

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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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:

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

Contact us:

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In April the NHS will be privatised



By Jill Mountford, Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign organising committee (pc)

From this April 80% of the NHS budget — around £70 billion — will be handed over to 211 GP-led Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). CCGs replace Primary Care Trusts, once the local arm of the Department of Health.

The CCGs' budget will be spent in a competitive market subject to competition laws designed for commerce not public health. The private sector will cherry-pick the services where they can make the most profit. Hospitals will be left with the most difficult and most expensive cases; their finances will be destabilised. For many Trusts, laden with PFI debts, the financial crisis will deepen.

Under regulations to Section 75 of the Health and Social Care Act (not voted on by MPs) it will be almost impossible to award a con-

tract without competitive tendering from "Any Qualified Provider". The "Qualified" bit means financially sound with certain policies in place, not medically qualified!

CCGs are not accountable to the electorate. They answer to the NHS Commissioning Board (Sir David Nicholson) and to Monitor, the market regulator.

The new regulations grant Monitor sweeping statutory powers to intervene and enforce competition. Monitor will be able to decide when commissioners have breached competition regulations, and have powers to issue fines, set aside contracts, stop arrangements that they deem flawed and to impose competitive tendering and the offer of "Any Qualified Provider".

The spin for CCGs has been that GPs are best placed to know about patients' needs. But very few GPs have the time or knowledge to do the commissioning. It will in fact be done for them by private companies employing around two thirds of the commissioning workforce. Commissioning is being taken from PCTs and given to the private profit making sector.

Built into CCGs' constitu-

tions are gagging clauses forbidding GPs to speak out about contracts awarded and any other CCG business without prior permission from the CCG board. GPs will be more accountable to the shareholders of private business than to the public.

This system is created for the private sector to compete for any NHS funding that is spent on purchasing services for patients. With massive cuts in real terms to NHS funding, CCGs will choose private providers who are cutting corners, at the expense of patient care.

CLOSE

NHS hospitals will be forced to close services that cannot make a profit or, worse, close altogether.

What's happening in Lewisham and South London Health Trust will happen all over the country — the closure of well-functioning A&Es, replacing them with first aid posts, selling off land where hospital services sit and outsourcing to the private sector.

The whole procedure is set up to favour big businesses and corporations who have teams of lawyers and accountants to put together their tenders, and heavily stacked against co-operatives, social enterprises and the voluntary sector not-for-profit providers that are clinically led.

The NHS, beyond the reassuring logo that will be used by all private providers, is disappearing in front of our collective eyes.

The regulations to Section 75 going through Statutory Instrument Committees over the next 30 odd days firmly place competition laws central, putting fear into any future government that might consider renationalisation of the NHS because of the astronomical costs attached to breaking billions of pounds worth of contracts under competition law. Yet this has got to be fought for and won. There is no alternative. We de-

mand the renationalisation of the NHS. Leaders of the labour movement gormlessly stood by as the Health and Social Care Bill became law. Not one national demonstration was called in defence of the NHS, not one piece of industrial action, and not one demand on the Labour leadership to commit to repealing the entire Act and rebuilding the NHS when it comes to power. Not so much as a whisper.

Yet could there be a better, more uniting issue on which to mobilise millions of people? The fight to repeal the Health and Social Care Act and to rebuild the NHS paid for by taxing the rich and big business is now the job of everyone who considers themselves a socialist. It is the job of every trade unionist, and should be the job of every Labour Party member.

We must take the argument for rebuilding the NHS into the labour movement. It should be on every Labour Party agenda and discussed in trade union meetings across the land.

An equal right to life is as basic as it gets. To fight for it raises fundamental questions about how the world works. It is a starting point from which the idea of transforming society, creating a better world for the whole of humanity, begins.

We are living through a crisis in capitalism that has laid bare the barbaric nature of the system. Banks are bailed out to the tune of hundreds of billions of pounds, dollars and euros and the rich collect properties, works of art and fast cars, while the poor collect food parcels in community and church halls.

We have just sacrificed health care for all free at the point of need so the rich can accumulate more wealth that they will greedily hoard and stupidly spend.

We live in a deeply sick system that just got sicker with the implementation of the Health and Social Care Act. We have to organise and fight to get it back.

Scottish students organise

By Gordon Maloney

A Scottish branch of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) was formally established last weekend at a conference of more than 70 delegates in Aberdeen.

Delegates from across Scotland voted to adopt a constitution and to establish a committee at a two-day conference.

The conference debated Scottish independence. A motion which would have committed NCAFC Scotland to actively supporting independence was narrowly voted down. The campaign remains neutral.

The conference also adopted a motion calling to "provide support... to any groups on a campus not already affiliated to NUS who wish to run an affiliation campaign", as well as

to actively run or support candidates in the upcoming NUS Scotland conference. Two of NUS Scotland's three current full-time officers attended the conference as members of NCAFC.

James McAsh, one of the organisers of the conference and President of Edinburgh University Students' Association, said: "NCAFC Scotland conference really showed the valuable role NCAFC plays in the student movement.

"There was a comradely atmosphere even when we discussed contentious issues like Scottish independence, and everyone came out of it energised to go on to do great things.

"A big focus from here will be on fuel poverty and working with the labour movement."

On workersliberty.org

Horsemeat smoke screen

www.workersliberty.org/node/20458

Youth of today: confounding stereotypes

www.workersliberty.org/node/20459

Equal rights for migrant workers!

SUPPORT THIS APPEAL

Next year restrictions on migration from European Union member states Bulgaria and Romania are set to be lifted. There is growing right-wing agitation for Bulgarian and Romanian workers to be excluded from Britain, treated as second class citizens without the right to remain, or denied access to services and benefits.

We oppose this bigotry, and say that migrants — from the EU or outside — should be welcome here. We support freedom of movement and equal rights for all. We deny that migrants are responsible for the “strain” on jobs and services. These are scarce not because of migration, but because the ruling class and its Coalition government are decimating them as part of making the majority pay for the crisis, to

Rail cleaners: migrant workers taking action

boost profits and the wealth of the rich. We need UK-born/migrant unity to fight for our rights.

Our movement should not engage in agitation against “Europe”, which can only play into the hands of the nationalist right. The rise of UKIP is a threat we should take extremely seriously.

The EU is a capitalist institution dedicated to the interests of the rich. But so is the UK. Underlying the row in official politics over Eu-

rope is a struggle between different interest groups within the capitalist class. There is no sense in which workers and most people in Britain would be better off if Britain was outside the EU. In or out, the fight goes on.

At the same time, the international capitalist crisis requires an international solution. Instead of agitating for Britain to leave the European Union, we want to build our own

“union” of labour and social movement solidarity across Europe and beyond, to fight back attacks, fight to level up services, social provision and rights, and fight to expand democracy at a European and international level.

• To sign email edward.maltby@gmail.com.

Initial signatories include:

Patrick Murphy, National Union of Teachers national executive; **Daniel Lemberger Cooper**, University of London Union Vice President; **James McAsh**, Edinburgh University Students' Association President; **Rosie Huzzard**, Branch Chair PCS DWP Sheffield, NCAFC NC; **Thais Yáñez**, Birkbeck University SU Anti-Fascism Anti-Racism Officer, NCAFC NC LGBTQ (all personal capacity).

Universities or shopping malls?

By Ed Maltby

While less well-off universities are losing thousands of applications, overall university finances are set to increase by billions: and these billions are to be spent on Vice Chancellors' prestige projects.

Overall, 2012 saw a fall in university applications of around 28,000. This particularly affected universities like Bolton, Greenwich, Leeds Metropolitan, East London and Bradford — and especially London Met, which saw a fall of over 4,000 students.

The government's plan to allow the fees system and intensified competition to send some universities to the wall — to experiment in failures and buy-outs — is clearly progressing.

However, overall, business is booming. The ability to charge £9,000 fees is allowing universities to increase their incomes.

Much of this new loot is being poured into projects to make the sector more competitive. To give one example, Nick Petford, vice-chancellor and CEO of the University of Northampton has published an article in which he lays out a vision of the sector going the way of professional football!

£8bn of the sector's projected income is slated to be spent on “infrastructural” and restructuring projects before 2015. An article in the *London Review of Books* by NCAFC supporter Oscar Webb about the “UCL Masterplan” for redeveloping University College London gives the flavour:

“As academics and students are crammed ever

closer together, commercial projects will fill the spaces they vacate. Up to ten new cafés will open, on top of the six that already exist. The masterplanners aren't shy of talking about ‘commercial opportunities’. The campus they want looks like a shopping centre. Almost every accessible ground floor space is glass-fronted in the plan. Malet Place will be turned into a ‘teaching and learning “high street”’. Retailers will be invited to set up shop in ‘under-used areas’.”

The flip side of these glass-fronted, Premier League fantasies of Vice Chancellors is the wave of attacks on workers' rights, such as the mass outsourcing of support jobs at Sussex University and attacks on teachers' pay, job security and union recognition across the sector: the glitter-

ing shopfronts and “commercial opportunities” require a flexible, cheap, compliant workforce.

We need a rational organisation of the sector — based on free education and democracy, where universities are publicly-owned and managed by those who work and study in them. Fighting unity between students and workers, not the market, is the way to get the sector we need.

Furthermore, students and workers should demand that the new billions are ploughed, not into wasteful monument building but into wages and pensions, services such as nurseries and improved disability access for staff and students, affordable accommodation, and improved library services!

Italy's new right

By Toby Abse

The general election of 24-25 February will see the arrival in Italy's parliament of a large contingent from a new political movement, the Five Star Movement (Movimento Cinque Stelle or M5S) of the 64-year-old comedian Beppe Grillo.

This new entry will closely parallel the arrival of the Lega Nord in the Italian parliament of 1992. M5S represents an attack on the major political parties and the traditional political class (what the Italians call *la casta*) and M5S is an attack from the right, not from the left.

Many have perceived Grillo as a figure of the left because of his involvement with earlier anti-Berlusconi movements and demonstrations (such as V Day, V2 Day and No Cav Day), his use of new social media, and his espousal of a horizontalist rhetoric.

Grillo appeared to be aligned with such movements as Popolo Viola (the Purple People) and Se Non Ora Quando? (If not now, when? — a feminist movement that campaigned against Berlusconi's sexism), which have also used social media to bypass Berlusconi's near-stranglehold over the mainstream television channels.

Grillo has a good stance on environmental issues and has close links with the No Tav movement against the projected high speed rail link between Lyons and Turin, a movement more usually associated with the radical left.

The rise of Grillo and of such “horizontalist” movements as the Popolo Viola in 2010-11 was a consequence of the ineffectual opposition to Berlusconi by the “post-communist” Partito Democratico della Sinistra/Democratici di Sinistra/Partito Democratico (PDS/DS/PD) and the implosion of Rifondazione Comunista in 2008 in the wake of its disastrous decision to participate at cabinet level in the 2006-8 Prodi government.

However, beneath the superficially attractive surface, is a rightwing demagogue whose movement's structures are as top-down and as authoritarian as the Lega Nord in the heyday

of Umberto Bossi.

Grillo has publicly opposed the granting of Italian citizenship to the children of immigrants and proclaimed his willingness to work with CasaPound, an extremely violent neo-Nazi movement whose rules require all its members to read *Mein Kampf* but never to deny the Holocaust on Facebook.

CasaPound has a record of murderous attacks on black people — although it tried to distance itself from a member or ex-member who went on a killing spree against Senegalese in Florence — and recently mounted a premeditated physical attack on an election candidate of the radical left Rivoluzione Civile in the Lazio region.

In the course of the general election campaign, Grillo has expressed the view that there is no need for trade unions, provided workers are represented on company boards.

It is misguided to see Grillo's call for Italy's exit from the eurozone and return to the lira as progressive. It is all part of a xenophobic package in which “the Germans” rather than Angela Merkel are the object of attack. It presupposes a return to protectionism and competitive devaluations which may be in the interest of certain sections of Italian capital — especially small businesses of the kind that sympathised with the Lega Nord — but are contrary to the interests of the Italian working class, whose real wages would fall even further than they already have over the last decade.

For all its faults, Rivoluzione Civile, an electoral cartel that includes Rifondazione Comunista and the Italian Green Party, represents the only serious electoral opposition to the austerity imposed by the 13 months of Monti's technocratic government, a government which enjoyed the support of both the PD and Berlusconi for all its anti-working class measures.

Voting for M5S to attack La Casta in 2013 is like voting for the Lega Nord in 1992-94 in response to Tangentopoli: a rightist, xenophobic, racist response to a real crisis of the system.

Should we boycott Amazon?

Eric Lee



Recently, I co-authored a book on online campaigning for trade unions and self-published it using a print-on-demand service called CreateSpace.

CreateSpace is a subsidiary of Amazon, the giant online retailer, and any book you publish there is automatically available for sale on the Amazon websites. It was a great option as it cost nothing and allowed us to reach a very large global audience.

When I announced this to LabourStart's mailing lists, we got hundreds of people to buy copies of the book. But a small number, mainly from the UK, wrote in to say that they wouldn't buy from Amazon.

Most of them had heard that Amazon doesn't pay its fair share of taxes in the UK. Some will have heard of the online petition at Change.org that got over 90,000 supporters.

That petition — which has proven to be far more popular than any of the campaigns we've done in defence of workers' rights — was posted by Frances and Keith Smith, independent booksellers from Coventry. The first line reads like an advertisement for their shops.

Their shops, they say, "have been a proud part of our local high streets for many years. We are proud of the personal service we provide to all those who visit our store."

That sounds like self-promotion to me, but for tens of thousands of people, it sounds like a just cause — supporting small, family-run businesses against the encroaching faceless and all-powerful American-owned corporation.

This is, as Marxists will be aware, a thoroughly reactionary attitude toward capitalism, a longing for an earlier era of friendly Mom-and-Pop shops where smiling shop owners greeted every customer by name, and freely extended credit to those who were a bit skint.

It goes without saying that Amazon should pay its taxes. We also demand that government ramp up corporate taxes and enforce payment. And that's our minimum demand — in the longer run, we support expropriating the expropriators.

Unions have also started to take on Amazon here in the UK.

In mid-February, the GMB held protests at nine

Amazon facilities. They presented the company with "corporate ASBOs" in an attempt to focus public attention on the company's record of tax avoidance — but also on their record of low pay and union-busting. These are issues which concern socialists and deserve our support.

As the union put it, "Amazon pay its staff as little as £6.20 per hour — just above the national minimum wage of £6.19 per hour. Staff complain to GMB about a culture of bullying and harassment endemic in the dataveillance that comes from staff being required to wear digital arm mounted terminals (AMTs) with no agreed protocols re breaks, speeds etc. Union activity has to be kept underground for fear of reprisals."

But GMB have so far refrained from calling for a boycott of the company.

And they're absolutely right — because this is not how you will compel Amazon to pay a living wage and recognize trade unions.

The boycott, like the strike, is one of the most powerful weapons in a trade union's arsenal. It needs to be used with care — which is why unions very rarely use it.

For a boycott to be called, one should expect it to produce some kind of result. Calling a boycott that has no effect on a

company's profit may make boycotters feel worthy, but it distracts from the real issues.

Coca-Cola is a company that is often targetted by campaigners for boycotts — but the unions representing Coke workers have never called for such a boycott, and in some cases have outspokenly opposed one.

For a boycott of Amazon to be effective, it would need to make a dent in the company's sales — something that seems rather unlikely considering just how vast the company has become in recent years.

A decade ago, when the Communication Workers of America were attempting to organize Amazon workers in the Pacific Northwest, a boycott might have had a chance. Not today.

Amazon made the news yet again this week, as reports came out of its maltreatment of temporary workers in Germany, where neo-Nazi thugs were hired by the company to "keep order" among the workers.

This, just like union-busting, low wages, contract labour and tax avoidance, are all good reasons to shop elsewhere if you can — but they are not grounds for a general boycott of the company.

So if we're not boycotting Amazon, what can we do?

We can support the GMB and any other union that tries to organise workers there. We can publicise their appalling record on the living wage and union busting through the media. We can demand that Parliament fix a system which allows companies to legally avoid paying taxes despite earning billions of pounds in this country.

We can even help build alternatives by supporting left-wing bookshops, of which there are still several in the UK.

But signing up on Change.org to show your solidarity with some small bookshop owners in Coventry, or taking the personal decision to not shop at Amazon and then telling all your mates about how worthy that makes you, is little more than posturing.

Letters



Slogans for Syria

Tom Unterrainer (*Solidarity* 274, 13 February) thinks that there is a problem with the AWL National Committee's recent resolution on Syria.

In the past, he notes, a headline over an article in *Solidarity* called for Assad to go. The NC resolution failed to repeat that call, and Tom smells a rat. He writes that the resolution "implies Assad and his close political clique could play some role in a peaceful political resolution to the current conflict."

Let me go on record as saying I wish that Assad should "go". Meaning, minimally, I hope the murdering bastard dies an unpleasant, early death.

However the resolution was concerned with more general matters — above and beyond the question of Assad's personal fate. The resolution was an attempt to put the evolved, shifted reality in Syria within long-standing AWL frameworks.

The first idea: don't demand something unless you understand and favour the outcome. In the past — further back in the conflict — a victory for the Syrian opposition and the overthrow of the regime would have been positive, representing a democratic opening. That is not the case now; the nature of the opposition has changed. The NC decided to avoid slogans that state or imply we are for the victory of the Syrian opposition militias. If the various opposition groups do manage, in time, to overrun the Syrian state, we will see warlordism, ethnic cleansing, Islamism, and gangsterism on

a grand scale. It has already begun.

Where we are now is — to a large extent — the responsibility of the staggeringly corrupt and sectarian Syrian state. True. But things can get much, much worse than they are now (think of Lebanon in the 1970s, except vastly, horribly bigger; imagine a new, major regional war). A collapse into fiefdoms and inter-ethnic bloodletting on a gigantic scale would take society rapidly further away from democracy, women's rights and freedom — not closer.

Second idea: there are even worse things than a badly functioning (even a very badly functioning, brutal and repressive) bourgeois state. The current alternative to the spiral into (much worse) barbarism in Syria is some foreign-sponsored deal. Such an agreement — if it happens — will not be pretty or democratic. But the state remaining intact is preferable to it being abolished and replaced by mayhem.

If an agreement is signed between the Ba'athists and some of the opposition which stabilises the situation, and we assess that the only practical alternative is much worse, we would not denounce it (i.e., agitate against it, try to undermine and abolish it). Such agitation would not be responsible (because we care about the fate of the Syrian people and the future possibilities of working class organisation in the region.)

This does not imply that we would endorse such a deal, of course. We are not advocates of badly functioning, brutal states.

Neither are we arbitrators, trying to bring Islamist leaders and Ba'athist thugs together to strike a rotten deal. It is not our role to suggest a series of compromises that might facilitate a deal (Assad should go, but he can keep his bank accounts, etc.). We're not working for the UN. We're not at the table. This isn't our role, even if it were possible. These were the issues dealt with in the NC motion.

The question of Assad, as an individual, is absolutely secondary matter. (Although in "practical" bourgeois politics, I think it is pretty certain he would "go" if such a deal were to be signed off).

Mark Osborn, south London

Wrong on "NIMBYS"

Contrary to Martin Thomas' view (*Solidarity* 274), Cumbria's anti-nuclear lobby cannot simply be dismissed as parochial NIMBYS.

Nuclear power, which generates harmful waste products that last for millenia, is one of the extreme examples of capitalism's ecological blindness. If we had democratic control of the means of production then I doubt we would now be burdened with a large nuclear waste legacy.

However, Martin Thomas is a practical man and would not appreciate these "what ifs". As he says, the waste exists. Are we simply going to dump it on Mexico or Sweden?

I believe the rational working-class solution lies in the development of thorium nuclear technology. Its advocates claim it could eliminate most of the world's nuclear waste legacy, including nuclear weapons. There are claims that the small amount of waste produced by thorium technology lasts only a few hundred years, compared with tens of thousands of years for uranium produced waste.

But as the search for profit diverts investment towards fracking and tar sands extraction, and the "defence" priorities of the advanced capitalist states favour nuclear weapon producing uranium-based power, it is not easy to see where the funding will come from to develop this technology.

The NIMBYS of Cumbria have used what limited democracy they have to prevent their community being host to the nation's nuclear waste. However, they should not now claim victory and return to tending their backyards.

They should fight for a rational solution to the energy crisis and seek alliances in the labour movement with those that share that vision and have the potential social power to make it a reality.

Todd Hamer, London

Who decides Labour's policies?

He told the BBC interviewer to wait for Miliband's speech and one Cruddas was making on 14 February. In his speech Cruddas suggested more support for a living wage, more regulation of private landlords, and more social house-building — but all so vaguely as to mean little.

The "One Nation Labour" packaging is condemned by Ed Miliband's own facts. He shows that Britain, like the world, has become more and more sharply divided into two "nations" — the top one per cent, getting richer and richer, and the majority, falling further and further behind.

MARX

In between there is, as Karl Marx put it, a "constantly growing number of the middle classes, those who stand between the workman on the one hand and the capitalist and landlord on the other... they are a burden weighing heavily on the working base and increase the social security and power of the upper ten thousand".

They are also a burden weighing on the Labour Party!

The fundamental division is between the "working base" and the "upper ten thousand". It cannot be undone by measures such as Cruddas and Miliband propose. They are weaker than the Blair-Brown government's tax credits and minimum wage policies, which did not stop inequality increasing.

The class division can be undone only by ending the top few's monopoly of the ownership and control of productive wealth, a monopoly which makes the rest of us depend on selling our labour-power for whatever pittance we can get to that wealth-owning class.

The first obvious step towards that has already been demanded by last year's TUC congress: "full public ownership of the [financial] sector and the creation of a publicly owned banking service, democratically and accountably managed".

The unions should fight, in the first place, for a democratic debate on policy in the Labour Party, rather than policies being "unveiled" at whim by Miliband and Cruddas; and for a programme that makes that TUC policy central.

According to Labour leader Ed Miliband, speaking on 14 February: "Over the last three decades or so, less than 15 pence of every additional pound Britain has made has gone to an entire half of the population... 24 pence in every pound has gone to the top 1 per cent of earners".

Inequality soared under the Tories, continued to increase under Blair and Brown, and is zooming under the coalition. The policies Ed Miliband proposed in that speech would come nowhere near reversing that trend.

"We would tax houses worth over £2 million... We would... reintroduce a lower 10 pence starting rate of tax..."

The "mansion tax" is cribbed from the Lib Dems, and the reintroduction of the 10p tax band from some Tories. Both would be welcome, but marginal.

The new Labour campaign against the "bedroom tax" is also welcome; but also marginal, compared to the campaign needed against the wide wall of benefit cuts which will hit no fewer than 27 million people this April.

Jon Cruddas, the official chief of Labour's "policy review", told BBC Newsnight on 13 February that he is working out policies and "you will gradually see this come into the public domain over the next month".

Clerical fascism?

Critics of *Solidarity* sometimes say that our description of Islamist political movements as "clerical fascism" is too simplistic, or too sweeping.

A recent report from Tunisia (*Financial Times*, 18 February) makes us think we are right after all. Ennahda, which currently leads a coalition government there with two smaller secular parties, is always described as "moderate" Islamist.

It operates under constraint — in one of the world's most secularised majority-Muslim countries, one where there is a strong trade-union movement and a sizeable left, and where the population is mobilised and feisty after it overthrew the old Ben Ali dictatorship in January 2011.

Yet Ennahda's "League for the Protection of the Revolution" has the defining characteristics of fascism — mobilising disoriented middle-class and "underclass" people on the streets against the labour movement and political rivals.

League leader Mostafa Tahari told the *Financial Times* that secular opposition parties, the trade unions, leftists, and critical media are "counter-revolutionaries".

Said Aidi, a secular liberal politician beaten up by the League, comments: "The League claims it is a civil society group, but... it has never organised conferences or debates. It was always about violence".

The League is widely held responsible for the assassination on 6 February of a leftist politician, Chokri Belaïd, and for attacks on UGTT union offices across the country.

"Under the banner of peaceful protest", reports the FT, "League members form intimidating mobs outside the meetings and offices of political opposition groups".

The term *clerical fascist* was not invented by us. At the start it referred to a particular species of fascist movement in Europe in the 1920s and 30s: not the Nazis, nor Mussolini's fascists in Italy, but the fascist movements in Croatia, Romania, Austria, Portugal, Spain, and Ireland whose authoritarian ideologies depended heavily on Catholic religion. Socialist writers in the 1940s such as the late Tony Cliff used the term to describe Islamist political movements in the 1940s and indicate a rough analogy between them and the European movements.

Even though Ennahda is in government, fascism has not yet triumphed in Tunisia. The labour movement is still strong and able to fight back.

That fightback can only be weakened by whitewashing the clerical fascists or pretending (as for example *Socialist Worker* does) that they are really some analogue of reformist workers' parties.

Help us raise £15,000

A raffle at our 16 February dayschool "Their Europe and Ours" raised £110.

Winners took home chocolates, books, and gift vouchers. The school itself raised an extra £53 towards our fund appeal, after covering costs.

AWL North East London branch continues its series of monthly film-showings and fundraisers on Sunday 24 February with a showing of *Paris Is Burning* to mark LGBTQ history month. The film explores the gay liberation movement in New York. Tickets are £8/£4 (waged/unwaged) and include food and drink. The showing takes place at 3.30pm at Menard Hall, Galway Street, London EC1V 3SW.

AWL North East London branch are showing Jennie Livingstone's *Paris is Burning* on Sunday 24 February

Solidarity is also planning for our May Day issue. To take out May Day greetings for your union branch or other labour-movement body, send a cheque (payable to "AWL") for £15 (two-column space) or £25 (three-column space), and email artwork and text to solidarity@workersliberty.org.

You can contribute to our fund appeal in the following ways:

- Taking out a monthly standing order using the form below or at www.workersliberty.org/resources. Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.
- Making a donation by cheque, payable to "AWL", or donating online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.
- Organising a fundraising event.
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.

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



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

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Private security and the “labour spy”

By Tom Harris

The private security industry is expanding at an impressive pace. Estimated to be worth hundreds of billions of dollars, the industry includes vast corporations such as G4S, now the world's third largest private sector employer, and with a global staff of 657,000.

Companies like this may be familiar to British people from large-scale public events like the Olympic Games, but private security is also a profitable industry in war-torn regions like Iraq and Afghanistan, where governments and investors have found it convenient to browse the market to source their heavily armed men. Espionage, too, has been an enormously lucrative industry in modern history, and the recent exposure of blacklisting services operating on a staggering scale demonstrates that the profits have by no means dried up. The boom in private security presents a number of problems, but a glance at history suggests the threat it poses to the labour movement is particularly dangerous.

The use of hired thugs to harass organised workers was particularly notorious in the USA from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Companies such as Pinkerton, Thiel, and Burns provided industrialists with goon squads to rough up striking workers or union agitators with a shocking brutality.

Before state bodies such as the FBI began to seriously centralise and expand, whole militias of “Pinkerton men” would be hired in by bosses to attack strikers. In the Homestead Strike of 1892, Pinkerton men staged a lengthy gun battle with steel workers, resulting in 16 deaths. Far from being some isolated phenomenon, the use of such services was so widespread that a federal law was eventually passed to specifically stop the employees of Pinkerton from being hired by the state.

1930S

By the 1930s, the role of these companies had changed, but had by no means disappeared. Indeed, companies specialising in spying on trade unionists had grown to an enormous size.

In *The Labor Spy Racket*, Leo Huberman records how in 1937 there were 230 agencies engaged in industrial espionage in the USA, and that an estimated 135,000 labour spies were employed by the top three agencies alone (Pinkerton, ever the entrepreneurial success story, being among them.)

The La Follette Civil Liberties Committee unearthed evidence that such agencies had contracts with some of the most famous corporations of the day, including Chrysler, General Motors, Kellogg, and Quaker Oats.

The La Follette committee also revealed training manuals given to aspiring industrial snitches which gave them meticulous instructions to “make up and mail in a detailed report for each day” cataloguing “how each man feels about the foreman and superintendent or anyone else in authority.”

The main goal is to “report whether any men where you work are members of the union” and “whether any agitation is going on in town anywhere.” Of course, none of this is to say that the turn towards espionage meant abandoning the more traditional use of brute violence. The LaFollette committee also heard witnesses from the Ford car works at Dearborn who spoke of being beaten unconscious by gangs

of more than 25 men.

The scale and extent of hired strike breakers from this period seems so extreme that it is easy to forget that private surveillance on organised labour is still going strong today. The recent blacklisting scandal in the British construction industry is a case in point. After a campaign from the UCATT construction union and investigative journalism from the *Guardian*, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) was finally forced into raiding the offices of the Consulting Association in 2009.

The company had a blacklist of 3,213 construction workers alleged to be left-wing, radical, or just vocal about health and safety issues. The ICO has disclosed that the Association's blacklisting service was used by 40 construction companies in the industry, including Balfour Beatty and Sir Robert McAlpine.

The situation is no better abroad. British security companies profited from the proliferation of contracts that followed the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, when the US government began outsourcing protection of convoys to private operators.

Diplomats and investors continue to use British firms such as G4S and Control Risks to provide armed guards. In areas where any scrutiny and accountability of armed authority has largely collapsed into chaos, private armies can be even more dangerous than state ones. The story of private security in the occupation of Iraq is perhaps still best epitomised by Blackwater, the company whose staff opened fire in a public Baghdad square, killing 14 civilians.

UNACCOUNTABILITY

As concerning as all this may be, it would be a mistake to counterpose the unaccountability and violence of private security forces with the supposed benevolence of state security.

After all, in every one of the cases above, private agents proceeded with varying degrees of collaboration from the state. It shouldn't be forgotten that the Pinkerton militias received a large proportion of their contracts from the government itself.

Similarly, Blackwater mercenaries were not brought into Iraq by some shady criminal network, but hired by the US military. In the evidence given to the La Follette Civil Liberties committee, time and time again witnesses and victims described the collaboration of the police, the way in which “the Dearborn police who were present made no effort to forestall” the savage beating of striking Ford workers.

In March of last year, the ICO revealed that details on the Consulting Association's construction blacklist included information that “could only have been supplied by the police or the security services.” And where private companies aren't up to the job, anyone with a passing familiarity with the history of the 1984 miners' strike knows that the British police force is perfectly capable of violently assaulting strikers without needing outside help.

Nevertheless, while socialists recognise the state's repressive machinery for what it is, there are certain pressures we can apply to try and hold the police to at least some degree of constraint and account. All of these are infinitely harder to bring to bear on a private force that doesn't even have the pretence of a democratic function.

The growth of the private security industry continues — it is the job of socialists to fight and warn against it.

Taking o

A 2009 raid on the office of the “Consulting Association” revealed it had been compiling information on thousands of workers to help construction industry bosses keep their sites free of potential trade union organisers.

As the scale of the blacklisting operation has become clearer, other sordid facts have emerged. The type of information contained in CA files is so detailed that it could only have come from state sources, suggesting state collusion in the blacklist. Recently, it emerged that right-wing officials of the construction union UCATT, and of Amicus (one of the unions that merged to form Unite), may have been complicit in passing on names to blacklisting bosses.

Although some workers have discovered their own blacklisted status, the vast majority of blacklisted workers are still unaware. Some victims of the blacklist are now pursuing a legal action, while some councils have taken a stand against blacklisting by committing not to give public contracts to the firms implicated. The Blacklist Support Group, the national rank-and-file committee of construction activists in Unite, and the rank-and-file construction workers' bulletin *Site-worker* have maintained a near-constant campaign of direct action against prominent blacklisters, frequently bringing Oxford Street traffic to a standstill to expose blacklisting and union-busting on the Crossrail development.

Three activists involved in the struggle for justice for blacklisted construction workers spoke to *Solidarity*.

Transform the unions to beat the blacklist

“I found out that I'd been blacklisted in May 2011 after I'd applied to the Information Commissioner's Office, more out of curiosity than anything else.

They sent me a file which went back to early 1995. It had one page, and documented the only time I'd been involved in industrial action at a major civil site — Connah's Quay Power Station in north Wales. It made reference to me being incompetent and then it referred to me as a bit of a sheep!

The revelations since the scandal have been shocking. What strikes me is the distinct lack of remorse since the story broke in 2009. A lot of people implicated act like they are above the law and have no basic grasp of what's right or wrong, as seen with the evidence from Cullum McAlpine (director of the firm Sir Robert McAlpine) and the late Ian Kerr. At least with the Leveson Inquiry and the much reviled Murdoch apology (however sincere or insincere), it did make him accountable and responsible for his actions. We are hoping that Kerr's wife, who was also part of the cabal, will come forward and fill in some more pieces within this elaborate conspiracy jigsaw.

The stand of the councils that have pledged not to give contracts to blacklisting companies is noble. This sends a clear message to the contractors, who deal in currency without morals. The councils' stand tells them they will be hit in the pocket, by exclusion from the tender process, should this malpractice rear its ugly head again.

The unions need to grow balls again. It's that simple. For too long this Machiavellian practice has been allowed to go unchecked. Rank-and-file union activists have driven this campaign to where it now; it is not constrained by bureaucracy. Union hierarchies have to acknowledge what the members need in terms of site organisation at site level.

We need democratically-elected stewards, accountable full-time officials, no self-serving, stooge convenors, no sweetheart deals and partnerships with blacklisting companies. We also need roving safety reps on sites. This is the only credible and transparent way forward.

As workers, we need to go back to collective bargaining. If

on the bosses' blacklist

that means implementing actions — official or unofficial — on companies who do not recognise unions within their workplaces, then so be it.

Exposing and ending these practises needs dedicated and committed union resources from the bottom up. That means starting with organisation on the shop floor — i.e. on sites.

I am mortified about union collusion in blacklisting. I've seen documentary evidence which made my stomach turn. These people who have betrayed us need to be weeded out of the movement, no excuses.

Blacklisting bosses have been invited as guests to union conferences — this also needs to stop. We as unions are saying we are committed to eradicating blacklisting though we are happy to invite them into our house. I'd go as far as to say it'd be like inviting far right party representatives into conferences. People now need to be made accountable and challenged as to the merits for inviting these persons.

Actions against these companies can take many forms. Demonstrations at Crossrail have brought the campaign to

blacklisting companies' doorsteps. That's rank-and-file activity at its best. Awards ceremonies have also been targeted.

We should also lobby parliament for legislative change. We want stronger actions, including custodial sentences for the perpetrators. We also want stronger Tribunal legislation. The current regulations are so full of loopholes that the workers often fall at the first hurdle. This needs changing, and quickly, if we are to get any type of justice and legal redress there.

Tribunal judges must cut through bureaucracy. They have the capacity to see what's right and wrong. They must act accordingly instead of citing red tape issues and treating the current blacklist regulations like a hot potato.

My recent blacklist case against one of the Consulting Association subscribers has seen me hit for costs. As only 2% of cases have costs awarded, this shows how seriously the Tribunal currently takes these claims.

I would also like to see us taking this to Europe. Sweden is where the biggest culprit, Skanska, originates from. Let's take the protests to their plush offices in Stockholm. Let's network with construction worker activists there, where the same corrupt practices will no doubt be in place.

The word "blacklist" was first documented in the 17th Century. That was around the time of the English Civil War. It seems we've gone back to the dark ages with the revelations in this rapidly developing scandal.

Just like in 1647, justice must now be seen to be served."

Roy Bentham

"Hit the blacklisters economically"

"In 2009, I discovered I had been blacklisted since 1985. A pattern seemed to fall into place about finding and sustaining regular work. Difficulties with home life and amenities resulted.

Only five to ten percent of the blacklisting operation in my industry has been uncovered. I think other industries operate in the same way.

It is vital to hit the blacklisters economically. This is what

they're all about, after all. The right legislation is coming; in time blacklisting will be as abhorrent and illegal as any other kind of discrimination.

Union involvement should be fully exposed to regain lost trust over the years of inaction. When companies are found to blacklist, protests such the Crossrail demos ought to be encouraged. Where necessary, strike action must be taken."

Vic Williams

"We're a long way from revealing the full extent"

"I had full employment in the electrical industry from 1971-2000. In 1999, I took the shop steward's position on the Marks & Spencer project in Manchester.

Following this, my phone stopped ringing for job offers when previously I was inundated with offers.

This continues to this day, due to my name being on the blacklist.

In the last 10 years, I have only worked approximately four of those years, and only on short-term contracts via employment agencies.

In 2003, myself and three others were removed from the Manchester Piccadilly No.1 site for raising health and safety issues. I did not gain employment again until November 2005. This was on the Manchester Royal Infirmary, which was due to run until 2012.

I was again removed from site, five months into the contract, via a false redundancy. In both of these cases, I was successful in employment tribunals.

I still think we are a long way from revealing the full extent of this practice. More and more evidence is coming out every week. The Tory government are stalling on a full enquiry. They say they need more evidence; they should read the 3,000-plus files.

We need every council in Britain to remove these companies from their tender lists. Legislation also needs changing. National agreements should be adhered to in every sector of construction."

Graham Bowker

Merseyside Blacklist Support Group meeting

Saturday 23 February, 11am at Unite HQ, Jack Jones House, 2 Churchill Way, Liverpool L3 8EF.

Blacklist Support Group AGM

Saturday 23 March, 10.30am at Faraday House, 48-51 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3AE

Unite construction workers' rank-and-file network national meeting

Saturday 23 February, 1pm, Jurys Inn Hotel, Jamaica Street, Glasgow

● More info: facebook.com/groups/blacklistSG

Gramsci, crisis, struggle

Adam David Morton reviews *Antonio Gramsci: Working-Class Revolutionary*, a Workers' Liberty booklet published in 2012.

Following "year one" of the Russian Revolution, Antonio Gramsci wrote a piece for the newspaper *Il Grido del Popolo* [1918] in which he argued that "just as a poem exists in the fantasy of the poet before it reaches the printed paper, the advent of social organisation exists in consciousness and will . . . What is demanded is the external, printed paper."

Here, in the crucible of revolutionary processes stretching across Europe, there was a striving towards a realisation and recognition of new organisational and political forms to achieve social transformation. The "Modern Prince", as a qualitatively new form of political party, would become the epithet in the Prison Notebooks given by Gramsci to the revolutionary agent that would transform principles into practice, or consciousness and will into social organisation. A new pamphlet *Antonio Gramsci: Working-Class Revolutionary*, edited by Martin Thomas and published by Workers' Liberty raises these questions of political organisation and more. It is well worth reading given the significance of the questions raised and it will go straight onto the reading list of my third-year "Gramsci & Global Politics" module.

The text is organised around a series of essays and interviews and its springboard is a set of key debates between the editor, Martin Thomas, and Peter Thomas, the author of the fantastic *The Gramscian Moment*. It should be noted that Peter

Thomas was the winner of the Premio internazionale Giuseppe Sormani 2011 Prize, awarded to *The Gramscian Moment* by the Fondazione Istituto Piemontese Antonio Gramsci for the best book (or article) on Gramsci published between 2007-2011. Peter Thomas' political engagement and Gramsci scholarship is pivotal to revitalising debates within and beyond Marxist politics. Moreover, *The Gramscian Moment* is the most significant book to have emerged on Gramsci for some years, which is reflected in its award-winning status.

As editor, Martin Thomas does a wonderful job in commencing the volume of essays and interviews with Peter Thomas by providing an excellent background introductory essay on "Gramsci's Life". This is a fantastically concise overview of Gramsci's political and social biography that will satisfy beginners and experts. Despite reference to producing a "more loyal reading of the *Prison Notebooks*" — that raises numerous questions and problematic assumptions — the introduction leads one nicely to one of the main threads running throughout the text: that of political organisation and struggle. "The party", Martin Thomas states, "must not be a walled-off sect whose special jargon serves to insulate from intellectual challenge from outside".

The subsequent six chapters then tackle this issue and much more besides. These contributions include Peter Thomas on the "philosophy of praxis" at the heart of Gramsci's conception of politics; an interview with Peter Thomas in relation to *The Gramscian Moment*; and then four essays by Martin Thomas touching on revolution and democratic philosophy, theoretical controversies, liberal pluralist appropriations of Marxism, and the relationship between Gramsci and Leon Trotsky.

The interlocutions with Peter Thomas are crucial to the volume and yield rich and valuable points for reflection, discussion, and political engagement. Peter Thomas wants to lead us into the "infrastructure" of reading Gramsci by recognising how Gramsci was attempting to "translate" theoretical gains deriving from the post-revolutionary period in the Soviet Union into principles for understanding bourgeois hegemony.

Significantly, he recounts that Gramsci was in the Soviet Union between June 1922 and November 1923, attending the Fourth Congress of the Third International and meeting figures such as Leon Trotsky, which was decisive for Gramsci's political development in continuing V.I. Lenin's legacy through the leadership of the Italian Communist Party.

Peter Thomas also brilliantly raises the spotlight on the concept of the "Modern Prince", never a straight metaphor for the political party in Gramsci's thought, to understand it as a concrete proposal for a different conception of political organisation. Indeed, the theme of the "Modern Prince" is a major feature in Peter Thomas' forthcoming presentation in the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice's seminar series in March 2013. For Gramsci, the "Modern Prince" was both a unitary and plural conception of a revolutionary agent based on dynamic social relations of critical pedagogy, linking the perspective of labour to organising, building, and living in a new society.

As Peter Thomas aptly summarises: "Gramsci conceived of the Modern Prince as a new type of dialectical-pedagogical political and social relation capable of being translated into different contexts and then, just as critically, of being re-translated backwards, enriched by the dialectical pedagogical exchange and interchange."

Martin Thomas' commentary on *The Gramscian Moment* concludes that "the book is structured at odds with the dialogic conception of philosophy which it argues". Any such summary on a publication is always in danger of missing modes of political engagement and activism that transcend the text.

There could also be a missed opportunity in Martin Thomas' dismissal of his namesake's emphasis on the need to reconceive the dynamic and democratic pedagogy of new organisational political and party forms which can link everyday practices to how we live today. A tension on this issue permeates the exchanges in the text.

CRISIS

The current period is one of global economic crisis. This is overlain with crisis conditions in the rapacious destruction of the environment and social reproduction.

There is a global food crisis in which the surge in world food prices, linked to wider speculation on the global commodity futures markets, has triggered major food riots and revolutionary processes, not least in Egypt. Capital accumulation is advancing these crisis conditions across the social and natural substratum throughout the world in the form of neoliberalism. In Britain, the long march of neoliberalism is embarking on a far-reaching and destructive politics of austerity where work and labour is being eroded.

New class agents in the form of the "precariat", shaped by changes in the organisation of capitalist social relations of production, may be on the rise, as noted by Andreas Bieler. Geopolitically, global militarism is generating ever-increasing and frequent imperialist interventions raised by the problems of overaccumulation and the crisis conditions of capitalism, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Mali.

Crisis is everywhere. Unfortunately, there is little attention to these multiple crises in the contributions from Martin Thomas and how to engage the reader in contesting capitalist crisis or the crisis in capitalism. This is especially pertinent given that there is a crisis too in political and party organisation, most recently and notably engulfing elements of the radical left.

Writing in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci himself stated: "It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life."

Peter Thomas' insight in *Antonio Gramsci: Working-Class Revolutionary*, to reconsider different conceptions of agency and forms of political organisation, to build a new infrastructure of social relations in a dialogue of exchange and interchange, is therefore crucial.

Indeed, the external printed paper to realise the fantasy of the poem is needed more than ever, but the message as he at least acknowledges cannot remain the same.

● Adam David Morton is Associate Professor and Co-Director and Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ) in the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy* (2007) and *Revolution and State in Modern Mexico: The Political Economy of Uneven Development* (2011). A version of this review was published on his blog, "For the Desk Drawer", at adam-davidmorton.com.

The Left

Socialist Worker

Whitewashing the Islamists

By Gerry Bates

Socialist Worker has avoided explicit support for the Islamist militias which ruled northern Mali from April 2012 until recently.

But in its 9 February issue it sidled to the defence of what it sarcastically called "the dastardly Islamists".

"Media" accused the Islamists of destroying Timbuktu's unique holdings of ancient manuscripts. "But it was never true".

In fact, the Islamists torched the building where the manuscripts were kept, but most were saved because staff had hidden them elsewhere shortly before the militias seized Timbuktu last year.

Socialist Worker takes the credit due to the Malian archive-keepers, people who know from close up that "dastardly" is too kind a word for Al-Qaeda and its allies, and turns it into excuses for the pillagers.

The archive-keepers couldn't save the ancient Sufi shrines which the Islamists destroyed, or the living people of Timbuktu.

"They looted and ill-treated people... destroyed the mausoleums of saints and amputated the hands of people they accused of stealing", the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* was told by Amadou Alassane Mega, a student who fled Timbuktu during Islamist rule. "They beat us up when we smoked or listened to music".

A civic activist who stayed in Timbuktu told the *New York Times*, over the phone, that when the Islamists encountered young people of opposite sexes together, they forced them to marry on the spot.

There are good reasons, based on the history of French colonialism and neo-colonialism in west Africa, to oppose the French military presence.

They do not justify whitewashing the Islamists.

Can Egypt's workers beat Morsi?

By Clive Bradley

The government now in power in Egypt has put snipers on the roofs of buildings in the canal cities to shoot demonstrators. It sends armed thugs to repress democratic and secular opponents. There are allegations of sexual assault on female demonstrators from groups of thugs who may or may not be connected to the regime.

The government has introduced a constitution based on Islamic law.

The question, two years on from the overthrow of Mubarak, is — “was it worth it?” Has the Egyptian revolution fulfilled of the promise it showed? Or is this all we were ever going to get?

These questions are also relevant to what was called “the Arab Spring”. We had a revolution in Tunisia; there’s now an Islamist government. We had a revolution in Libya; Islamist movements have since gained much greater influence. In Syria, where we hoped for a democratic revolution, the opposition is increasingly dominated by Islamists. What has come of the hopes of two years ago?

Every revolution is contested, and there are always progressive and reactionary forces which are contending with each other. The surprising thing about the Arab revolutions was that Islamist forces, including the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, were not centre-stage. Largely democratic and secular youth movements were the central force. Prior to January 2011, many people thought any upheaval in Egypt would be just the Muslim Brotherhood taking over. In fact it’s been a much more complex and contested struggle than that.

We are seeing enormous struggles against the Morsi government. The secular and democratic forces have not given up. There is a new, independent trade union movement, which remains militant. The existence of that movement is the single most important gain.

The secular opposition is hugely divided. Most of it is entirely bourgeois — political parties whose policies, for instance on the economic front, are neo-liberal. But the Muslim Brotherhood also has neo-liberal economic policies, so there’s a consensus across Egyptian politics for neo-liberalism. The forces of any kind of leftist, never mind revolutionary leftist, alternative to that are very small.

There is a great deal of poverty and unemployment. Many people have not been paid for a long time, many of those that have jobs don’t have permanent contracts and haven’t for years. These were some of the factors behind the revolution in the first place. The opposition parties are presenting economic policies that have nothing to say to the masses of people except “tighten your belts”. Many of the opposition leaders are themselves millionaires.

The independent unions are a fantastic development. Such movements are rare in the region. There are strong independent unions in Algeria and Tunisia, and an independent union movement has developed in Iraq in the last decade, but it is a very new development in Egypt. There was a militant and powerful union movement in Egypt before the Nasser regime came to power in 1952.

Nasser had a system of so-called unions which were incorporated into the state, which the Mubarak regime inherited and maintained. Those bodies still exist, but the revolution facilitated the emergence of an independent union movement which declared itself in Tahrir Square on 30 January 2011.

Over one million workers have joined the independent federations, but their organisation is still young and weak at a national level. That’s less true in individual workplaces, where rank-and-file workers’ organisations are still very strong. There’d been growing numbers of strikes throughout the 2000s in the run-up to the fall of the Mubarak regime, and strike levels have continued to rise. The union movement’s weakness is relative — existing at all is less “weak” than not existing — but the independent unions are not strong by comparison to either the forces of the government or the bour-

geois opposition.

There are two independent union federations — the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), which is the main body that was declared in Tahrir Square in 2011, and what is effectively a split from it, called the Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress (EDLC). The EDLC includes the Centre for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS), whose leader Kamal Abbas toured Britain in 2011. CTUWS is a labour-movement NGO which has been working to build up grassroots workers’ organisation, largely clandestinely, since the 1990s, and they felt the approach of the EFITU, in declaring a federation, was wrong.

It’s very difficult to judge that debate from a distance. The dominant figure in the EFITU is Kamal Abu Eita, the leader of the tax collectors’ union, which was the first independent union to form in the period immediately before the revolution. Abu Eita is a member of Hamdeen Sabahi’s Dignity Party, which is Nasserite, and is in fact now a member of Parliament. Kamal Abbas comes from a roughly-Trotskyist background, so there may be other political differences too. The two federations have undertaken joint initiatives, so the division is not as severe as it might be and not irreparable.

SQUEEZE

One of the proposals in the constitution was to legislate to allow only one union in each industry, which was clearly intended to squeeze out the new independent unions.

But even in December, when the constitutional debate was going on, there were major strikes, including some significant victories. Workers at the Eastern Tobacco Company struck for higher wages and won, and workers at the Egyptian Aluminium Company also struck and won their demands after the government was forced to intervene. In Mahalla, an industrial town which has been central to class struggle in Egypt for decades and certainly since the mid-2000s, some workers declared an “independent republic”. It was a gesture, but significant given that Mahalla is seen as the centre of working-class struggle in Egypt. It shows that independent workers’ organisations are still very much an element in politics in Egypt, despite their relative weakness.

The main force they face is the government party, the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood was known for years under the Mubarak regime, and further beyond that, as the best-organised opposition movement in Egypt. Workers’ Liberty has called it clerical-fascist. So is Morsi’s government a fascist government? What exists in Egypt is not yet fascism. Struggle continues, and the workers’ movement has not yet been crushed. But there is something evolving which is increasingly, to say the least, nasty.

The Muslim Brotherhood has aimed for a long time to be constitutional, even though it was formally illegal under Mubarak. When the revolution began, they were slow to respond because they didn’t control it and didn’t know how to relate to it. But their caution was also motivated by their general tendency to attempt to be fairly legalistic and constitutional.

I had previously felt that, given the Brotherhood’s apparent commitment to develop along those lines, into a legalistic Islamist party along the Turkish model, there were

grounds to be reasonably sanguine about them. Certainly it is the case that the Brotherhood in power has moved more quickly in the direct of violent authoritarianism than I thought or hoped they might. So I was wrong two years ago.

What’s happened since Morsi was elected president is an increasing element of the iron fist inside the velvet glove. Morsi’s bestowing of essentially dictatorial powers on himself is what started the latest wave of struggle. The Brotherhood has groups of armed thugs, organised on the street, as an armed force. That’s a new element. There are also other Islamist gangs, associated with the Salafists, who are a more extreme Islamist movement than the Brotherhood.

This development, of armed gangs on the street which mobilise against working-class and democratic forces, is indicative of something potentially moving towards fascism, albeit not of the Nazi type.

The Brotherhood’s religious sectarianism is also getting worse, leading to increasing polarisation with Egypt’s large Christian minority. In 2011, when the old regime shot at some Christian demonstrators, the Brotherhood made a show of being non-sectarian and talked about healing divisions. That mask is increasingly slipping. In the presidential run-off between Morsi and Shafiq, many Christians were backing Shafiq, the old-regime candidate, just to keep the Brotherhood out. Those fissures are getting worse.

One key difference between Morsi’s regime and the Islamist regime that took power in Iran is its attitude to America. Morsi needs to keep the aid money coming in from America, and Gulf states which are allied to America. The Egyptian army alone gets \$1.2 billion a year. Their links with America represent a significant pressure on the Morsi government, but Morsi has resisted this pressure, at least to an extent, in pushing through an Islamic constitution and greater dictatorial powers.

Morsi managed to remove some of the figureheads of the military clique that replaced Mubarak, but the infrastructure of that is still there. There’s been a fusion, certainly at the top, of elements of the old state apparatus with the Brotherhood. But the state apparatus is not entirely predictable. There is an enormous “secret state” in Egypt, and even in the last weeks army figures, including the Minister of the Interior, who’s a general, have made noises about intervening if the situation continues to worsen. The prospect of a military coup is a real one, as well as the prospect of “creeping fascism” from the Brotherhood.

The organised base of the Brotherhood is stronger than any on our side. It’s vital not to underestimate the threat they represent, or adopt a kind of “after Morsi, us”-type attitude, reminiscent of the German Stalinists’ complacency about Hitler that saw the workers’ movement, in which they were a significant force, crushed by Nazism.

The task is huge. The labour movement, and genuinely democratic, secular forces have to cohere into something capable of providing an alternative.

The legacy of the left in Egypt is not a good one; the Communist Party of the 1960s dissolved in Nasser’s party. Even before that, the Stalinist left had simply echoed nationalism. So there is no healthy tradition of democratic, socialist political organisation in Egypt. You can’t create that overnight, but the raw material for it exists in the form of the independent labour movement. Perhaps the leaders of that movement are moving too slowly in terms of entering the political stage. Something similar happened in South Africa — understandably so, because people are concerned to defend and maintain what are still weak organisations, and they’re afraid that if they move into politics too suddenly they’ll blow apart their trade union organisations.

But the self-assertion of the independent workers’ movement on the political stage is what has to happen. Therefore the urgency for solidarity with the democratic, secular, and working-class forces in Egypt is all the greater. What happens to that movement is incredibly significant for the whole region. If what is happening in Syria could poison the Middle East, the independent workers’ movement in Egypt could counterbalance that.

The task to help them is not just a task for Egypt, it’s a task for us. Saying “we need to build solidarity” is easy, and actually building it is difficult. But it’s very important

The Dorner complex

Christopher Dorner was a former Los Angeles cop. He was sacked in 2008, alleging racism. In February 2013 he allegedly conducted a series of shooting in which he killed four people. Hunted by police he eventually died when they set fire to the cabin where he was hiding. This article was written by Matthew Cunningham-Cook for the left-wing American magazine *Jacobin*. It is reproduced, abridged, from their website, and can be read in full at tinyurl.com/jacobindorner

[...] Dorner's "manifesto" has been selectively quoted, focusing on the sections where his mental illness and homicidal rage come into full view, while the allegations of racism and human rights violations by the LAPD have been slyly deemphasised.

What are those allegations, exactly? Usage of the n-word among colleagues, the lack of institutional self-reflection in the aftermath of Rodney King, retaliation against deputies for breaking the "blue line," officers singing songs celebrating the burning of Jewish ghettos by Nazi stormtroopers, assaulting a woman in her 70s, and assaulting a man who suffers from dementia and schizophrenia by kicking him in the face. Throughout, Dorner attacks the LAPD's pervasive culture of institutional racism: something that most Angelenos of colour will confirm.

Two other black officers have since come forward, largely confirming Dorner's account of the racism on the force (the former, however, defends the role of the current chief of police). No one seems to have seriously considered giving in to Dorner's one demand: that the record be set straight by releasing all of the documents related to his disciplinary hear-

ings, and clearing his name from the prior disciplinary actions against him. He pledged to end his warfare if the LAPD would do so. Considering his apparent death, one wonders if that life could have been saved at the price of the department's momentary embarrassment. "A man is nothing without his name," repeats Dorner.

Dorner's reaction is partly rooted in a corrosive version of American masculinity — his response to institutional corruption is uniquely Jack Bauer and John Wayne. Gratuitous violence included. Dorner is a wholesale product of a society gone mad on racism and war, of a state that aggressively punishes dissent, of an intellectual milieu where telling the truth has become a dangerous act. There was no internal institutional outlet for him to address injustices against him: the blue line prevented that. [...]

The initial response to the Dorner phenomena [...] has been to isolate it as an individual event, extrinsic to our society. Why does he hate us? Indeed, the presentation of most criminality is as something monstrous. This formulation ignores something crucial: it is impossible to arbitrarily separate some parts of our lives from the others. It is as foolish to presume that criminality is monstrous as it is to presume that the leg operates independently of the hip.

And so the Dorner incident, like all incidents involving madmen, requires us to consider the madness that structures life in America.

[...] We do need to take a hard look at ourselves. Why has Dorner attracted such support online, especially in communities of colour? Why have two more LAPD officers, at great risk, come forward to address the free-flowing racism that characterizes their worklife? The questions we might ask will be fraught with peril, but there could be great positives: one of the key things that this experience has exposed is that a broader social consideration of what it means to live life ethically is gravely absent.

In Dorner's case, the allegory of life to a furnace takes literal weight — he has died, consumed by fire. The police will celebrate, the chorus will quiet, the lives of his victims mourned. It is unlikely that the fire that burned away Dorner will burn away any illusion: this is unfortunate, and disturbing.

His allegations will be dismissed as the rantings of a lunatic, things will return to normal. Until the fire, next time.

Only 15% of rapes are reported

By Daniel Rawnsley

The Home Office statistics bulletin on sexual offending in England and Wales states that on average 2.5% of women and 0.4% of men were the victims of sexual assault in 2011/12, representing around 473,000 adults. The police recorded a total of 53,000 cases of sexual assault over the same period.

Even when crimes *are* reported, often the cops don't record them. The Office for National Statistics reckons that the police fail to record about a third of the crimes reported to them.

That one third non-recording is better than things were: before 2002 the cops recorded only about 50 to 60% of the crimes reported to them, according to the ONS. The recording rate rose to 90% between 2002 and 2007, but that was thanks to an audit system now abolished.

Working out whether crime is falling or rising is, therefore, tricky.

It is estimated that around 0.5% of women and 0.1% of men were victims of rape or sexual assault by penetration in 2011-12, an average of 85,000 and 12,000 respectively. The total number of "most serious sexual crimes" reported by the police in the same period was 42,976, less than half.

The Home Office bulletin reported that only 15% of women who were raped or sexually assaulted had reported the attack to the police.

"Frequently cited reasons for not reporting the crime were that it was 'embarrassing', they 'didn't think the police could do much to help', that the incident was 'too trivial or not worth reporting', or that they saw it as a 'private/family matter and not police business'".

The ONS crime statistics for July 2011-June 2012 suggest an overall fall in crime and a drop in most crimes.

A BBC article on the 24 January suggested that the fall in crime "might be exaggerated". The police record shows a fall in crime of 33% over the last five years. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), which is based on asking a random sample of the population about their experience. It shows a figure of 17%.

The police record has a more detailed breakdown of specific crimes. The CSEW does not try to record sexual offences due to a low rate of reporting in face-to-face interviews. The Home Office collects figures separately.

Common sense amongst criminologists is that the economic pressures of a recession leads to a rise in property crime. Professor Mike Hough called the apparent reduction "striking and unexpected, especially in view of the fiscal crisis, whose impact is bearing down sharpest on the poorest and most marginal social groups."

Brian Wheeler, writing for the BBC, offered several possible explanations: success for anti-social behaviour orders, smartphone games having "killed boredom" amongst young

people, a reduction in under-age drinking, a reduction of the amount of lead in the atmosphere and harder-to-break bus shelters!

The reduction in gun related crime may be explained by a spike in the price of illegal firearms in the UK (article by Paul Peachey in the *Independent*). In 2006 a handgun and ammunition could be bought for around £1,000, but recently this seems to have risen to around £3,500. West Midlands Police report a rise in older guns using home made ammunition and guns being shared, re-used rather than disposed of and even rented out.

The CSEW shows a rise in domestic violence over the past two years and the police record shows small rises (less than 5%) in harassment, racially or religiously aggravated public fear, alarm or distress, racially or religiously aggravated assault without injury, sexual activity including a child under 13 and causing sexual activity without consent. There were increases in soliciting for the purpose of prostitution, abuse of position of trust of a sexual nature and sexual grooming.

There was very small rise in the number of reported rapes of women over the age of 16 between from 2010-11 to 2011-12. However, cases of rape of women over 16 have risen year on year since 2007-8 from 7610 to 9776 in 2011-12.

Stop London Met witch hunt!

By Darren Bedford

Management at London Metropolitan University have suspended Jawad Botmeh and Max Watson, staff governor and Unison branch chair respectively, from their jobs.

The suspension follows management threats, on 22 January, to derecognise the Unison branch entirely. Unison represents non-academic staff at the university.

Uni bosses say the pair have been suspended for "a serious matter of concern", which relates to "gross misconduct". Union officers believe it may concern

Jawad's appointment (in 2008), and his 1996 conviction for "conspiracy to cause explosions" in relation to a plan to bomb the Israeli embassy, for which he served 13 years in jail. A Unison statement said: "We are completely convinced that Jawad's 1996 conviction for conspiracy to cause explosions was an appalling miscarriage of justice. Amnesty International, Unison's National Delegate Conference and the MPs who signed an early-day motion all share this view.

"Local MP Jeremy Corbyn also takes this position on Jawad's innocence and

fully supports Max and Jawad.

"Regardless, Jawad declared his conviction on application to work at London Met, and legally has a right to be employed at the University. Indeed,

shown by the motion passed at the 2003 Unison National Delegate Conference which clearly advocates that Jawad's conviction was unjust."

The branch said it saw the suspensions as "the latest in a series of escalating attacks on [workers'] democratic right to representation by [their] union, in an attempt to weaken the defence of [their] rights Unison is fighting for."

Workers and supporters demonstrated at London Met on 13 and 18 February, and are planning an ongoing campaign.

For more information, see <http://bit.ly/X736S1>

London Met HR were made aware of Jawad's conviction some time ago.

"We are proud to have Jawad as a member of our Branch and also of the ongoing support Unison has shown him over the years,

Teachers ballot for strike to defend rep

By Darren Bedford

Teachers at Bishop Chaloner school in East London are voting in an indicative ballot for strikes against the victimisation of a National Union of Teachers rep, and again what workers describe as an authoritarian and bullying management regime inside the school.

An NUT campaign forced the school management to climb down in autumn 2012 when they wanted to impose a "mock Ofsted" inspection on staff. A strong union group was forged on the back of this. Weeks later, the union rep found himself on "capability", a form of professional probation. That was triggered by two observations, both with a low-set Year 11 class last thing on a Friday afternoon that took place in June, months previous. It is no coincidence that a rep who has built a fighting union group in his school that has challenged the au-

thority of the head finds himself in this situation.

Capability is designed to get rid of teachers; the stress of the process can make a downward spiral of lesson observations almost inevitable. And it is all too often successful union reps that find themselves caught up in it. This is victimisation in a school in which many members of staff feel oppressed, belittled, and bullied. Staff have little faith in the practices and judgements of the leadership team.

Teachers elsewhere in the country are fighting back against over-observation and bullying managements. Members of the teaching union NASUWT at Newtown primary school in St. Helens struck against the school management's staff appraisal system.

Under the system, staff can be subject to an unlimited number of observations. The union also has concerns over confidentiality.

Council introduces £9/hour minimum wage

Barking and Dagenham Borough Council in London has introduced a £9 per hour minimum wage for its staff, well above the national minimum and 45p/hour more than the "London Living Wage". More: bit.ly/11QEYYs

BBC workers strike

By Ira Berkovic

Members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) at BBC workplaces across the country struck on Monday 18 February.

The NUJ is fighting the BBC's "Delivering Quality First" cuts programme, which will involve 2,000 job losses, including 30 compulsory redundancies, over five years.

NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet said: "The BBC is prepared to waste public money on needless redundancies rather than secure redeployment opportunities for those at risk."

Union members will also take part in a work-to-rule campaign from Friday 15 February.

Halesowen College strike

Lecturers at Halesowen College struck on Thursday 14 February to demand the reinstatement of four colleagues.

The four maths lecturers were sacked because their students failed to reach particular attainment targets, but the University and College Union (UCU) accuses college bosses of disregarding their own disciplinary procedures and protocols, and says the four are being victimised for their trade union activity.

Supporters handed in a "Valentines Day card" petition to management, containing over 12,000 signatures.

• For more, see tinyurl.com/halesowen4

Carnegie verdict on 2 April

Victimised Australian trade unionist Bob Carnegie will find out the verdict of the court case against him on 2 April, with sentencing expected some time after that.

Campaign pressure, including direct action, between now and April, and again between the verdict

and the sentencing, can make a big difference.

The Maritime Union of Australia and the International Trade Union Confederation have released a YouTube video promoting the campaign to defend Bob. Support continues to grow in the Australian labour movement, and new messages of support have

also been received from construction workers' unions in Galicia (Spain), and Japan.

Supporters in Britain plan further action in the next few weeks.

To keep up to date with the campaign, see bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com

is least effective in getting people into jobs in weak labour markets where unemployment is high." According to the *FT*, "[the study showed] there is little evidence that workfare schemes increase the likelihood of finding a job.

"They may actually diminish the time available for looking for work."

Workfare doesn't work

By Clarke Benitez

"Workfare" schemes took a blow on Tuesday 12 February as two unemployed workers won Court of Appeal cases which ruled that at-

tempts to force them to work for free, or risk losing their benefits, were unlawful.

Now an article in the *Financial Times* has knocked them further, by publicising a Labour Party survey from 2008 which looked at the use of similar schemes in America, Canada, and Australia. The study concluded that "Workfare

More high street jobs threatened

By Ollie Moore

2,500 workers' jobs were put at risk as fashion retailer Republic became the latest high-street firm to collapse.

150 head office staff were immediately made redundant. Republic has 121 stores around the country.

Meanwhile, the South East Region TUC's "Hear My Voice" campaign, to organise HMV workers to help defend jobs at the entertainment retailer, continues. It is campaigning against the closure of 66 stores, and demanding that in any cases where job losses are unavoidable, HMV's administrators guarantee retraining and find alternative employment for sacked workers.

Visit the campaign's Facebook page at facebook.com/hmvstaffuk

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Sussex University: occupying against privatisation

Statement by student occupation at Sussex University

After continually being ignored by university management and left out of all negotiations regarding the proposed privatisation plans, Sussex students have occupied the University's conference centre.

Over the last few days the campaign has picked up widespread national press coverage and messages of support have been pouring in from Students' Unions, organisations and influential individuals.

The management at Sussex have shown a blatant disregard for the views and wishes of the campus community in the way that they have instigated these proposals. The lack of transparency, and openness from a University that has a reputation as a "radical" institution is tantamount to a management position which is eroding the spirit of Sussex. All methods used by staff and students to engage with management in discussion are being ignored.

As a result of this top-down decision, and many others which have not involved adequate consultation with this vibrant and close-knit campus community, people are feeling indignant and feel as though all routes to ask management to listen to and act on our concerns are dwindling.

We call on the management of the University to immediately halt their plans; to undertake a full and proper democratic negotiation with staff and students about the future of campus services; and to ensure that student and trade union representatives are fully represented and informed during all stages of future processes and decision making.

• Email your name and position to occupysussex2013@gmail.com and/or tweet @occupy_sussex to add your support to this statement.

March against cuts in Newcastle

Around 1,500 people marched in Newcastle on 16 February against a proposed £100m of council cuts.

Residents, trade unionists, community activists and students united to build the protest. It was coordinated by the Stop the Cuts-Save Our Services coalition of ten different campaigns of users and workers.

We are opposing the closure of libraries, play services, youth service. Also proposed are cuts to respite care, and cuts to older people's services and community centres.

The march was formally supported by Northern TUC, RMT, Unison, and PCS, but it was largely built by activists, including rank and file trade union members.

Workers' Liberty comrades were central to bringing the coalition together and winning support for it from trade unions and student groups.

On Saturday 2 March there will be a "where next?" forum for all campaigns to plan the way forward: 1pm, St John's Church Hall, Grainger Street, Newcastle.

Fight the "benefit cap"!

By Colin Foster

On 13 February the Guardian splashed a report that the Labour council of Camden, in north London, was "singling out more than 700 families to be moved up to 200 miles away".

The report exaggerated what's set to happen in Camden, but understated what's set to happen across London.

In April the Tory/Lib-Dem government will start to impose the "benefit cap", a rule that working-age couples and lone parents can never receive a total of more than £500 a week in all benefits combined. (Peo-

ple on disabled benefits, and people working enough hours to get Working Tax Credit, are exempted.)

At the start the cap will be enforced in four council areas: Bromley, Croydon, Enfield, and Haringey (not Camden). All others will follow at some time before September 2013.

The cap will be imposed by cutting housing benefit. On the Government's own figures, 56,000 households will lose an average of £93 per week. Half of them will be in Greater London, because rents are higher in London. And most of them, obviously, will be large households, with many

children, who have to pay higher rents. The average private rent for a two-bedroom home in Camden is £450 a week.

Camden council was told by the government last year that 761 households in its area will lose. Other areas in London — Brent, Ealing, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, and Westminster — have more than 1000 households each losing. Westminster has 2,327.

These are households which at present are just scraping by on benefits. They have lost out already from other government measures. £93 a week is a

catastrophic, impossible loss for them.

Many are likely to be evicted and become homeless. The Camden numbers are far from the worst, but include 1887 children, or about one child in 25 in the borough — roughly speaking, one child in every school class.

Camden council is planning to contact the households, once it gets a detailed list from the government, allocate advisers, and move some money out of its other budgets to help.

According to council leader Sarah Hayward, "households... with a number of children will not be in a position to afford rents

in London. Labour in Camden will do everything possible to ensure that as few people as possible have to move away from their established communities...

"Labour in Camden have also seen some success in negotiating private rents down with landlords... But there is only so much we can do to protect... residents from this heartless Government policy".

The fault of Camden council is not that it is "singling out families", but that, like other Labour councils, it is passing on the cuts imposed by the Government, limiting its own role to minor patchwork alleviation. It is not fighting back.

It is not using the council chamber as a platform to mobilise the local labour movement and community to save homes, services, and jobs by forcing the Government to backtrack on its cuts.

In Hull, in Manchester, in Southampton, and elsewhere, a growing minority of Labour councillors are speaking out against this compliance.

Just a few Labour councils taking a stand and rallying a struggle could stir a storm of resistance, as Poplar did in 1921 and Clay Cross in 1972-4.

• Councillors Against Cuts: councillorsagainstcuts.org