get close to the area as the roads were jammed with cars — everyone honking horns, singing, flag waving and some of the returned fighters firing guns and driving heavy artillery through the streets. It was a joyous occasion for the tens of thousands who had come. But I would imagine people who felt Qaddafi's end too brutal were keeping away.

It's different in areas with more mixed loyalties, but the family I am staying with is very representative of families in Benghazi. I sat with Mabrouka last night as she spoke about the loss of her son Abdullah and her sister Saha who lost her son Hussein. Abdullah and Hussein were first cousins; their mothers both lost their sons on the same day, 20 February. The family hated Qaddafi. They feel he got the end he deserved. No one worried if Abdullah and Hussein were shot dead in cold blood, unarmed — so why should they worry if that's how Qaddafi died? The younger generation feel the same — they appreciate revenge is not the noblest desire, but they passionately hate Qaddafi and feel that anyone who expresses any sympathy with how he died is not a true revolutionary.

A friend of the family visited the house today and expressed regret over Qaddafi's death. She felt he should have faced trial in the International Courts so the whole world could see what his crimes were. When she said this the room erupted into noisy argument and it was very emotional.

What do you think of the idea that Qaddafi was killed so he couldn't reveal more about his links with Britain and other Western powers?

Yet another conspiracy theory to add to the hundreds before! I don't believe this is the case. I believe that the execution was very much as we have seen it recorded. Revengeful and brutal, in the hands of undisciplined youth who were looking for glory and a place in history. The political context in Libya does not seem to me to be very complex. Events here are run on very human emotions and the depth of political analysis is very shallow.

What has changed since your last visit to Libya?

When I first arrived in Benghazi at the beginning of October I was involved in a protest questioning how effectively the National Transitional Council (NTC) is working for the Libyan people. There was a lot of unrest about social security payments not reaching people in need and angry protests were organised outside the social security offices. Very quickly an organising committee was elected and further meetings took place to organise a campaign to hold the NTC to account for the chaos in the distribution of payments. I attended one of these planning meets and it too was quite chaotic! The Libyan people have got a long way to go before they learn to hold democratic meetings and organise themselves effectively.

Oil workers strike

By Gerry Bates

Workers at the Waha Oil Company, a joint venture between the Libyan government and three American oil corporations, have been on strike since the end of August to demand the removal of senior managers who collaborated with Qaddafi during Libya's civil war.

The workers say that managers provided the Libyan army with vehicles, and stored guns and TNT. As a result the company's oil fields were seriously damaged by NATO airstrikes.

There have been similar struggles at other oil companies and it seems that the oil workers are developing organisations and networks.

Protest outside the television station in Cairo against attacks on Christians

is recent elections in the Doctors' Syndicate — which the Islamist movement had dominated for many years.

Just prior to the election results in October, the Brotherhood held a self-congratulatory press conference, and almost the entire Egyptian media announced a Brotherhood landslide. It turned out this was completely wrong. As *Al Ahram* reported: "The [secular, opposition] Independence List stunned all observers by winning solid majorities... in 14 out of 27 governorates, and trounced the Brotherhood in a number of places they never dreamed of losing." (20/10/11). One place the Brotherhood was "trounced" was Ismailaya, where the movement was founded in 1928. The Independence List won 14 out of 16 seats in Alexandria, and in Cairo won almost 80% of the vote.

Why? In May there was a doctors' strike. The Brotherhood-run syndicate didn't support it, and denounced the strikers. Prior to that, although most doctors are very poorly paid (one of the demands of the strike was for a minimum wage of LE 1200) the Brotherhood had failed — for years — to fight to improve wages and conditions. Often, rather than fight for doctors' rights, the Brotherhood simply pushed their own Islamist agenda.

The Independence List did particularly well where the May strike was especially solid.

The Brotherhood still has overall control, but the political complexion of the union has been radically changed.

It's hard to know how far this pattern will repeat itself. But although the situation among doctors has its own peculiarities, it is surely not unique.

The Brotherhood has taken a turn towards organising within the labour movement — that is, the new independent unions; revealingly, their plan is to target the least militant sectors with the least history of struggle. This is hardly surprising: the Brotherhood includes employers who have seen strikes in their enterprises.

But the Muslim Brothers face intense competition also from their right. The ultra-conservative salafi movement has started to organise politically for the first time — and in July held an enormous rally in Tahrir Square which clearly rattled the Brotherhood. Old "jihadi" — violently "militant" — Islamists (recently out of jail) have launched their own political party, also.

SUFIS

The emergence of these groups (many of whom overtly opposed the January-February protests) have spurred the millions-strong sufi movement (mystical Muslim groups outside "official" Islam) to declare their own Egyptian Tahrir Party. As its founder told *Al Masry al Youm*: "Salafis hold whoever does not subscribe to their ideas as a non-believer. For them, Sufis, Shia and unveiled women are non-believers. Hence the need for a moral party that would make people feel safe." (5/9/11)

Of particular concern is growing tension — whipped up by the government and the official media — between salafis and Coptic Christians. A dispute in Upper (southern) Egypt last month led to the burning down of a church. A protest of mainly Copts, but which included Muslim supporters, was violently attacked by the police, leaving 25 dead and hundreds injured — the worst clashes since the fall of Mubarak.

So far the new workers' movement has not begun to develop its own political voice, though there have been moves to try by some activists. There is no workers' alternative standing in this month's parliamentary elections.

But the situation remains very volatile. Over the coming months there will be a pressing need for a working class unity, and working class answers to Egypt's severe social and economic problems — and to maintain the struggle for democracy and freedom. International solidarity will be vital.

Troubled Tribune

Press Watch
By Pat Murphy



Bad as the right-wing press is, the world of socialist papers and journals is too often a dispiriting and unappealing alternative.

The left press is usually tightly controlled by political organisations which discourage any debate. The result is lifeless, dreary publications with little or no influence. And it is a peculiarity of many left publications that their readership is smaller than their circulation, as so many purchases are expressions of solidarity rather than genuine interest in content.

There have been honourable exceptions to this picture. The *Miner* newspaper was eagerly gobbled up by workers in mining communities and their supporters throughout the 1984-5 strike as the only reliable source of information on the dispute. As the strike progressed the *Miner* broadened its coverage to issues beyond the immediate dispute, teaching supporters and miners much about wider class politics. Its popularity was, nevertheless, dependent on the course of that struggle and fell with the heroic defeat in 1985.

But for around half a century the labour movement left had a paper which combined unashamed support for workers in struggle in industry and politics with genuine influence. *Tribune*, established in 1937 as the paper of the Labour left, supported nuclear disarmament, workers' rights and public ownership and was not at all shy of attacking Labour leaders in power who fell short of its socialist standards. At its peak (1945 to 1950) *Tribune* had a circulation of around 40,000, and among its regular contributors was George Orwell, who had been its literary editor from 1943-5.

At the end of last month *Tribune* was narrowly saved from closure by a last minute deal to re-establish the title as a workers' cooperative. The existing owner, Labour-supporting millionaire Kevin McGrath, will pass it on without its debts.

Now would be a good time to review *Tribune's* record.

UNSTABLE

Throughout its history *Tribune* has walked the tightrope between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary socialism, blown this way and that by the contrasting winds of Labour loyalty, the influence of Stalinism, and the tension between Little Englander nationalism and internationalism.

For long periods and at some crucial times *Tribune's* record was not at all bad. Established to campaign for a united front of socialist parties against the threat of fascism in the late 1930s the paper argued, during the Second World War, that "the fight for socialism must be fought alongside the fight against Hitler". The Communist Party, in contrast, argued that the first should wait until the second had been won.

Despite various changes of editor and "line", it opposed both the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising and Eden's invasion of Suez in 1956, and went on to support the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

When a Labour government tried, in 1968, to shackle the unions with laws to restrict the ability to strike *Tribune* led the opposition in the Parliamentary Labour Party, linking with unions and party members to help force the withdrawal of the plans.

Many of the writers behind this paper went on to become very prominent figures in the Labour Party, most notably Aneurin Bevan and Michael Foot.

If circulation is any measure then *Tribune's* fall from influence has come in two stages.

In the late 1960s a new young left emerged which, at least initially, rejected existing mainstream parties and invested energies in the anti-Vietnam war movement and the growing ranks of the revolutionary left. To this movement *Tribune* seemed fairly irrelevant and staid.

In the 1970s extra-parliamentary struggle, particularly in the workplace, became the dominant form of socialist politics. It appeared, wrongly as it happens, that mass strikes and picketing could save us the bother of thinking about the boring and mundane business of government and party. In the longer term *Tribune's* patience and tenacity in relating to Labour politics could claim some vindication. Yet, during one of the most rebellious and radical periods in political history, *Tribune's* circulation dropped from 20,000 in 1960 to 10,000 in 1980.

As the focus of working class politics shifted in the 1980s to the political fights in the Labour Party, *Tribune* was

boosted. And as Labour activists became increasingly disillusioned with the experience of the 1974-9 Labour government and resolved to "never again" repeat that experience, *Tribune* became part of the campaign for Labour Party democracy and socialist policies. By far the biggest and most important fringe meetings at Labour Party Conference throughout the 1970s and 1980s were hosted by *Tribune*. Thousands of delegates would pack in to hear Tony Benn, Arthur Scargill, Dennis Skinner and Michael Foot.

The *Tribune* Group of MPs, first established in 1964, had been the organising centre for parliamentary opposition to right-wing Labour policies in government.

But then came the second stage in *Tribune's* decline.

On the back of the huge left-wing upsurge Michael Foot was elected Labour leader in 1980. A year later Foot's losing opponent Denis Healey, the right-wing Chancellor of 1976-9 and architect of an IMF deal which imposed wage cuts and led to the Winter of Discontent, stood against Tony Benn in a Deputy Leader election.

Benn represented and was the most articulate and charismatic spokesperson for the growing Labour left. But the Tribunites split over the election.

Foot and his supporters were inclined to support Healey as a means of healing internal divisions. They were partly influenced by the simultaneous departure of a group of right-wing Labour MPs to form a new and briefly quite successful party, the Social Democratic Party.

SOFT

A larger group, including the new editor of *Tribune* Chris Mullin, argued for supporting Benn (the eventual line of the paper).

In the past any serious left candidate for election in the Labour Party would have relied on *Tribune's* support. By 1982, however, there were a plethora of socialist organisations (the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD), the Rank and File Mobilising Committee, etc) fighting for Labour democracy, left-wing policies and a transformation of Labour which would go beyond the limited programme of *Tribune*.

In the end Benn's supporters set up their own parliamentary group, the Socialist Campaign Group, which leaned toward extra-parliamentary struggle, and trade union action. The *Tribune* Group and its newspaper were no longer the sole voice of left-wing politics in Parliament.

When Foot was followed as Labour leader by Neil Kinnock, another Tribunite, the paper became more clearly part of a "soft left". Although it objected to particular policies, most prominently the abandonment of nuclear disarmament, *Tribune* was no longer part of any active mobilisation of party members against the leadership.

When Mark Seddon took over as editor in 1993 it was hailed as a "return to the left" for the paper. But it became more of a coming to terms with the destruction of Labour as it had previously functioned, a recognition of the Blairite coup and the creation of New Labour. Neither the *Tribune* Group nor the paper played any significant role in fighting Blair's coup, despite the election of Seddon to the National Executive Committee as a candidate of the Grassroots Alliance. By the 1990s *Tribune's* circulation was below 3,000.

The survival and strength of a paper such as *Tribune* depends on the movements within which it exists. It was at its peak when the Labour left was a powerful and combative force; it inevitably declined when that left was suppressed and excluded by open and unapologetic advocates of neo-liberalism.

It would be entirely wrong, however, to portray *Tribune* as a helpless victim of the Blairite juggernaut. *Tribune* and its supporters were for the most part the diggers of their own grave. Faced with the choice between the demands of a militant left-wing movement for a politics which broke from capitalism and relied on working class organisations and a return to "politics as normal" in the Labour Party, they chose the latter.

They did not understand that the right had their own version of "never again". Never again must there be a left which can hold Labour governments to account, organise against them and reflect the demands of the class that Labour purports to represent.

The recent history of *Tribune* is an indirect vindication of the famous Pastor Niemoller warning, adapted to say "when they came for Militant, *Socialist Organiser*, etc, I said nothing, for I wasn't in those groups. When they came for me there was no-one left to speak out for me".

Indirect, because the paper is not being suppressed but instead reaping the whirlwind of the marginalisation of the serious Labour left. It is a marginalisation *Tribune* supporters did little to prevent and much to encourage.

A stylish film

Ira Berkovic reviews *Drive*

***Drive*, the recent Nicolas Winding Refn film that has further catapulted its male star Ryan Gosling into Hollywood's stratosphere, is a very, very good looking film. Every aspect of it is visually sumptuous; from the distinctive typeface used for the credits to the inspired casting of Ron Perlman (possessed of one of the most intriguing faces in American cinema) as the chief villain.**

It tells the story of Gosling's unnamed mechanic, moonlighting as a getaway driver, and his developing relationship with his neighbour (played by Carey Mulligan) and her young son.

But it's hard to pin down exactly what the film is "about" and whether it's trying to "say something". The outbursts of extreme violence from Gosling's character are jarringly at odds with his quiet, sensitive demeanour. Is the message about the potential for brutality inside all of us? Are we meant to read the driver's attempt to find the right moral path through an underworld of violence, corruption and betrayal as a metaphor for the attempt we must all make to find our way through societies based largely on those same values? I'm not sure.

I'm also not sure that it matters much, as Refn seems more interested in how the film looks than in what it's saying. That's not to accuse it of superficiality; *Drive* is a triumph of cinematic style. Even (perhaps especially) in the film's most violent moments, it's clear how much attention has been lavished on the film's look.

In one particularly brutal moment Gosling kills a man by repeatedly stamping on his face. The scene is cut expertly, showing the audience just enough to convey the intense horror and shock at the bloody incident that Carey Mulligan's character (who witnesses it) feels, but not quite enough to tip it over the edge into cheap splatterfest territory.

Some might find it shallow, but unlike some of Quentin Tarantino's work (to which the film has been compared), *Drive* doesn't just feel like a blunderbuss explosion of motifs, tropes and references that the director thought might look cool. There is reference in *Drive* to various classic noir films, and most explicitly to 1978's *The Driver* — but the references work as respectful homage rather than the tacky pastiche which characterises Tarantino at his laziest.

Drive feels like it has been meticulously crafted to give audiences a whole range of experiences and elicit a whole range of reactions in a way that only very well-made cinema really can. While it is important to try to identify the "message" — intended or not — of any work of art, that shouldn't prevent us from appreciating the art on its own terms (primarily aesthetic, in this case).

For anyone who appreciates the stylistic use to which cinema as a medium can be put, *Drive* should not be missed.

Ryan Gosling

Airbrushed view of the Deep South

Sacha Ismail reviews *The Help*

Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* has just been turned into a film. Both are enjoyable, but there are political problems with them and, in the case of the film, these problems are aggravated by conventional Hollywood presentation and story-telling.

The Help is set in early 1960s Mississippi, in the semi-apartheid set-up which existed from the late 1870s until the victories of the Civil Rights movement won at least formal legal equality for black Americans. Many of the black women in the small town of Jackson are maids for white women, cleaning their houses and bringing up their children, who then in turn become employers. This includes two of the film's three heroines, Aibileen and Minny.

Most of the employers are, as you would imagine, deeply racist, and treat their servants in a manner ranging from degrading at best to deeply brutal at worst. The third heroine is Skeeter, a young, white, bourgeois woman who is increasingly disgusted with the reality of her community and becomes friends with Aibileen, before persuading her and other maids to help her write a book of their stories — a very risky project in the circumstances.

Despite Stockett's obvious good intentions, both the book and the film have been criticised by black academics and activists.

Aibileen (Viola Davis) and Minny (Octavia Spencer)

The Association of Black Women Historians in the US argued that *The Help* "distorts, ignores, and trivializes the experiences of black domestic workers" and "strip[s] black women's lives of historical accuracy for the sake of entertainment".

They took particular issue with Stockett's use of black dialect (the author is from Mississippi, but white), her nearly

uniform portrayal of black men as cruel or absent, and her lack of attention to the sexual harassment endured by many women in white employers' homes.

In *The Help*, pretty much all the abuse and mistreatment is done by the white women.

Having acknowledged all that, I think the problem is worse in the film than in the novel. The book is split into three parts, each narrated by one of the heroines; the film is a single narrative structure, and you could argue that it gives disproportionate attention to Skeeter — who, in addition, has been transformed from odd-looking and awkward into quirky but conventionally attractive.

On the issue of black men the balance in the book is different, with much more about Aibileen's dead son, including flashbacks. In the film he is only mentioned in passing.

Most important, the book gives a much better sense of the degradation, violence and heartbreak faced by the black women as a routine part of their jobs and lives (and which many domestic workers around the world continue to face now).

That is much more airbrushed on screen. The film ends with sunlit vistas and inspiring music. There is a vein of humour in the book, but in the film it dominates everything. Despite some unpleasantness, wasn't the Deep South jolly?

Read the book rather than see the film — and then go online to read some of the criticism.

Glasgow history: is it red or wretched?

Dale Street reviews *When the Clyde Ran Red* by Maggie Craig, and *The Tears That Made the Clyde* by Carol Craig

***When the Clyde Ran Red* singularly fails to live up to its title (and dustcover — a picture of the crowds in Glasgow's George Square on "Bloody Friday", 1919).**

The expression "Red Clydeside" refers to a period of industrial and political unrest on the Clyde, from around the start of the First World War until the 40 Hours Strike of 1919 and the subsequent capture of 10 of Glasgow's 15 constituencies by the Independent Labour Party in 1922.

Such events are covered in Craig's book. But not very well. There is no mention, for example, of the strikes which swept through about 25 engineering factories in February of 1915. And one would look in vain for any serious analysis of the different socialist currents that found expression in the upheavals of "Red Clydeside".

Nor does the book engage with the ongoing arguments about the significance (or otherwise) of "Red Clydeside", epitomised by Iain McLean's dated but still controversial *The Legend of Red Clydeside*.

Almost half the book's contents deal with events which fall well outside the years of "Red Clydeside".

Craig goes as far back as Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobite uprising of 1745: "(He) was never a noted fan of democracy. Many of those who rallied to his standard were, seeing in him the only focus for their discontent over Scotland's loss of independence. ...It can be argued the Jacobites of 1745 forged a political movement ahead of its time."

And as far forward as the SNP's victory in the Holyrood elections of 2011: "In May 2011 the SNP under Alex Salmond swept to a stunning victory... routing their political opponents.... Leading as it does to the likelihood of a referendum on Scottish independence, the sheer scale of the SNP landslide took many commentators by surprise."

Craig also devotes chapters to the "Zinoviev Letter", which brought down the first Labour government, the 1926 General Strike, the origins of the SNP, the Great Depression, the Spanish Civil War, the launch of the *Queen Mary*, the Empire Exhibition of 1938, and the Clydebank Blitz of 1941.

MIND

At the hands of Craig, "Red Clydeside" is transformed from a specific period in the history of the Clydeside working class into a metaphysical state of mind:

"Whatever our political views, many of us still hold the ideals of the Red Clydesiders close to our hearts. It's what makes us who we are."

Craig concludes by criticising other historians for "rendering a thrilling and passionate period of history boring" and for "missing the point".

According to Craig, the "Red Clydesiders" manifested "the democratic spirit of the Scottish people" and "the unshakeable conviction that this is a country more than able to run its own affairs." They gave expression to "the determination, achievements and sheer lust for life of the people of Glasgow, Clydebank and Clydeside."

But Craig is missing the point. "Red Clydeside", warts

"Bloody Friday", Glasgow, 1919

and all, is part of the history of the workers' movement. It was not a staging post between the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 and the SNP referendum of 2014.

Maggie Craig's optimistic portrayal of Glaswegian workers is not one which finds any corroboration in Carol Craig's *The Tears That Made the Clyde*.

Carol Craig reels off statistics about contemporary Glasgow. It is the most violent city in Western Europe. In some areas of the city male life expectancy (55) is lower than many Third World countries. More than 20% of the population die before they reach 65. In the poorest areas of the city male life expectancy has declined over the past two decades.

Obesity rates are among the highest in the world. More people are affected by long-term illnesses and at a younger age than in the rest of Scotland. 24% of the working-age population are unemployed. The number of Incapacity Benefit claimants is the highest in Britain.

Thirty six percent of children live in a household where no-one is employed, and 42% of them are eligible for free school meals — double the national figure. Liver cirrhosis mortality rates for men are the highest in Western Europe. The city has the highest rate of drug abuse in Scotland.

Deprivation and de-industrialisation, writes Craig, explain only partly the poor health of much of Glasgow's population. Other cities have suffered from deprivation and de-industrialisation but without the same impact on health. Nor does inequality explain the rampant poor health. Inequality (as distinct from just poverty) is a major factor in triggering social and health problems. Glasgow is less unequal than many other cities. Yet Glasgow lags behind those more unequal cities on health standards.

Craig argues Glasgow's problems are rooted in the city's

history. They are, so to speak, a legacy of that historical past, albeit one that contemporary government policies do nothing to eradicate. As the historian Tom Devine writes in the foreword to Craig's book: "The social problems under consideration have a long lineage and so historical analysis of the Glaswegian past, Carol Craig suggests, is an essential approach to them."

Thus, although Craig's primary concern is what strategies should be adopted to overcome contemporary patterns of deprivation, the bulk of her book is given over to an analysis of the distinctive features of Glasgow history.

Craig deals with the absence of a middle class in Glasgow (i.e. there were just the very rich, and the very poor), the East-West social apartheid, a local ruling class more autocratic than its counterpart elsewhere, and the Glaswegian middle class ideology which blamed the poor for poverty.

Craig also presents a bleak overview of the history of the working-class population and the historical factors which encouraged widespread alcoholism, a strongly macho male culture, high levels of gender hostility, and the emergence of a "pecking order" within the working class itself.

Whereas *When the Clyde Ran Red* portrays plucky proles struggling on manfully with a smile on their faces ("running through all these stories, even in the darkest of times, this quicksilver vein of wit is the birthright of the people of Red Clydeside"), Carol Craig strikes a more pessimistic but arguably more realistic note:

"The victims and perpetrators of violent crime are not flourishing, neither are the young people committing suicide, the drug addicts, the neglected and abused children, the alcoholics, the men in their fifties too incapacitated to work, the battered women, the drunks."

Left debates the euro and Greece

By Martin Thomas

On Monday 31 October, a New Political Economy Network (NPEN) seminar for academics, journalists, and political figures, at the offices of the *Guardian*, discussed the eurozone crisis.

Larry Elliott, economics editor of the *Guardian*, introduced, arguing that the eurozone project has come to the end of its road and that the answer is “to rip this up and start again”.

Costas Lapavistas from the School of Oriental and African Studies put it more sharply: the left must campaign for debtor-led default (Greece stopping payment on its debts) and exit from the eurozone. Greece will then be followed by Portugal and others, and the eurozone (though not necessarily the EU) will break up.

Engelbert Stockhammer from Kingston University was the other invited speaker. Speaking from an avowedly left Keynesian point of view, he advocated a campaign for a transformation of the EU — a big European budget, a Europe-wide welfare state, etc. — rather than for exit.

Some speaking from a Marxist background argued for a transformation of Europe rather than default and exit: for example John Palmer, a former leader of the IS/SWP and also a former *Guardian* journalist, and Ozlem Onaran from Middlesex University, who said that we should not underestimate the ability of working-class movements in the “periphery” to force concessions on a European scale.

Others backed default and exit. The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (AWL) was cited in this high-level conclave as a bogeyman, with one speaker quoting “an AWL member” as declaring that euro-exit would lead to a nationalist “carnival of reaction” in the country exiting. He retorted that this would be so only if the left failed to lead the exit, and instead let the right shape it.

After the meeting I debated further with Costas Lapavistas. Here, in counterpoint, are two sides of the argument as I understand it so far.

The Greek government is no longer able to govern. That’s why the referendum has been called. We need an immediate answer: default and exit. That will allow for Greece to restructure its economy, regain competitiveness, and shift the social balance within the country in a way that is impossible while it is trapped in eurozone constraints. And it addresses the real issues of national independence which now arise from the Troika’s impositions on Greece.

A workers’ government in Greece would have little option but to default on debt payments. It would probably have to restore a separate Greek currency because it could not get enough euros to run the economy. It would probably be expelled from the eurozone and the EU.

Default and exit coming that way, as the result of victories by the left, would be accompanied by social measures benefiting Greece’s workers and poor at the expense of the country’s rich and its bloated military establishment.

That would be because default and exit resulted from victories by the left, not because victories for the left would result from default and exit. They wouldn’t.

DEFAULT

We know what to do following default and exit. Nationalise the banks. Impose exchange controls. Introduce an industrial policy. If that means that people can’t travel abroad, or that fuel must be rationed, or that you have war-economy measures, so be it. That is better than the Troika (EU-ECB-IMF) plan.

A workers’ government in Greece would have to impose many emergency measures. It could not bring immediate prosperity. It would uphold Greece’s national rights, but it would also understand that confined in one country it would be doomed, and it would focus on campaigning for similar struggles elsewhere in Europe.

The Greek left, in striving for a workers’ government, should campaign for such measures as refusal to pay the debt, expropriation of banks and big enterprises, taxation of the rich, cuts in military spending, and so on, as a programme to be fought for both in Greece and across Europe, and explain default and exit as a likely consequence — rather than campaigning for default and exit as its frontline demands and then hope to nurture socialist cuckoo-eggs in that “default-and-exit” nest.

As regards immediately-winnable concessions, probably Greek workers — by refusing to comply with the Troika plan — have a better chance of forcing some concessions from the EU and the ECB (relaxing the plan, giving ECB credit to Greece) than they have from a “default-and-exit” bourgeois Greek government, if only because the EU and the ECB are much richer and so can more easily afford concessions.

Lindsay Thomas, a former director of the Financial Services Authority, asked a shrewd question in the meeting: if Greece goes out from the eurozone, where is it going to? The

Greek debt crisis has thrown the whole eurozone project into chaos

capitalist world market is not a soft refuge from the harsh eurozone. Greece is highly trade-dependent, with exports amounting to 23.5% of output (2008).

In the eurozone, Greece is trapped.

Hungary and Latvia have suffered worse economic collapse since 2008 than Greece. Neither is in the eurozone. Both are free to let their currencies decline relative to the euro, or to print more money.

In fact Hungary and Latvia have kept their exchange rates with the euro more or less stable. That suggests that euro-exit is not an easy recipe for recovery. Governments who have the extra levers which would be made available by euro-exit have chosen not to use them.

A defaulting-and-exiting Greek government would not have the option of keeping its exchange rate with the euro fixed. A new drachma would lose value fast, while rich Greeks holding euros would whisk them out of the country and benefit relative to Greek workers forced to accept drachmas for wages. Probably Greece would have a two-currency economy, with some things available only to those who could pay in euros. That won’t help, or leave Greece less “trapped”.

Default worked in Argentina. After two years of economic chaos, in December 2001, Argentina defaulted on its debt, and soon after abandoned the fixed exchange rate which made one Argentine peso exchangeable for one US dollar.

Yet the Argentine economy bounced back, growing over 8% per year from 2003 onwards, and Argentina was able to borrow again on international markets from 2006.

Over 2002, the peso slumped to 25 cents, and Argentine workers suffered intensely. In the mid-1990s, the top ten per cent in Argentina averaged 18 times the income of the poorest ten per cent. In 2002, the richest 10% got 43 times as much as the poorest. Unemployment rose to an official figure of 21% in December 2002. Inequality has eased only slightly since then.

Capitalist economies recover from defaults. But only through dolours which any capitalist government will impose disproportionately on the poor.

Socialists want to save working-class rights and standards, not the euro. A workers’ government in Argentina would have had no choice but to cancel the peso’s peg to the dollar, and see the peso slump. But we should not advocate default-and-exit as our answer, rather than seeing default-and-exit as a possible consequence of social struggle.

Moreover, Greece, in the midst of global depression, is unlikely to have the same fortune as Argentina in the relatively booming mid-2000s.

The euro was introduced to serve big banks, big corporations, and core states in Europe. The working class has no stake in it. To defend the euro is as false, for socialists, as would be defending the gold standard or Argentina’s peg of the peso to the dollar.

We do not defend the euro or the gold standard. We do not defend “independent” national currencies either.

So long as we have to deal with money, we need relatively stable money. The Bolsheviks, after the 1917 Russian revolution, refused to pay Tsarist debts, and experimented financially: but, in 1924, had to introduce a currency linked to gold (the chervonets and the “gold ruble”) in order to stabilise their economy.

Even a workers’ government will have to deal with money for a long time, and will need some mechanism, with

costs, larger or smaller, to stabilise its currency.

The working class has no stake in the euro. It does have a stake in reducing the barriers between countries in Europe. It is not just bourgeois apologetics to point out that the rivalry of European states across economically-outdated national borders led to two world wars in the 20th century.

We do not subordinate the working class to the bourgeois plans and factions that work, in their own way and frequently at the expense of the working class, to reduce the barriers between countries in Europe. We pose our opposition to those bourgeois plans and factions in terms of maximum working-class unity across Europe, maximum building on the botched achievements of the bourgeoisie, minimum regression to higher barriers between countries.

WAR

The EU is even more neo-liberal than the IMF.

We have no brief for the capitalist EU. But Elliott’s idea of “ripping it up and starting again” is daft. (Fight World War Two again and hope for a better sequel?) We have to start from capitalism as it is. By definition capitalism operates to serve big banks and big corporations. We can’t avoid that. We can and must work on the contradictions within it.

If the claim is that the EU is specially more impervious to working-class pressure, or pressure for equality and democracy, than other capitalist structures, then that is not true.

The introduction of the euro in 1999 was botched and hurried through on a wave of capitalist triumphalism. We did not advocate Britain joining the euro, and when a referendum on British entry looked likely, we advocated not a yes vote but refusal to make a choice and a campaign instead for working-class unity across Europe.

However, between the introduction of the euro in 1999 and the onset of crisis in 2008, Greece’s income per head (on PPS calculations) increased from 68% of Germany’s to 80%. Spain’s increased from 80% to 90%. Ireland’s increased from 105% to 115%. Ireland had already seen a great expansion of capitalist growth, and indeed of such autonomy as it could get as a small state in the world market, since it joined the EU. Staying out of the euro did not give the UK better progress: its income per head increased only at about the same rate as Germany’s.

The argument is for exit from the euro, not for exit from the EU.

The counter-argument is for orientation to a Europe-wide workers’ struggle to force concessions from, and overthrow, Europe’s rich, not for preserving the current structures.

Waffle about Europe-wide transformations is no good to Greek workers who are losing their jobs now. A Europe-wide movement is desirable. But it doesn’t exist, and Greek workers can’t wait for it.

Default and exit is no more an immediate answer to the Greek worker losing her or his job today than any Europe-wide demand is.

The first answer for Greek workers losing their jobs is to resist, fight back, take over workplaces, demand expropriation of the bosses and bankers. The question then is whether they look to an alliance with workers elsewhere in Europe, many of whom already face the same sort of attacks as in Greece and are already fighting back.

Or look to an alliance with a hypothetical section of the Greek bourgeoisie willing and able to carry out a left-Keynesian policy after default and exit.

• Costas Lapavistas:
bit.ly/costas1 and www.researchonmoneyandfinance.org/

GMB begins strike ballots

By Ira Berkovic

GMB, Britain's third largest union, launched its ballot for strike action on public sector pensions on Monday 31 October.

GMB members across three different pensions schemes (local government,

civil service and NHS) will be balloted in a vote that close on 16 November. Also balloted will be GMB members working in Parliament, meaning that MPs will be met with picket lines at the House of Commons. The ballot for the parliamentary workers (including catering and security staff) closes on 15

November.

In the past months, GMB officials have been most explicit about the need for further action beyond 30 November. The union's National Secretary Brian Strutton has talked of a "long, hard and dirty" dispute which stretches well in 2012. The union refers to the 30 November strike as

only "the first day" of strike action.

GMB leaders will need to be held to such rhetoric. The undemocratic culture of that union, where appointed Regional Secretaries hold enormous sway over regional units of the union, while make it difficult for activists to put pressure on their leaders and hold them to account. Using Trades Councils and local strike committees to coordinate with other unions can help build pressure from below, and GMB militants should link up across branches to make sure the rhetoric from Strutton and others is acted on.

The construction union UCATT has also begun balloting its members to take part in the 30 November strike.

Scottish teachers' union EIS, the first union to begin balloting, will conclude its vote on 3 November.

Southampton workers to vote on new deal

Southampton council workers will begin voting on Friday 4 November on a proposal from management that could see their months-long battle come to an end.

A members' meeting on Wednesday 2 November will decide whether to continue the action short of a strike during the two-week ballot period.

Unison is not putting out a recommendation on the bosses' deal which includes some concessions on the pay cuts.

•More!
tinyurl.com/sotondeal

AWL industrial bulletins

Public Disorder (local government workers)
tinyurl.com/publicdisorderbulletin

Germ's Eye View (health workers) tinyurl.com/germseeyevue

Lambeth Council Worker (local government workers in Lambeth)
workersliberty.org/lambethcouncilworker

Tubeworker (London Underground)
workersliberty.org/tubeworker

Coming soon: Tower Hamlets Class Struggle (education workers in Tower Hamlets)

PCS and 30 November: strategy needed

By a PCS activist

PCS has a live mandate for action from the June strike so we are not balloting again.

The union has organised a number of reps' briefings, which have been used to discuss ideas as to how we can make N30 even bigger and better than J30. It's good that there is a realistic assessment going on of where we were weak last time in terms of membership support, picket lines etc., and there are moves to address this.

On the downside, reps have not been thoroughly

briefed as to how the actual pension changes will affect members. What are the proposals for increased contributions? What would a career average pension scheme look like? What has actually been discussed in negotiations? How should we escalate the action?

Clearly, we need to make N30 the biggest strike Britain has seen for generations.

But union leaders are adopting an SWP-style approach — promoting N30 as the next, isolated, "big thing" — without any long-term strategy for actually winning the dispute.

Building the strike in South London

By a Unison activist

My union, Unison, has been slow in readying the union to fight the government's attacks on our pensions.

This means that my branch have had to throw everything at building for the ballot. We've used a number of tactics to try and ensure a big turnout for the ballot.

- A week before the ballot opened we held an all members branch meeting focused on pensions. 250 members attended and voted for two motions, one which laid out how we will build for a large turnout and the other which commits the branch to fight for a strategy to win based on the widest possible rank and file democracy.

- All stewards have been tasked with organising shop meetings about the ballot. Although the branch meeting was very successful, many workers cannot attend central meetings because of shift patterns or where they are based. Shop meetings also

allow people to ask questions or make contributions in a smaller, less intimidating setting.

- Branch officers have been holding stalls outside large council buildings handing out information about the strike and urging people to vote yes. In addition, all officers on facility time have been asked to walk around workplaces with leaflets about the strike and answer members questions.

- The branch has been producing weekly pensions briefings emailed to all members. The briefings focused on different ways of explaining the strike-case studies of different workers and how much they would lose from pensions changes, statements from members on why they are voting yes, myth-busting, wider politics around the strike.

- We have been calling all members to keep track of who has voted and using the information to decide where to focus our efforts.

All of the council's unions — Unison, GMB,

NUT and Unite — have been working together to build for the strike. The joint union meeting room has been transformed into a "war room" with lists of all workplaces and how they have been covered. We are reaching out to other local public sector branches to offer to help them build. Lambeth Unison members will be holding stalls and leafleting local hospitals and benefits offices.

In early November we are holding the first cross-union meeting of the dispute for all activists from unions which are balloting for action.

It is often stated that the majority of people who vote in a ballot, vote in the first week. This is true but that is because in most ballots, only the most organised members vote.

To achieve a big turnout we must campaign from before the ballot opens to the day it closes and aim to reach the people who don't usually engage with the union.

Mass sackings threat in Doncaster

By Darren Bedford

Nearly 10,000 workers at Doncaster council could face losing their jobs unless they agree to worse contracts imposed by council bosses as part of a £7.5 million cuts programme.

Negotiations on the package, which includes a 5.4% pay cut for many workers, were not due to conclude until mid-November, but bosses have attempted to short-circuit that process by blackmailing employees into accepting the new terms.

Paul Smillie, the convener for 800 members of the Unite union at the council, said his members were "up in arms" at the way council bosses had disregarded an ongoing negotiation process. Unison's Jim Board said that the council's action "demon-

strates a failure to take the negotiations seriously and deliberately drive through changes without the union having a say."

He called it "a bullying approach which is now hanging over us", and said that unions would "respond very quickly by initiating internal dispute resolution procedures."

A series of local authority disputes over 2010 and 2011 showed that using "Section 188", the legislation that allows bosses to impose contractual changes through the threat of mass sackings, is now the go-to tactic for public sector employers seeking to shortcut around collective bargaining and negotiating processes. While strikes, such as the London FBU dispute in late 2010, have impacted in mitigating the impact of such changes, unions have found it hard

to maintain members' resolve to resist with the threat of losing their jobs hanging so conspicuously over their heads.

Public sector union activists need to urgently work out strategies for beating mass sackings, and the labour movement nationally needs to campaign for the abolition of laws that make a mockery of trade union recognition and agreements.

Other industrial news online

Left candidate Michael Dooley excluded from General Secretary election in construction union UCATT — tinyurl.com/ucattelection

Carlisle RMT cleaners strike. "We handed out nose pegs to passengers telling them they would need them as the toilets were stinking because cleaners were on strike."
More in article below.

Wins for Tube union

By a Tubeworker supporter

Tube workers' union RMT has scored two more important victories in its fight against the victimisation of union members.

Sacked drivers Jayesh Patel and James Masango have won reinstatement.

James will be back at work on 14 November, while Jayesh — who has been working a stations job since he was "dipped" from his job as a driver in June — will return to driving trains in February.

The victories came as RMT prepared a strike ballot of all train grade members.

The victories bring the total of successful reinstatement campaigns since December 2010 to eight, an impressive testimony to the RMT's spirit of solidarity but also a worrying indication that Tube bosses are still attempting to pick off individual RMT members whenever they can.

Activists will be hoping to capitalise on the morale boost from the successful reinstatement campaigns as the RMT heads into a testing time with battles on a number of fronts.

A recently leaked document from Tube bosses re-

vealed plans for a further jobs massacre (see *Solidarity* 222), and drivers voted overwhelmingly to take action short of a strike in opposition to new safety regulations that reduce the minimum number of staff required to keep a station open.

Unfortunately it will be fighting with a hand tied behind its back on many of these issues after the union recommended acceptance of a four-year pay deal. Without the confidence to fight for a shorter deal, members overwhelmingly, and understandably, voted in line with the union's recommendation. But the decision does mean that the RMT cannot now launch a fight on pay — the issue with the most potential to unite workers across grades — until 2015, after the Olympics and the Mayoral election.

Elsewhere in the rail industry, cleaners employed by Carlisle Cleaning and Support Services who work on the Virgin West Coast Mainline began strike action on Friday 28 October in a battle over pay and union recognition.

Carlisle's owner, Impelam Group, increased its profits by nearly 30% last year.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

“No Day” protest in Athens

28 October: Greeks say “no” to the Troika

By Theodora Polenta

On 28 October, all over Greece, the usual yearly parades to commemorate Greece's refusal to surrender to Mussolini in 1940 – “No” Day – were turned this year into protests of defiance and resistance against the newly imposed austerity measures of the Pasok government and the EU-ECB-IMF Troika.

It is the custom that school students and armed forces parade and show their respects to politicians and religious leaders on the saluting stands. However,

the expected patterns of events were turned upside down.

In Thessaloniki, the crowd shouted slogans: “Bread, Education, Freedom: the Greek junta did not end in 1974”; “Now or never: time to revolt”; “Don't let capitalism kill you”.

The parade in Thessaloniki was cancelled, and all the politicians there, including Greece's president Karolos Papoulias, were escorted away by police. Protesters occupied the saluting stand, and students and trade unionists paraded holding banners saying: “We don't owe, we

won't sell, we won't pay”.

Similar things happened all around Greece. Not only members of the Pasok government were heckled, but also politicians from the right-wing opposition parties, New Democracy and Laos politicians.

In Athens, students turned their heads away from the politicians' saluting stand as they passed, raised their fists in the air, holding black handkerchiefs, and paid their respects to the protesters instead.

The Athens council band, despite threats from the mayor, paraded with black handkerchiefs around their

musical instruments and refused to stand by the politicians.

In two small islands, Syros and Chios, the authorities decided to cancel the parades. The islanders decided that the parades should go ahead under the people's rules.

Instead of politicians, left-wing national resistance fighters from the Second World War were placed on the saluting stand, alongside representatives of schools that are under occupation, to represent the unification of past, current and future struggles.

• More: page 3

Greek referendum on eurozone deal

By Colin Foster

On 31 October Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou announced plans for a referendum on the deal decided by eurozone leaders on 26 October which further “bails out” Greece (in fact, bails out the international banks which have lent to Greece, and demands destructive cuts in Greece).

His decision followed a wave of strikes and mass protests which disrupted Greece's official celebrations of a national anniversary on 28 October.

Papandreou's gamble succeeded in one thing:

embarrassing the opposition parties. Although they had voted against the deal in Greece's parliament, the opposition parties expressed outrage at the referendum.

If Papandreou wins the referendum, then his government regains some political grip. If he loses, then the opposition parties (in the first place, New Democracy, Greece's Tory party) will be faced with taking over, after an election or as part of a new coalition based on the current parliament.

Unlike Ireland's opposition parties, who insisted that the EU deal for Ireland be finalised before the country's general election,

so that they could subsequently say they had no choice but to implement it, the Greek opposition parties will have to try to renegotiate the deal — with an annoyed and reluctant eurozone leadership.

The deal should be voted down, or — if the referendum is blocked, which it may be by Papandreou losing his parliamentary authority — defeated by action in the workplaces and on the streets.

The deal is not working in its own terms anyway. Even before Papandreou's announcement, the interest rate which the global markets are demanding on 10-

year IOUs (bonds) from the Italian government had risen to 6.18%. The similar rate for German bonds is 2.19%. The Italian rate is unsustainable.

Labour movements across Europe should unite to demand, as an emergency measure, the expropriation of European high finance, and its conversion into a Europe-wide banking, mortgage and pension service, under social and democratic control.

Greece's debt should be cancelled, and a new beginning made. Social minima and workers' rights should be levelled up across the continent.

Fascists attack Occupy Newcastle

By Ed Whitby

At 3am on Monday 31 October the Occupy Newcastle camp was attacked. People were punched, knocked over and kicked, one occupier was hit in the face, bricks were thrown. Nobody had to be hospitalised but it could have been worse.

On the previous day a group of around 100 from the Scottish Defence League, English Defence League and National Front turned up at the camp at the Monument in the city centre.

Originally they intended to counter-protest an anti-Islamophobia rally initiated by Counterfire. Since that was cancelled, they decided instead to target a Revolutionary Communist Group stall which was beside the occupation.

People from the occupation and the left, including Workers' Liberty, helped defend the stall and occupation. A line of police separated the two sides.

The right-wing thugs were clearly up for a fight and had been drinking. Later on a few pubs were trashed and police escorted SDL members to coaches.

Although it is not clear who carried out the Monday morning attack, it seems unlikely that Sunday's events and Monday's

were unrelated.

EDL members on Facebook have been engaging in discussions with occupiers, often not openly, but to say they should be welcome in the occupation movement.

The event has also raised an issue of trust in the police who had said they would be keeping the occupation safe after Sunday, but weren't there when bars kicked out at 3am and the incident happened.

Unfortunately, it has also highlighted how divided the left and labour movement is. In an assembly meeting a Counterfire supporter blamed Unison for calling off the Islamophobia event; but Counterfire should have known that the EDL were coming and mobilised to defend the occupation.

The UAF/SWP were not visible on the day, but have since written to the occupation giving their support, asking for the occupation to send reps to the UAF committee, and blaming Counterfire for refusing to work with them.

It all points for the need for an open, democratic anti-racist/fascist group linked to the labour movement which reaches beyond being a front for left groups or something for union leaders to use at local elections.

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