

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

**Israel displaces
Bedouin**
page 2



**Labour and
the unions**
centre pages

**Greece's new
strike wave**
page 8



BENEFIT OVERCLAIM? UP TO 10 YEARS JAIL

**British retail
billionaire
Philip Green
avoids around
£285 million
tax per year
by registering
his company
abroad.**

**The rich plunder while the
poor are prosecuted: see page 5**

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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Defend the Bedouin, stop Praver Plan

By Tom Harris

In the last few months there have been many protests in Israel over government plans to remove tens of thousands of Israeli Bedouins from their ancestral villages and land.

Named after prime ministerial advisor Ehud Praver, the "Praver Plan" is the Israeli government's attempt to "resolve" the disputed ownership of land currently inhabited by Bedouin Arabs, primarily in the Negev desert.

The government claims that residents will be compensated and provided with alternative accommodation in specially designed towns. But many Bedouin and human rights organisations denounce the

plan as discriminatory and an attempt to clear the region for Jewish settlement.

The Israeli Bedouin have experienced decades of repression and displacement. They used to be nomadic. Ottoman, British and Israeli land expropriation forced them into stationary settlements.

When the Bedouin in the Negev largely sided with the Arabs against the Is-

raelis in the 1948 war, Israeli forces further repressed and displaced the them, leading many to flee to surrounding countries. Most of those that remained were subsequently relocated to restricted desert areas under martial law.

Around 170,000 Bedouins live in the Negev today. Many live in the outskirts of towns and

cities, but tens of thousands live in villages and farms which the Israeli government refuses to recognise or to provide with proper infrastructure.

The fear is that if the Praver Plan goes ahead the Bedouin will be forcibly uprooted once again.

Left-wing activists and Arab-Israelis question why, since the Bedouin are formerly Israeli citizens, the government is entitled to clear them from their homes.

They fear that space is being cleared for further settlement by Jewish Israelis.

In places like Um Hiran, right-wing organisations have already been setting up temporary accommodation near the villages set to be demolished.

Bob Carnegie back in court: defend the right to protest!

By Colin Foster

On 16 October, Australian trade union and community activist Bob Carnegie is due to appear in court again.

Construction company Abigroup, part of the Lend Lease empire, is suing him and two unions, the CFMEU and the ETU, for a total of \$15 million damages over the strike in August-October 2012 at the Queensland Children's Hospital (QCH) construction site.

Bob Carnegie, a member of Workers' Liberty Australia, got involved in the QCH dispute, despite not working on the site, because court orders had been served on, and obeyed by, all the union officials, including the site delegate, to stay away from the site.

The QCH workers, still in dispute but deprived of leaders or organisers, asked Bob to come and help. He came and helped them organise a regular community protest at the site, regular dispute meetings with democratic discussion, dispute bulletins, delegations to other workplaces, and a hardship fund.

The workers won their demand for a union-negotiated site agreement including a clause with guarantees for workers employed by subcontractors

rather than the main contractor. Days later, Abigroup initiated charges against Bob Carnegie of contempt of court. They said he had disobeyed court orders which instructed him, too, to stay away from the site.

There was a campaign by trade unionists and socialists to defend Bob Carnegie, which included strikes at all the big construction sites in Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney on 11-13 February (when the case came to court) and strikes and a demonstration in Brisbane on 18 August (when the verdict was announced). Finally Bob was acquitted on the grounds that the terms of the court orders had been unclear.

But the civil case for damages remains.

IMPLICATIONS

Suppose you see striking workers on a picket line. You ask about the issues; they convince you of their case; and so you stay, and come back again on other days, to support them.

You have signed no contract with the boss against whom the dispute is conducted. You have no obligation to him. And yet he can sue you for the losses he suffers through the dispute?

Could he also sue you if you just gave money to the

hardship fund for the dispute? Or sent a message of support?

If you joined a demonstration against the invasion of Iraq, should the police be able to sue you for the cost of the measures they took? Or shopkeepers in the area of the demonstration, if they lost business? Or the government, if it had been forced not to join the invasion and thus suffered the cost of cancelled military preparations?

To defend Bob Carnegie on this issue is to defend the basic right to protest. Of course Abigroup does not think it can get millions of dollars in damages from Bob Carnegie, a seafarer by trade who has also worked in construction and has no more economic resources than the average worker. It is bringing the case in order to intimidate others.

There will be a mediation meeting between the unions' lawyers and Abigroup's on 8 October, and it is conceivable that a deal will be struck there so that the case does not go to court. For now, however, we must assume that the case will go to court and Abigroup's lawyers will do all they can to bankrupt Bob Carnegie and intimidate all future supporters of protest.

Support Bob: see defendbobcarnegie.wordpress.com.

Support Shahrokh Zamani!

Iranian trade unionist Shahrokh Zamani has been imprisoned since June 2011. His crime? Attempting to build independent trade unions to stand up for his and fellow workers' rights.

Shahrokh, a member of the Painters' Union, was charged with "propaganda", "endangering national security", and "participating in an illegal organisation".

International human rights organisations say that Shahrokh has been physically and psychologically abused, denied medication, and denied visitors.

Shahrokh is a class-war prisoner. If we allow the Iranian state to get away with crushing him, it will be a defeat for all those fighting for workers' rights in Iran, and around the world.

Between now and January 2014, Workers' Liberty will be seeking to collect 10,000 signatures in workplaces, universities, colleges, schools, and communities to demand Shahrokh's release.

Please support the campaign. Email freeshahrokh@gmail.com or ring 07775 763 750 for more information.

• bit.ly/s-zamani

Bedroom tax: thank you, Raquel Rolnick!

By Dave Kirk

Earlier this month the UN Special Rapporteur on Housing, Raquel Rolnick, reported on UK housing conditions (including the implications of the Bedroom Tax).

After talking to ministers, civil servants, tenants, experts and activists she announced a scathing verdict on the Bedroom Tax: "I was very shocked to hear how people really feel abused in their human rights by this decision and why — being so vulnerable — they

should pay the cost of the economic downturn, which was brought about by the financial crisis. People in testimonies were crying, saying, 'I have nowhere to go', 'I will commit suicide'."

Rolnick, formerly housing minister in Brazil, and a member of the reformist Workers' Party, called for the Bedroom Tax to be scrapped.

The Tories and the right wing press were livid. Tory Chairman Grant Shapps appeared on the BBC Today programme, not to respond to her report, but to rant

about her being "a woman from Brazil" and to demand from the UN "an apology and investigation into how this came about".

Even more sexist, racist, and bizarre was a *Daily Mail* headline that accused her of being a "dabbler in witchcraft who offered an animal sacrifice to Karl Marx". The details in the article were actually much more mundane.

As a young woman Rolnick developed an interest in Candomble, a Brazilian religion which originated with African slaves. She

once carried out a Candomble rite to help with a university study on Marx.

For campaigners, Rolnick's intervention is welcome and keeps up the pressure on a Government that is already on the defensive about the policy.

This is why it is so important that Labour is pressured to pledge to repeal the Bedroom Tax.

On the ground campaigners remain determined to force social landlords and councils to pledge not to evict Bedroom Tax victims.

£730 a month for a windowless cell

By Omar Raii

Though universities like UCL [University College London] have an annoying habit of bringing up their place in university rankings, something tells me they won't be mentioning one particular accolade very often.

New halls built for UCL students have just been awarded the Carbuncle Cup, an award given by Building Design magazine to the worst new building. Just to repeat, that's not "worst new university halls" or even, "worst new block of flats", but Worst New Building.

The magazine has unfavourably compared the new flats with HMP Pentonville, which is on the same street, noting that the prisoners receive a better view than the students.

It seems even sunlight is considered an extravagant extra for university students.

A UCL spokesperson, attempting to defend the ugly monstrosity, said it had "excellent" transport links and was designed with post-

graduate students in mind.

We didn't realise postgrads are less human than other students and therefore it's perfectly fine for them to be charged up to £730 a month for wretched, windowless rooms.

For too long, students, including those at UCL, have been held ransom by universities, charging extortionate amounts of rent for unacceptable conditions, knowing full well that students will be forced to shell out.

First year and international students are among the most exploited, often seen as cash-cows by universities, who are often as sneaky and uncaring as the worst landlord you could imagine.

It's time to put a stop to this. Students shouldn't stand for it. We deserve to be treated better than an endless source of revenue for universities while being cooped up like sardines in tiny flats.

The student movement needs to campaign for fair rents and decent housing.

• bit.ly/465cal

On Friday 13 September around 30 workers and community activists occupied Wallsend Memorial Hall in East Newcastle. Workers who have not received wages since the beginning of September, occupied after managers from the centre's funders, the Social Investment Business, announced plans to repossess the building. Since its creation in 1883 the centre remains legally entrusted to "the people of Wallsend". Occupiers say they will remain there until their demands — that the centre stays open, in the hands of the people of Wallsend, and that owed wages are paid — are met. The hall is used for college courses, toddler groups, youth club, services for benefit claimants, migrants and martial arts classes

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TUC
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Stop this sell off!

The government wants to sell off student debt to private companies. To sweeten the deal, the government is considering upping the repayment rates. This would be the equivalent of a huge and retroactive stealth hike in tuition fees.

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts is calling for national and local action against the sell-off of the student loan book.

• More details here: bit.ly/sell-debt

The unions and the anti-lobby Bill

By Professor Keith Ewing

[The furore over Falkirk and Labour's relationship with the unions] conveniently masks a potential scandal ... the government's announcement on political lobbying, soiled by its unexpected inclusion of an attack on trade union support for the Labour Party.

Apparently any money spent by an affiliated union campaigning at an election is to be treated not only as a "third party expenditure" as at present, but also as a Labour Party expenditure for the purposes of electoral law. As such, it will count towards the Party's electoral spending limit.

Since 2001, there has been a limit on the amount of money a political party can spend at an election, the limit being based on the number of candidates standing in the party's name. For parties that put up candidates in every constituency, this works out at somewhere just below £20 million on the campaigning costs incurred in the year before the election.

A separate limit applies to so-called third parties — businesses, pressure groups and trade unions. Here the limit is set somewhere just below £1 million in the year before the election, on election campaign costs incurred supporting or opposing a particular political party.

The government's plan appears to be that affiliated union expenditure will be treated as Labour Party expenditure whether or not the Party has approved it, and whether or not the Party benefits from it. As such, the proposal looks like it has been lifted straight from anti-union political funding legislation recently introduced by a right wing government in New South Wales.

"ESTABLISHED CUSTOM"

It is also a disgraceful example of government proposing to use the power of the state in breach of "an established custom" recognised by Churchill in 1948, that "matters affecting the interests of rival parties should not be settled by the imposition of the will of one side over the other"...

The proposal is almost certainly unlawful in this country, as it is said convincingly to be in Australia. First, it is a violation of the Convention rights of affiliated unions, which alone of electoral participants will be gagged for a year before an election, unless they do one of two things. Either they can disaffiliate from the Labour Party to retain electoral freedom; or they can seek Party permission to incur an expenditure that will be attributed to the Party.

Either way, the right to freedom of expression of trade unions is thus made conditional. It is conditional on not exercising their right to freedom of association by affiliating to the Labour Party in the first place. But if unions exercise their right to freedom of association, it is conditional on securing the permission of the Party to exercise their right to freedom of expression. It is implausible to believe that freedom of expression can be contingent in this way, all the more so when the contingency applies in such a discriminatory manner.

But it is not only affiliated unions that will have cause to complain: so will the Labour Party. The Labour Party's case will arise where a union incurs expenditure without its approval, which will nevertheless be treated as the speech of the Party, even though the Party is opposed to the speech in question.

This cannot be consistent with the idea of freedom of expression, which is designed to enable me to say what I think, not to hold me responsible for what someone else may think. It is grotesque.

• From the website of the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom. Full text: bit.ly/lobby-ke

“Welfare not warfare”?

Letters



Slogans like “Welfare not warfare”, “Fund education not war” or “Books not bombs” are good as “longer range” slogans. They sum up our advocacy of resources being spent on socially useful goals, serving human need, not the capitalist priority of militarism, and can help develop political consciousness and mobilisation.

But used as slogans against a particular war or military action, they can confuse more than clarify. They can be depoliticising, parochial and nationalistic.

Having explained or sloganised the political reasons why a war or military action is bad (it will cost many lives, promote reactionary goals or forces, serve capitalist/imperialist interests, etc), it is perfectly legitimate and in fact necessary to point out that the spending of resources on it is an exam-

ple of the reactionary politics of the government waging it – spending money on “bad things” while underfunding or cutting “good things”. But it is quite another matter to suggest that the war is bad essentially because it costs money.

Short-term slogans along the lines of “Spend money on public services, not this war” run the risk of implying that services are being underfunded or cut because there genuinely isn’t “enough” wealth in society, rather than because the ruling class is waging class war in order to increase its wealth. (This is particularly problematic when the military action in question is brief and relatively low cost, e.g. the threatened bombing of Syria rather than, say, the war in Vietnam.) They could also imply that money should be spent at home rather than waging war abroad, ie that the problem with foreign wars is that they involve deploying resources in other countries. This plays into the already very strong nationalistic opposition to relatively benign things such as foreign aid.

Such an approach also undercuts attempts to develop in-

ternationalist consciousness among workers and others in Britain, ie to argue for opposition to imperialism and militarism on principle.

The left slips into this for two reasons. Firstly, straightforward opportunism. And secondly, a genuine element of isolationism or indifference in “left” politics. You can see this in the rare cases when an imperialist intervention by Britain or the US aids some democratic cause (despite being done for cynical, imperialist reasons) – like stopping Serbia from destroying Kosova in 1999, or stopping Qaddafi crushing the Libyan rebels in 2011.

“WHO CARES?”

In those cases, some “left” arguments for flatly opposing the interventions (as opposed to advocating absolutely no trust in them) came pretty close to “Who cares? The most important thing is opposing our own government”, a kind of inverted imperialist nationalism.

I oppose US plans to bomb of Syria, and I’m glad that the UK probably won’t be taking part, but saying “Fund welfare, not warfare” as a way of opposing that was not good. It implies indifference to the fate of the Assad regime’s victims, because spending money on public services in Britain is more important – rather than opposing the bombing (and, secondarily, spending money on it) because we think it is bad and will do harm. It distracts from the fundamental points.

If we do raise slogans about the cost of a war we oppose, they need to be very clear about the key thing being its reactionary character. For instance, an Israeli socialist could say “Spend money on services, not oppressing the Palestinians” – though saying “Spend money helping the Palestinians, not oppressing them” would be more advanced politically! And something like “Scrap Trident, fund public services” at least suggests adequate political criticism, even though it doesn’t say it explicitly.

But this is not about having a go at anyone who uses these sort of slogans in an unclear or problematic way.

The instinct to apply “Welfare not warfare”-type ideas is good, particularly at a time of public services being decimated. But socialists’ job should be to promote clarity, not add to the lack of it.

Sacha Ismail, south London

No absolutes in niqab debate

The ruling by Judge Peter Murphy which allowed a Muslim woman to wear her full-face veil in court except when giving evidence is sensible.

It is a compromise between an individual’s religious belief and a social necessity.

There are times when facial expressions are an essential part of communication or need scrutiny. Those occasions are not many but they do exist. Truth telling is something that human beings assess by body language, facial expressions in particular, and that is surely useful in a court room.

There are no absolutes here – for instance sight-impaired people can’t assess another person’s body language, but that should not exclude them from jury service.

In the case of Birmingham Metropolitan College the case for stopping female students from wearing the niqab was ridiculous. They said they wanted to create a “safe and welcoming environment”. They can do that by effectively excluding a small minority? By stigmatising students (including, so they said, students who wear hoodies)? They

were forced to back down.

Compromises can help create a better environment in which to discuss issues about the hijab and niqab. But discuss this we must.

The niqab and hijab is not just another piece of clothing. Whether it is religiously sanctioned is a matter of debate among Muslims, but that is not what concerns me.

Even if chosen by the wearer, this female religious clothing is an artefact of social and sexual control of women. And that is not something we should tolerate anywhere in the world.

Women do not always have choice over whether or not to wear the hijab – in some parts of the world the hijab is an absolute rule, and defiance brings informal or formal punishment, social ostracisation, or much worse. And very young girls in the UK are dressed in head coverings by their parents without choice in the matter.

All of this should be a matter of a public debate. If we can do that while opposing bans and noxious *Daily Mail*-type hysteria over imaginary dangers posed by niqab-wearing women, so much the better.

Cathy Nugent, south London

Left Unity Socialist Platform meets

The Left

By Martin Thomas



The “Socialist Platform” within Left Unity, which Workers’ Liberty supports, met on 14 September.

At the founding conference on 30 November of the Left Unity group, the main debate will be between the “Left Party Platform” (LPP), proposed by Kate Hudson and others, and the “Socialist Platform” (SP), proposed by Nick Wrack, Soraya Lawrence, Will McMahon, Chris Strafford, Cat Ryland, and others.

The (rather manipulative, but also very unrealistic) philosophy behind the LPP approach is that masses of people can be inveigled into left-wing politics, or at least into voting for a new leftist electoral effort, by offering them something just a bit to the left of Labour but vague enough not to startle them.

The SP, on the other hand, believes that any worthwhile left-wing project must clearly declare itself socialist and working-class from the start, and look to building up through patient activity to convince working-class people.

Full report at bit.ly/lu-sp-report

Support the Palestinians!

Trade union and student union activists are promoting the following statement on Israel/Palestine. The Palestinians’ struggles have been somewhat sidelined by the international focus on the wider “Arab Spring”. The Israeli government’s policy aims to make Palestinian independence a historical impossibility. This cannot be allowed to happen. Please sign the statement by emailing middle.east.solidarity@gmail.com, and put a motion of support in your trade union branch, student union, or campaign group.

We call for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Occupied Palestinian territories, and the creation of a really independent Palestinian state in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, in contiguous territory, alongside Israel.

This is of great urgency because the Israeli government continues to build settlements in the Palestinian territories, and refuses to negotiate seriously. It aims to make a genuinely independent Palestinian state impossible. This situation is a factor endangering the whole region.

There is also a religious-sectarian polarisation across the region. Secularism, equal rights for all religions and none, and the right of self-determination for all nations – including the Palestinians, the Kurds and the Israeli Jews – are an essential part of winning democracy, peace between nations, working-class unity and social advance in the Middle East.

We call on the British government, the EU and the US to withdraw the political, economic, diplomatic and military “aid” they give the Israeli government until it negotiates a deal giving the Palestinians the right to a really independent state in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

We will work for the British and international labour movement to liaise with and help efforts in the region, including by Palestinian and Israeli activists, to fight for workers’ rights, democracy, secularism and the right of all nations to self-determination.

(All individual signatories in a personal capacity)

- Pat Murphy, Nation Union of Teachers national executive
- Ian Leaver, NUT national executive
- Roy Bowser, NUT national executive
- Camila Bassi, Sheffield Hallam University UCU
- Maria Exall, CWU Greater London Combined Branch secretary
- Rosie Huzzard, National Union of Students national executive council
- James McAsh, NUS NEC
- Roshni Joshi, NUS NEC 2012-13, National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts NC
- Janine Booth, RMT council of executives
- Tony Byrne, RMT Midland Regional Council Assistant Secretary
- Liam McNulty, London Young Labour committee
- Hannah Thompson, London Young Labour committee and Labour Representation Committee NC
- Shreya Paudel, Middlesex University Students’ Union president 2012-13
- Daniel Cooper, University of London Union vice president
- Matt Wells, PCS 001026 Branch Organiser

The rich plunder while poor are persecuted

Announcing the new prosecution guidelines for so-called “benefit cheats”, Keir Starmer, the Director of Public Prosecutions, said: “benefit and tax fraudsters cost the taxpayer [£9.1 billion every year]”.

Benefit fraudsters, the new guidelines insist, should therefore be sentenced under laws which carry a maximum jail term of ten years. What Starmer did not say was that benefit fraud accounts for just £26.9 million, or 0.3%, of the £9.1 billion total.

According to the *Tax Research* website, the figure for tax fraud (based on undeclared income) is an underestimate, and could be as much as £70 billion. So why does the government (and Starmer, who acts for the government) treat these two issues as equivalents?

The short answer is that they want to demonise people who over-claim on their benefits.

By any reasonable assessment, “tax fraudsters” should also include tax avoiding companies like Amazon, Starbucks, and Vodafone — who, to use Starmer’s language, “cost the taxpayer” a further £25 billion a year.

There is a huge moral difference between someone who “makes a few quid on the side” and a fat-cat tax evader.

Take someone like Philip Green, boss of the Arcadia Group (Top Shop, Wallis, BHS). Knighted by New Labour for services to British retail and adopted by the current government as an advisor on government spending, Green is the quintessential “pillar of society”, an example of where hard work can get you.

But Green used inherited wealth to make much more cash. He employs accountants and lawyers to avoid paying tax. He registered his company in the name of his wife. She is from Monaco, and not liable to pay UK taxes. This is how Green avoids paying £285 million a year in taxes.

That is fraud and everyone knows it is. But because it is technically legal, and because Green is a rich man, it is tolerated. The government is not rushing to change the law to stop Green defrauding the state. The *Daily Mail* will not be running shaming headlines about how he is robbing the taxpayer. He will not be inconvenienced for ten minutes, let alone lose his liberty for up for ten years, because of what he does.

RICH

Rich individuals and corporations routinely steal from public finances all the time.

And we should count among the thieves, fraudsters, and cheats the banks which grabbed — and wasted — so much public money over the last five years. In 2008 about £1.1 trillion from public finances was poured into the banks, to buy their shares or give them loans or guarantees.

Most tax evasion (as opposed to the legal tax avoidance) is committed not by people who don’t declare a bit of “cash in hand” work, but by rich people who have lawyers on their side and are able to negotiate with the government over the punishments they receive if found out. Those people do not get locked up for ten years.

Contrast these multi-billion pound fraudsters to the individuals who mis-claim and over-claim on their benefits.

A survey of the cases that come to court and are reported in local newspapers shows people very different from organised criminals like Philip Green, who plot and plan with their associates and relatives to defraud.

Very often they are women with families living in difficult circumstances. Very often they are entitled to benefits, but have failed to disclose they are living with a partner (who may or may not be working) and therefore their claim for benefits is administratively wrong.

They are hard-pressed people who have tried to get a bit of extra money for themselves and their families. They do this because they are poor. They have fallen foul of a stingy, humiliating, and increasingly draconian benefits system.

Every day hundreds of people have their benefit stopped

This is demonising the poor

because they have not met this or that criterion of a bureaucratic system. Disclosing new information about your circumstances is a sure-fire way to have your benefits stopped for weeks and weeks.

Every week thousands of people will visit a food bank because they have lost their job but have had to wait weeks to receive benefits to which they are entitled, and therefore have nothing to eat. They are not, as Michael Gove would have it, people who cannot manage their money. They are people who have had the money they are entitled to mismanaged by the state.

And every year millions of people are entitled to benefits that they do not claim. Those unclaimed benefits (including pension credit and Job Seekers’ Allowance) are worth £12 billion.

Moral standards under capitalism are upside-down. Rich individuals and companies are lauded for accumulating and hoarding unimaginable wealth and therefore bleeding dry resources that should be used to fund schools, hospitals and create jobs. Banks are praised for rediscovering their profit mojo and overcoming the crisis.

Then they propose to lock up working-class mothers for just trying to survive.

The left and the labour movement needs to make the political arguments against these inequalities. The ruling class gets away with continual attacks and daily humiliations against the poorest and most vulnerable in society because the labour movement is passive and weak.

Our demands should include opposition to all means-tested benefits. Everyone who is jobless, regardless of their “ability to work”, should have a basic, guaranteed income that is enough to live on.

Our campaign needs to base itself on proposals to redress the wealth inequality — expropriating the banks, taxing the rich, and stopping them avoiding tax.

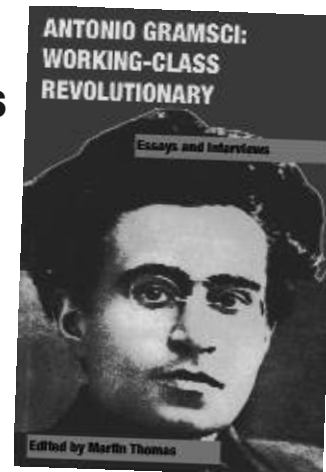
BOOKS FROM WORKERS’ LIBERTY

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This booklet discusses a major recent study on the *Notebooks* — Peter Thomas’s *The Gramscian Moment* — and argues that

the *Notebooks* were in fact a powerful contribution to the working-out of revolutionary working-class strategy in developed capitalist societies.

£4. Buy online at <http://bit.ly/gramsci>



What is capitalism? Can it last?

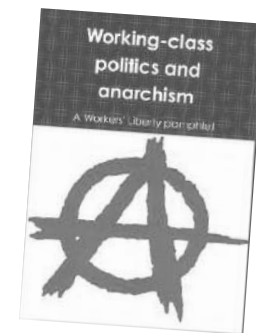
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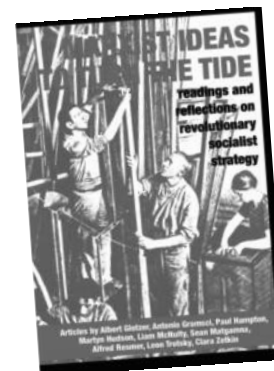


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Behind the Blairite drive against the unions

By Dale Street

In 1943 the *Economist* magazine offered this helpful advice to the Labour Party: "The Labour Party is based on an out-of-date doctrine. Its social basis does not match modern social structures. Its dependence on the trade unions ties it to conservative sectional interests. The 'labour coalition' of the party and the unions should be scrapped and replaced by a regroupment of non-Conservative forces".

Two years later the Labour Party won a landslide general election victory, hailed by its national election organiser as the moment when "the working classes, hitherto a subject race, succeeded in the organisation of political power and became the ruling class in their own land."

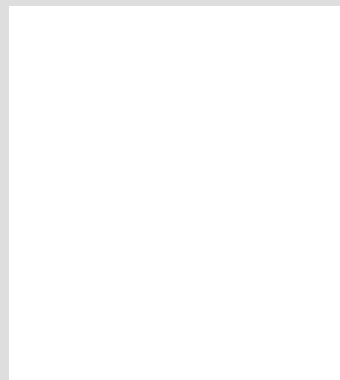
Clearly, therefore, there is nothing new in calls for the Labour Party to cut itself loose from affiliated trade unions as its only means of survival. According to Lewis Minkin's history of the Labour-union link, *The Contentious Alliance*:

"For the Centre and the Right, it became a priority to seek the destruction of the union-Party relationship. Often they diagnosed inevitable degeneration or suicide as the future of the labour movement."

But when Minkin spoke of "the Centre and the Right", he was referring to the centre and right of the political spectrum as a whole, not to the centre and right within the Labour Party.

In fact, for virtually the entire twentieth century, even the Labour Party right wing accepted the Labour-union link as the bedrock of the movement. More often than not, it was usually the right wing who benefited most from the link. The block vote generally protected Labour's parliamentary leaders against conference challenges from left-minded local Labour activists.

Even the future leaders of the breakaway SDP, such as Bill Rodgers, acknowledged just two years before their split that "there is no salvation for the Labour Party in a break with the trade union movement." The subsequent fate of the SDP was to prove him correct.



Ex-union leader and current Blairite Alan Johnson

The fact that the "traditional" right wing treated affiliated unions as the natural allies of the Labour Party — even if that alliance, to use Minkin's expression, could sometimes be "contentious" — underlines the seismic shift represented by the emergence of Blairism in the Labour Party in the 1990s.

The Blairites were hostile not just to the policies which the party might adopt because of its links with the unions. They were hostile to the links themselves. They were the leaders of a labour movement which they did not think should even exist.

For some Blairites the solution was to reduce the role of the unions in the party to such a degree that it became meaningless. For others, the solution was to break the link completely.

BLAIR

Two years after Blair's election as party leader his ally and fellow Labour MP Stephen Byers was already briefing the media that the Labour Party might sever its links with the unions.

In 2005 the ex-CWU general secretary and then Trade and Industry Secretary Alan Johnson advocated that the unions' share of votes at Labour Party annual conference be cut to 15%.

In early 2007 Johnson lined up with former TGWU general secretary Bill Morris and the fake-left Jon Cruddas MP to advocate further reductions in the unions' role in the Labour Party.

In late 2010 Blairites returned to the attack on Labour-union links. MPs Andy Burnham and Tessa Jowell "questioned" affiliated union members having a vote in Labour Party leadership elections. Margaret Hodge MP advocated that Labour "cut the umbilical cord" with the unions on the grounds that they were "irrelevant in British society".

And ex-MP Alan Milburn — so right-wing that some Tories wanted him to be offered a post in the Con-Dem coalition government — proposed that the unions "should no longer have a structural relationship with Labour."

In February of this year Alan Johnson again raised the issue of reducing the unions' role in the Labour Party.

In an interview in the magazine of the ultra-Blairite "Progress" faction, he attacked union leaders as "fat, white, finger-jabbing blokes on rostrums shouting and screaming" and called for their share of the vote at Labour Party conference to be cut to "about a third".

Unsurprisingly, when Miliband announced his proposals to replace "opting out" by "opting in", they won applause from these old-time Blairites and from Blair himself ("bold and strong ... long overdue and probably, frankly, I should have done it when I was party leader").

Miliband's proposals are not, as Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey has claimed, "an opportunity rather than a threat." His proposals represent the latest stage in the long-term Blairite project of destroying what defines the Labour Party as the party of organised labour in Britain.

Why Labour

By Martin Thomas

Union leaders are usually satisfied with sops and gestures. So why are many on Labour's right wing pushing Ed Miliband to damage and weaken the link?

It is because they *remember*, or have been taught by those who remember.

After 1979-80, a breach between the union leaders and the Labour parliamentary leaders opened space for an unprecedented rank and file upsurge in the Labour Party.

The upheaval was triggered by the intersection of two curves: ferment within the trade unions, and successive collapses by the Labour parliamentary leaders. Both were, in turn, generated by the economic turmoil of a capitalism crashing and lurching through transition from the consensus-politics boom of the 1950s and 60s to the neoliberalism of the 1980s.

In March 1971 the TUC organised a march of 150,000 through London, protesting at the anti-union legislation of the Tory government which had been elected in June 1970.

Part-way down the Embankment, the march paused. Hugh Scanlon, then president of the big engineering union which would after many mergers become part of today's Unite union, jumped up on one of the street benches and gave an impromptu speech.

We must drive out the Tories, he declared, and get a new Labour government. But — he added to applause — it must be a Labour government committed to socialist policies! Never another Labour government like the one that had lost office seven months before!

That government, starting off quite popular in 1964-6, had by 1970 become deeply discredited on the left and — after it tried to bring in anti-strike laws in 1969 — even with union leaders.

LEADERS

The Labour leaders were trying to manage capitalism in times when the world market allowed less leeway. They were directly under the influence of bankers, bosses, and top civil servants, who had definite ideas on how to manage crises while the Labour leaders were baffled

Meanwhile a susurrus of working-class industrial militancy, starting in the mid-1950s, was becoming a roar, and would become an explosion in 1972-5.

Scanlon had made his career in the union as a supporter and promoter of shop-steward organisation, which became increasingly dense in many industries in the 1960s and 70s.

The unions, bureaucratized though they are, are also based on workers organising as workers in our workplaces. They have to be. They die if they are not. That makes them unstable from a conventional capitalist point of view.

Scanlon himself would end up in 1979 as "Lord Scanlon".

He followed the usual route for a once-militant shop steward who climbs the ladder of union position without clear working-class politics and without the discipline of an active rank-and-file movement or a coherent socialist organisation.

But the pressure from the rank and file, piecemeal and politically inchoate though it was, continued. At the end of the 1970s, the union leaders' desire to conciliate and temporise could not move fast enough to keep pace with the Labour leaders' pursuit of capitalist interests.

The 1974-9 Labour government had come to office in the wake of a wave of working-class revolt. It started off with some reforms. Then from early 1976 through to 1978 the Labour government made deep cuts — sharper cuts in the NHS, in fact, than Thatcher would ever make — and tried to limit wage rises by law.

Labour's elected National Executive Committee, dominated by trade unionists and elected representatives of local Labour activists, remained leftist. In November 1976 it sup-

r's right wing fears the union link

ported a demonstration against the Labour government cuts which mobilised 80,000 in London on a working day.

Still, the Labour leaders thought they could deal with such things. Demonstrations? Protests? Votes at Labour conference? Those were irritations, but surely the top union officials would ensure that nothing became too serious.

In the winter of 1978-9 the Labour leaders still felt confident to flout a decision of the 1978 Labour conference against continued wage controls, and to try to squash an ensuing revolt by low-paid workers (the "winter of discontent").

The union leaders of 1979 were people who felt they had faced down the Tories in 1970-4, and were as yet fairly confident that they would face down the new Tory administration. Behind them stood hundreds of thousands of workplace union reps, similarly minded. They wanted to pull Labour back into line, and see off the Tories.

Straight away, in October 1979, the Labour Party conference voted for mandatory reselection of MPs — meaning a new selection contest before every election — and control over the Labour Party election manifesto by the National Executive (not the parliamentary leader).

Both measures had been campaigned for steadily since 1973.

Tony Benn had been a minister in the 1974-9 government, with a more left-wing image than other ministers, but no rebel. Now he distanced himself from the discredited leadership of James Callaghan.

RANK AND FILE MOBILISING COMMITTEE

In May 1980, the Rank and File Mobilising Committee was formed, on the initiative of SCLV, a forerunner of AWL. As Patrick Seyd puts in a detailed academic study of the period:

"Each organisation associated with the RFMC was represented on the organising committee but it was CLPD [Campaign for Labour Party Democracy] and the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, later to become the Socialist Organiser Alliance, which provided the direction and organisational drive for the campaign.

"John Bloxam from Socialist Organiser was the campaign organiser and Jon Lansman [CLPD] became its secretary. Prior to the 1980 Party conference the RFMC organised twenty country-wide rallies to win support for the Left's reform proposals.

"It successfully provided the tactical drive and organisation in the face of opposition from both the Right and parts of the parliamentary Left, to secure the adoption of new procedures for electing the Party leadership, and it then went on to provide the main base for the campaign to elect Tony Benn as the Party's Deputy Leader.

"The RFMC was a remarkable organisation in the history of the Labour Left. For a period the Labour Left was united... and the multitude of organisations operated together as a single unit".

The regular 1980 Labour conference, in October, voted for the principle of election of the Party leader by the whole party, not just the MPs. (The exact procedure would be settled by a special conference in January 1981).

It also adopted unilateral nuclear disarmament and backed direct action against local government cuts.

Callaghan resigned as leader on 15 October 1980, trying to get a successor in place before the new leadership election

Ed Miliband wants to be seen to be "tough" on the unions. Unions should resist his plans to reduce their collective voice in politics.

procedure was installed. MPs, feeling the heat from below, rejected Callaghan's chosen candidate, right-winger Denis Healey, and instead chose Michael Foot, who was a left-winger, though a faded one, and at age 68 obviously an interim figure.

In March 1981 a whole segment of the Labour right split off to form a "Social Democratic Party", which at first did well in the opinion polls and then merged with the old Liberal party to form the Liberal Democrats.

Between April and September 1981 Tony Benn campaigned against Denis Healey for Labour's deputy leadership. Benn won 83% of the votes from local Labour activists, and Healey scraped in only thanks to the union vote.

In *Socialist Organiser* (a forerunner of *Solidarity*), we warned of the limitations of the upsurge at the same time as we made ourselves central to organising it.

We argued that the struggle for democracy must be taken into the unions. The left's alliance with top union leaders could only be temporary and fragile.

"The victories so far are formal", we wrote. "They must be filled out with the content of working-class struggle if the movement is to be regenerated. A 'democratised' labour movement will become a fighting organisation of the workers, hammering at the Tories and their backers, or it will quickly fall again under the control of bureaucrats and time-servers" — and, we warned, they would use witch-hunts and bans to help them neutralise the democratic reforms.

So it was. In January 1982 the union leaders met with the Labour Party leaders at Bishops Stortford and agreed to work together to tame the rank and file. A long, slow, grinding

counter-revolution got underway.

Many factors helped the Labour right reassert itself: the industrial defeats of the early 1980s; the political vagueness of the Labour left.

But the Labour right had been given a frightening glimpse of its own mortality. It had been shown how frail its position became as soon as the working-class base began to move, even in a limited way.

It has shored itself up both by Blair's restructuring of the Labour Party in 1997, and by striving, with some success, to embed some self-limiting adages in the common sense of the labour movement.

We mustn't go back to the strife of the 1970s, they tell us — when in fact that strife won victories, and without it the Tories would have done ten years earlier what they did in the 1980s, when we couldn't rouse enough strife against them.

We can't have the Labour Party divided as it was in the 1980s, they say. Actually, in early 1981, at the peak of the "division", Labour stood at 51% in the opinion polls. It was the subsequent disappointments which brought it down to a miserable 28% in the 1983 general election.

Labour should never promise much, they declare. Promises in 1964 and 1974 led only to Labour governments which at first made popular reforms and then collapsed abjectly. Instead (they say) Labour should commit itself in advance to orthodox capitalist policies — as Neil Kinnock, Labour leader 1983-92, put it, it should do all its betrayals in advance — and then if things go well it can hand out some reforms.

To try to make adage into unbreakable law, the Labour right want to exorcise the union link.

Defend the Link campaign
defendthelink.wordpress.com

New strike wave in Greece

By Theodora Polenta

According to official figures, participation in the strike by Greek teachers on 16 September was over 90%.

Over 30,000 teachers, university administrators, students and workers in pension funds, and others flooded the centre of Athens. Four other sectoral union federations have coordinated with OLME (the union federation for high school teachers) and have announced repeated five-day rolling strikes against government plans to cut jobs and suspend tens of thousands of workers for eventual sacking or possible redeployment.

There were also around 10,000 demonstrators in Thessaloniki. The public-sector union confederation Adedy has called a 48 hour strike for 18-19 September.

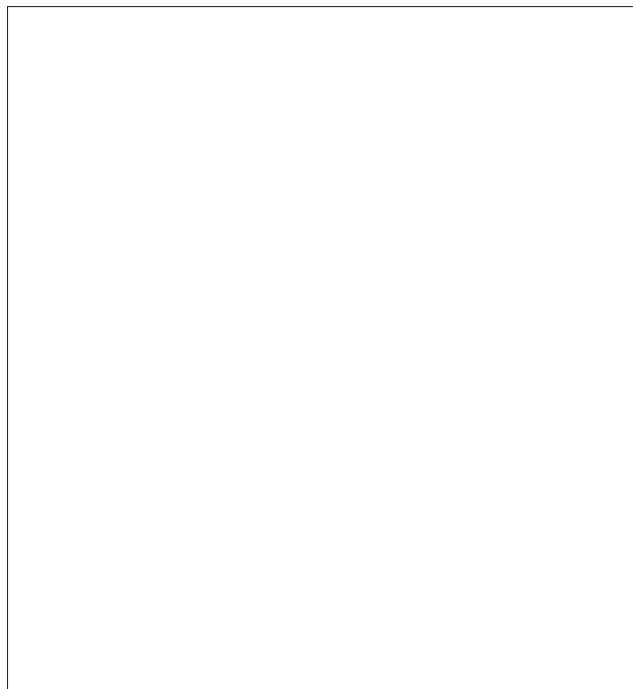
It is very important to continue efforts to compel the leadership of the primary teachers' federation (DOE) to join the movement. The primary school teachers have decided to strike for 48 hours on 18-19 September, and there are very strong voices inside the federation calling for a more dynamic mobilisation. The front of unions committed to five-day rolling strikes must widen as soon as possible and as much as possible.

Among the high school teachers, over 90% of local unions voted in favour of strike action. On Tuesday 17 September, occupations and protests are planned at government offices. There will be a motorbike-rally in the centre of Athens.

On Thursday 19th high school teachers will be holding meetings to discuss the continuation and escalation of the strike, and on Friday 20th the presidents of the local high school teachers' unions, the constituent parts of the OLME federation will meet.

Many workers want to see the total overthrow of the Samaras government and the rule of the EU-ECB-IMF Troika over the Greek economy.

The union Federation of Public Hospitals (Podein) will hold a four-hour nationwide stoppage on Thursday 19th and



rally at 12 noon outside the Ministry of Health.

These are critical times which will test the ability of the left in Greece not only to support struggles but to lead them and extend them.

High school teachers are in the forefront, because since 2011 2,500 primary and secondary schools have been closed or merged.

Many courses have been shut down in the technical colleges, and will now be available only at private colleges.

16,000 teachers' jobs are at threat in secondary education. 2,500 are being put in redeployment, 5,000 have been transferred, 5,000 temporary staff have lost their jobs, and 3,500 have been retired early.

Many have been compulsorily transferred to other areas.

New laws will turn high schools into centres of continuous testing, geared to "results", making them a mechanism to filter out and downgrade working-class kids who will be forced to leave school without a high school diploma.

Already 27 rank and file local unions in primary education have signed a statement in favour of primary and kindergarten teachers joining with the high school teachers in the rolling five-day strikes. 21 out of the 36 local general assemblies of the teachers voted for the rolling five-day strikes. But the leadership of the primary teachers' federation is dominated by members of the government parties, New Democracy and Pasok, whereas the high school federation is now led by the left.

Students are also mobilising. Groups like the "Disobedient School Students" can help form a common front across the whole education system against the government.

The federations so far joining with the high school teachers in the programme of rolling five-day strikes are those of workers in the Employment Agency (OAED), in social security (IKA), and in social policy (POPOKP).

Another four federations, health insurance (EOPYY), Ministry of Labour (OSYPE), the insurance fund for self-employed (PSE OAEE), and tax office (POE-DOH) took decisions in the summer in which they called on the public sector workers' union confederation Adedy to coordinate and organise an ongoing general strike.

Adedy is still led by New Democracy and Pasok members, and so unlikely to do that. The federations should move directly to join the programme of rolling five-day strikes, and create a common centre of struggle with the other federations.

This fight can and should be connected to the struggle waged by workers at the public broadcaster, ERT. ERT offices remain occupied, broadcasting under workers' control, and can become the voice of the strike movement.

And now is the time for other public sector workers' fed-

erations, too, to vote for strike action. Workers in municipalities were among the first to be attacked by the government and the Troika.

However, so far the leaders of the federations of workers in the municipalities (POE, OTA, and POP OTA) seem unwilling to escalate or coordinate their struggle.

The Memorandum also plans to reduce 140 hospitals to 80 and 80,000 health workers to 40,000 by 2015.

So far the government has "promised" that its current job cuts will not affect university professors, tax office workers, and public health workers, but that promise is just to buy time.

An effective strike movement, coupled with a political agenda aiming to overthrow the government and establish a government of the Left is the most powerful weapon that the labour movement has against its oppressors.

The initiative for a general strike cannot be left at the hands of the leaderships of the big union confederations, Gsee (private sector) and Adedy (public sector). A general strike can only be imposed from below, and that should be with full awareness that the central trade union leaderships, even if dragged to adopt the proposal, will do everything they can to sabotage it.

The mass movement should take control of the struggle, with frequent general meetings at each workplace, with elected (and removable) strike committees, with communication teams that will disseminate strike information and counteract government and media propaganda.

MILITANT MOOD

Sadly, the Greek Communist Party's trade-union front PAME has chosen at yet another turning point in the movement to stand against the militant mood of workers.

According to KKE any slogan short of workers' government and control is a reformist slogan that serves the interest of Syriza, and Syriza is only an alternative management for the capitalist system.

PAME's unionists, in education, health and elsewhere, led the fight against strike escalation: "The climate is not ready", "We should not close schools and hospitals".

In the local high school teacher unions' general meetings, the proposal for rolling five-day strikes was supported by Syriza and the "Agonistikos Parembaseis" group. The ND unionists' group, the Pasok unionists' group, and PAME argued, often together, for a one-off 48-hour strike, i.e involvement in the strike already planned by Adedy for 18-19 September. The small forces of the Democratic Left also sided with ND and Pasok.

Important now is the creation of strike committees in local unions, with the participation of parents' associations, school students, and residents who want to support the teachers' struggle. They should organise a daily presence of strikers and supporters in schools, pickets, discussions with parents and students, and financial support for colleagues through strike funds.

Syriza's leaders have so far shown willingness to go forward in this battle. But this must be concretised and materialised. Syriza should mobilise in every neighbourhood to work with the teachers' struggle.

The goal of bringing down the memorandum government of Samaras looks ever closer. The important issue is not so much the time of the elections as the level of class struggle when the government is overthrown.

The evolution of the international crisis makes it clear that a left-wing way out requires the greatest possible social mobilisation, something much more active, much more conscious, and much more militant than just voting.

The primary responsibility for the successful escalation of the strikes belongs ultimately to the political Left, predominantly Syriza, and not the trade union movement and its leadership.

Syriza should develop a clear, unambiguous comprehensive proposal for termination of the old and new memorandum and an explicit statement of immediate termination of debt payments.

Dawn in New York

Songs of Liberty & Rebellion



Claude McKay (1889-1948) was a Jamaican poet who, during his time in London, became involved in revolutionary socialist circles.

He attended the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1922. While he did not associate himself with Trotskyism, he became disillusioned with Stalinism in the 1930s (unfortunately ending up as a Roman Catholic).

He was a key figure in the "Harlem Renaissance", and his 1922 poem "Dawn in New York" reimagines William Wordsworth's "Upon Westminster Bridge" for 20th-century Manhattan, writing in the stories of human struggle and suffering that Wordsworth's picturesque rendering of London painted out.

The Ruby Kid

The Dawn! The Dawn! The crimson-tinted, comes
Out of the low still skies, over the hills,
Manhattan's roofs and spires and cheerless domes!
The Dawn! My spirit to its spirit thrills.
Almost the mighty city is asleep,
No pushing crowd, no tramping, tramping feet.
But here and there a few cars groaning creep
Along, above, and underneath the street,
Bearing their strangely-ghostly burdens by,
The women and the men of garish nights,
Their eyes wine-weakened and their clothes awry,
Grotesques beneath the strong electric lights.
The shadows wane. The Dawn comes to New York.
And I go darkly-rebel to my work.

Chávez's Trotskyist cheerleaders

Pablo Velasco concludes his assessment of Hugo Chávez's political legacy and the relationship of the "Bolivarian" state to Venezuela's working class. In this article, he looks at the attitude of international Trotskyism, and particularly the "International Marxist Tendency" to Chávez.

The accommodation and prostration of the apparently "Trotskyist" left to Chávez was one of the principal signifiers of a wider ideological collapse of socialism that took place in the early years of this century.

Alongside support for the murderous Islamist "resistance" (instead of trade unionists and secular forces) in Iraq, support for Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Iranian state against Israel, support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, along with quietism over Libya and Syria, the abasement before Chavismo was a clear sign of the residual gangrene of Stalinism within the workers' movement.

How did the left divide on Chávez? Workers' Liberty was one of the few critical voices on the Marxist left to characterise Chávez as a Bonapartist. The fragments of the Workers' Power/Permanent Revolution group took a similar position in Britain, although Workers' Power were credulous about Chávez's creation of the PSUV, and advocated that Venezuelan independent socialists join it. The International Socialist Organization in the US was also somewhat critical.

The British SWP, along with the "Fourth International" (Socialist Resistance in Britain) and others such as the *Weekly Worker*/*Communist Party of Great Britain* group, took a typically centrist position, welcoming the Bolivarian "revolutionary process" (and advocating working within it), without clearly identifying its class character and its dangers for working-class independence and political representation.

Thus Joseph Choonara's SWP pamphlet, *Venezuela and Revolution in the 21st Century* (2006) cheered on the "revolutionary process", and pulled its punches about Chávez. It took Chávez's rhetoric about socialism at face value, arguing that "Venezuela has placed the questions of socialism and workers' power back on the agenda". Worse, the SWP advised Venezuelan socialists to "work within the revolutionary process", accepting the hegemony of Chávez, going along with his methods, and remaining silent about the nature and direction of Bolivarianism.

SPECTRUM

At the far end of the spectrum has been the Australian Green Left Weekly, whose longstanding Castroism was complemented by its support for Chávez's Bolivarian project. Although its reports from Venezuela were sometimes informative of developments in the workers' movement, the paper provided no independent strategy for Venezuelan workers, tying them hand and foot to Chávez.

However the accolade for the most sycophantic "Trotskyist" capitulation to Chavismo must surely go to the "International Marxist Tendency", which publishes *Socialist Appeal* in Britain and runs the misnamed "In Defence of Marxism" website. Its leading theoretician Alan Woods was previously infamous for his comments, during the Militant Tendency days, about "dark masses" in Afghanistan, which provided cover for Militant's support for the Russian invasion in 1980. After Militant split in the early 90s (with those around Peter Taaffe going on to found the Socialist Party, and sect leader Ted Grant, Alan Woods, and others founding Socialist Appeal), the group was in an advanced state of decomposition. Its embrace of Chavismo gave it some new life, although on a reactionary basis.

Socialist Appeal launched the "Hands off Venezuela" (HOV) campaign, which went beyond the laudable goal of opposing US intervention in Venezuela and tried to put a socialist gloss on Chávez's bourgeois and Bonapartist politics. The HOV statement requires signatories to agree to the "defence of the revolutionary process" in Venezuela, and its website is subtitled "in solidarity with the Venezuelan revolution".

Woods' book *The Venezuelan Revolution* (2005) deserves its place in the catalogue of infamy, providing a "Marxist" rationale for dissolving working-class politics in Venezuela into Chavismo.

The book recounts a relationship instigated by Chávez to

A feature from pro-Chávez Venezuelan newspaper *Ciudad CCS* reporting (approvingly) on Alan Wood's sycophantic praise for Chávez and the "Bolivarian Revolution"

find international apologists. Chávez flattered Woods by reading extracts from his book *Reason in Revolt* on his TV show "Alo Presidente" on 21 March 2004. He also talked about the HOV campaign for 20 minutes. At the filming of "Alo Presidente" on Sunday 18 April 2004, Woods was "placed in the front row, in a prominent position immediately opposite the president". He was also "received by President Chávez for a private audience that lasted well over an hour".

Chávez apparently flattered Woods on camera, reading from another book and saying, not without a touch of irony, that "he who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it". The website report coos that, "In the course of the programme, Hugo Chávez mentioned Alan at least three times" and "has given his personal support to the publishing of the Venezuelan edition of *Reason in Revolt*".

Woods' own account of his visit provides Chávez with an unqualified endorsement. He says: "Hugo Chávez for the first time gave the poor and downtrodden a voice and some hope." Woods swoons: "From my limited contacts with Hugo Chávez, I am firmly convinced of his personal honesty, courage and dedication to the cause of the masses, the oppressed and exploited."

Chávez apparently told Woods that he didn't consider himself a Marxist "because I have not read enough Marxist books". To this Woods wrote: "From this conversation I had the distinct impression that Hugo Chávez was looking for ideas, and that he was genuinely interested in the ideas of Marxism and anxious to learn." He finishes his report by saying: "I believe that a growing number in the Bolivarian movement are looking for the ideas of Marxism. I am sure that this applies to many of its leaders. And Hugo Chávez? He told me that he is not a Marxist because he had not read enough Marxist books. But he is reading them now."

Woods provided a "Marxist" capitulation for the "Bolivarian revolution" in two long essays: "Marxism and the Venezuelan Revolution" and "Theses on revolution and counterrevolution in Venezuela", both written after his visit in 2004.

Woods offered an interpretation of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution to justify turning Chávez into a (unconscious) socialist revolutionary. He wrote that socialist revolutions normally require a Marxist party to be victorious – but, since this is absent today, "all sorts of peculiar variants are possible". He made it clear that Chávez is such a peculiar locum: "In the absence of a mass revolutionary Marxist party the forces of revolution have gathered around Chávez and the Bolivarian Movement."

Woods spread the most ridiculous illusions about the peaceful road to socialism. He wrote that, in Venezuela in April 2002, "it would have been possible to carry out a peaceful transformation of society after the collapse of the coup". He added that a peaceful transformation was also possible after the bosses' lockout in 2002-2003. He followed his mentor Ted Grant, who argued for similar forms of substitutionism and peaceful overturn in Portugal in 1974, adding for good measure that "the lower officer caste becomes – for a period – the unconscious agent of history". Grant also saw the "proletarian Bonapartism" of the Stalinist states as pro-

gressive against capitalism, while Woods misread Bonapartism in Venezuela for a genuine workers' movement.

Woods wrote that the big industries must be nationalised, but insisted this "can be done by introducing emergency legislation through the congress" – a version of the old "enabling act in parliament" that Militant used to preach in Britain as the key step to building socialism. He added that an appeal should be made to workers to introduce workers' control to "ensure a peaceful and orderly transition to a planned economy". Woods wrote that the masses must "purge" the state. He believed in 2004 that the Chávez government had carried out a partial purge – but "a serious purge can only be carried from below".

REFORMIST

So: the state does not need to be smashed, and the army does not need to split – the existing state merely needs to be "purged" ("from below", of course!) to ensure a "peaceful and orderly" transition to socialism. This is an utterly reformist perspective.

Woods' method is well summed up in the opening and closing paragraphs of his "Theses on revolution and counterrevolution in Venezuela". He described Venezuela as polarised between "two antagonistic camps" – the "revolution" (including Chávez) and the "counterrevolution".

He calls on Marxists to become the "extreme left wing of the Bolivarian movement". By grouping the working class with Chávez, he effectively does away with our class as an independent political element. The workers are subordinated to the Bolivarian revolution, with no interests separate from Chávez – in short, they are merely a stage army for petty bourgeois politics.

Woods included a chapter entitled "foxes and grapes" in his book, selectively quoting from AWL articles without citation. We debated his supporters on a number of occasions, where they played the role of energetic but uncritical defenders of Chávez. Woods sat with Ken Livingstone, Tariq Ali, and others fawning over Chávez during his visit to London in 2006. His supporters tried to organise flag-waving outside Chávez's hotel in a sickening parallel of royalist pageantry. Meanwhile, most IMT supporters in Venezuela took Woods' advice very seriously and dissolved into Chávez's PSUV.

After Chávez's death, Woods appeared on television and wrote a tribute, demonstrating that he has learned nothing of value to Venezuelan workers or indeed the workers of the world. He repeats the passage about Chávez not being a Marxist "because he hadn't read enough Marxist books... but he is reading them now". But nearly a decade on, with capitalism still extant and the bourgeois state still intact in Venezuela, this slippery formula simply does not wash.

If socialism is to be renewed in the 21st century, it must be scrubbed clean of substitutionist politics that look to other class forces – Stalinist states, Islamists, or petty-bourgeois Bonapartes like Chávez – to carry out historical goals that only an independently organised and politically conscious revolutionary workers' movement can fulfil.

Rivers of rubbish

Some left groups tell straightforward lies about the positions of other groups — and particularly about Workers' Liberty. At the 14 September meeting of the Socialist Platform of Left Unity, the *Weekly Worker*-CPGB (very unsuccessfully) pushed a motion to exclude AWL, saying we were "pro-imperialist", and supported the US bombing of Syria.

In fact, the issue of *Solidarity* on sale at the meeting included the headline "Against US bombs".... This 1991 article by Sean Matgama from *Socialist Organiser*, *Solidarity's* predecessor, documented some of the older streams of falsification on which today's diatribes draw.

Biblical scholars, I understand, have a terrible time of it working out what some of the long-vanished early Christian groups believed.

They have to rely on such chance survivals as the "Dead Sea Scrolls". Most of the rich history of the competing Christian groups in the later Roman Empire is lost: the victorious Catholic Christians entwined with the Roman and later states from the early 4th century onwards, suppressed their opponents and left little trace of them and their beliefs except for factional slanders and lies. Mostly we don't know what they believed.

If all the files of *Socialist Organiser* were to be destroyed and future historians of British socialism had to rely on the comments of our "socialist" contemporaries and critics, they would face a similarly hopeless task establishing what *Socialist Organiser* believed in.

Examples of grotesque misrepresentation are legion. Some are products of emotion blended with incomprehension. For instance, on issues of national or communal conflict, like those in Northern Ireland and in Israel/Palestine we base ourselves on the Marxist idea of consistent democracy, and take as our model the application of that idea by the Bolshevik party in the vicious cauldron of ethnic and national conflict in which they operated.

We reject the demonisation of Israeli Jews and Northern Ireland Protestants; we say there is right on both sides and that no national or ethnic group forfeits its right to exist because it is, for now, an oppressor or a would-be oppressor; we advocate mutual accommodation and a common struggle of the working class in the conflict-ridden peoples, based on support for the oppressed and mutual guarantees against fear of future oppression. Thus we propose a federal Ireland with local autonomy, and two states for the two peoples in Israel/Palestine.

Ignorant of the ideas of historical Marxism on questions like this; delirious with vicarious "Third Worldist" national and communal chauvinism distilled from sympathy with those presently oppressed; religious in denying that such peoples can ever be chauvinistic, the sectarian left denounce us as supporters of the oppressors, as "pro-imperialist".

Thus the SWP, not just in offhand heated exchanges but in an official document written by Alex Callinicos, has accused us of supporting the Israeli state's terror in the West Bank and Gaza! They seem unable to comprehend what we are on about. Some of the incomprehension, no doubt, is our fault; but communication is a two-way enterprise.

Or take the Falklands war. We opposed that war. We did not, like the "anti-imperialist" left (and much of the Labour left), support Argentina; nor did we dismiss the claimed rights to self-determination of the British population of the Falkland Islands, 400 miles from Argentina. The fascistic self-aggrandising military junta which then held Argentina in a murderous stranglehold invaded the islands in a search for chauvinist prestige at home.

Since the Falklanders oppressed no-one, the islands were not a British base for oppressing anyone, and the British had been there 150 years, long before the modern Argentinian state existed, we saw no reason to back Argentina's claim to the islands.

But we were, by any standards, against Thatcher's war of prestige and nostalgic gunboat imperialism. Throughout the war we carried on *SO's* masthead a variant of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg's slogan in World War I: "The enemy is at home". Yet ask any sectarian today, and you'll hear that *SO* did not oppose the Falklands (sorry, "Malvinas") war.

Then again: *SO*, which tries to be an open paper, carried an article by the then MP Reg Race advocating economic in-

They say Socialist Organiser failed to oppose Thatcher's Falklands War!

stead of military sanctions against Argentina. The same issue of *SO* opposed that idea editorially — on page one. Nevertheless the sectarians say, "*SO* called for economic sanctions". And so on. [...]

One of the worst examples is a pamphlet put out in 1970, and kept in circulation for over a decade, by the SLL/WRP. It alleged that Workers Fight [forerunner of AWL] supported the deployment of the British army in Northern Ireland.

It had a picture of British soldiers searching a man in Northern Ireland with his hands in the air, and the caption seemed to blame us, and me personally, for it! In fact Workers' Fight opposed the deployment of the troops in 1969. When the SWP (then called IS) supported the deployment of troops, the Workers' Fight grouping inside IS organised an opposition to that policy and, after a heated campaign, forced them to reverse it.

I co-authored a pamphlet which helped change people's minds and went round the country speaking and debating on it; I moved the resolution at the IS National Committee in May 1970 which reversed the policy.

Before that it so happened that in 1969 I was a member of the council which, between August and October 1969, ran Catholic Derry — behind barricades to keep out the British Army. When the people now in John Hume's SDLP moved that we remove the barricades and let the British Army in peacefully, the local leaders of the left backed the motion — they felt we were in a complete impasse — and I moved the defeated motion of opposition to letting the British Army take over "Free Derry". My amendment rejected the right of the committee to liquidate "Free Derry", and proposed that the issue be put to a mass meeting of the people who lived there.

Later, it so happened that the Workers' Fight group was the only British left group to have its headquarters raided by armed police in connection with Ireland — in September 1973. (The WRP "college" was raided by police in 1975, after a member had complained about ill-treatment there).

BRANDED

But still, we, and me in particular, were branded as supporters of the British Army in Northern Ireland in 1969. Therefore we had a direct responsibility for what the British state was doing in Northern Ireland in the '70s! Or so the WRP said.

Everyone knows that the Healy WRP were liars. But so is the IS/SWP. In the mid-70's SWPer David Widgery edited a Penguin book on the left in Britain consisting almost entirely of old IS/SWP articles. In it he defined WF as a group which "proposed the repartition of Ireland". It was a lie. [...]

Or take this more recent example: during the Walton by-election an article in *Socialist Organiser* rejected Militant's claim to be the political heirs of the recently dead Walton MP, Eric Heffer.

"Rivers of blood" separated Heffer, the consistent anti-Stalinist, from Militant, wrote Anne Field. Militant "regards the now-collapsing Stalinist states as workers' states and even supported the Soviet Union's bloody occupation of Afghanistan" (Emphasis added; and there are examples other than Afghanistan of Militant's enthusiasm for Stalinism, though none so terrible).

At least two publications have denounced *Socialist Organiser* for equating adherence to the theory that Stalinist states

are "degenerated and deformed workers' states" per se, with sharing responsibility for the Stalinist "rivers of blood"!

A broadsheet by the "Revolutionary Internationalist League" (RIL), given out at Labour Party conference, put the anti-*Socialist Organiser* canard like this: *Socialist Organiser* said "rivers of blood" lay between Eric Heffer and Militant because "they regard the East European states as deformed workers' states". Full stop! That would indeed be strange — and indeed very cur-like — since we ourselves were "workers' statist" when we took the opposite view to that of Militant on Russia's "Vietnam War" in Afghanistan!

RIL is on the extreme idiocy wing of kitsch Trotskyism (the same publication called on the — mainly Kinnockite — conference delegates to "disrupt" conference and force a way in for Nellist and Fields, the two expelled Militant-supporting Labour MPs!)

That lie seems to have originated in the *Workers' Press*, published by one of the saner splinters from Gerry Healy's WRP. There the sentence from Anne Field appeared in full quotes, but with a full stop after "workers' states" and the example of Militant's line on the invasion of Afghanistan simply lopped off, with no indication of a cut.

POLEMICS

The author of the Workers' Press effort was a certain Charlie Pottins, who used to lend his name — and his status as a Jew and a member of the all-too-tolerant Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) — to some of the foulest anti-Socialist Organiser polemics produced against us by the Healy WRP.

Themselves subsidised by Arab governments — Iraq, Libya — and paid by them to spy on Arab dissidents and prominent Jews here, they used to have crazy articles accusing us of being in a "Zionist conspiracy" with Reagan and Thatcher!

(The episode, in passing, demonstrates with wonderful irony the advantages of principled Leninist politics over everything else on the left. The JSG is a rather strange and loose political group, organised round an ill-defined Jewishness rather than precise political ideas. Here, their apolitical solidarity with Pottins meant that they allowed themselves to be used as camouflage for Healy's WRP, who were the paid agents of various Arab governments, agents whose brief included the task of spying on prominent Jews in Britain. A blinkered apolitical self-definition as "Jewish" led these Jewish socialists into an unwanted — but, for the Healyites, very useful — association with mercenary anti-Semites who were nothing less than potential pogromists. The JSG may not recognise Leninist politics, but Leninist politics recognises the JSG!)

Workers' Press is sectarian and disoriented, but it has made strenuous efforts in the last 6 years to slough off the lying practices of Healy. So why this misrepresentation of *Socialist Organiser*? What purpose is served? [...]

[This situation] presupposes a world of closed groups, the "Trotskyist" archipelago, with little dialogue or exchange of information between the inhabitants of the different atolls, and little desire or demand for it — a demand, on the contrary, for myths and lies and the sustaining half-truth and a keen eagerness to believe stories that the people of the neighbouring island go around with their heads under their arms because their ears are three feet long. It testifies to a political world way below the standards of truth and objectivity of even the serious bourgeois newspapers. It presupposes a mental world where people don't want to know, or — and this is the point, I think — cannot afford to let themselves know if they are to sustain their commitment and their conviction. They cannot afford to let themselves think.

It is a world in which the citizens have lost the battle on the ideological front against bourgeois society, and have retreated into private political worlds of their own, hidden behind protective barriers of myths, lies and special pleading to protect them from the often painful choices of the real world.

A healthy revolutionary socialist movement would engage critically and creatively with that real world, going out to take on the ideological battle rather than sheltering behind lies, myths, and demonisation of those who refuse to hide as they hide, in other words, who refuse to put their own political eyes out.

- Report of LU SP meeting: bit.ly/lu-sp-report.
- Polemic following this article in 1991: bit.ly/rivers2

Firefighters to strike

By Darren Bedford

Firefighters in England and Wales will strike on Wednesday 25 September after governments in Westminster and Cardiff refused to budge in the pensions dispute with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

The FBU does not accept the proposed pension scheme that may see firefighters forced out of the job early or forced to work to 60, putting public safety at risk.

Firefighters voted by nearly four-to-one in the ballot over the summer. Although some progress has been made in Scotland, which means strikes will not take place there next week, the lack of movement at Westminster meant

action had to be called. The strike on Wednesday lasts four hours from 12 noon to 4pm.

The FBU issued a statement stating it had “no option” but to call periods of strike action in England and Wales. Last week, a motion to the executive from the London region noted that “the apparent lack of progress and reluctance to set strike dates, is causing frustration, and some degree of disorientation, among our members”. It demanded that the executive not to agree to any extensions to the legal time limit for taking strike action unless either significant progress had been made in negotiations or proposals had been received which it is prepared to recommend to all FBU

members for acceptance.

A London FBU statement said: “Enough is enough. We have negotiated for over two years. We have talked until we are blue in the face. We have tested our members’ patience to breaking point (and probably far beyond). There is no indication at all of any real progress in recent negotiations; no sign that the government is truly interested

in offering further concessions. So the message from the London region to the national union is clear: Something needs to happen now.”

The FBU nationally says that revised proposals from the Scottish government mean industrial action will not proceed in Scotland at this time, while consultation with members there takes place. No agreement

has yet been reached in Scotland.

London FBU has been critical of this decision, which it says is “divisive, damaging and ultimately wrong for a campaign”. Instead, it argued that “only proposals that have the support of all three administrations will, if worthy, be put to FBU members for consultation”.

The London region is right that strike action is necessary now, to test the resolve of the government and to make it clear firefighters will not accept a botched pension scheme.

However a well-thought through strategy is needed to ensure firefighters don’t end up with a shoddy deal once the action has taken place.

Hovis pickets stay strong

By Darren Bedford

Police have attempted to break up picket lines at the Hovis factory in Wigan where workers are striking against the use of zero-hour contracts.

Three people were arrested in the early hours of 16 September, and one activist was thrown into the road on her back as police used force to clear a blockade of the road leading in the factory.

According to the *Union News* website, “two people were arrested on suspicion of obstructing the highway while a third was arrested for a public order offence. One of the three is a local Unite organiser.”

The police called the

early-morning picket “quite a sizeable demonstration”, numbering almost 100 people. A Facebook video shows the picket obstructing a goods lorry so that it took 40 minutes to travel just 500 metres, under police escort.

The continuing strike was bolstered by a city-centre demonstration in Wigan on Saturday 14 September.

The strike’s first demand (that Premier Foods, which owns the factory, stop using zero-hours contracts directly) has already been met, but workers are fighting on to win their second demand — an end to agency labour in the factory.

Strike vote in Lambeth libraries

Unison members working in libraries in Lambeth, south London, have voted unanimously to strike against proposed cuts to jobs and services.

The consultative ballot, which had a 73% turnout, was called in response to proposals from Lambeth Council to cut library services to the lowest levels in London. Unison can now move to a formal ballot.

Teachers’ campaign needs rank-and-file strategy

By Martin Thomas

From the “Rally for Education” called by NUT and NASUWT on 14 September in London, I conclude that to combat Gove and the government, we will also have to organise at rank-and-file level, and challenge the leaders of our unions.

We will have to challenge the supposedly left-wing leaders of the National Union of Teachers as well as the openly professionalist NASUWT leadership.

The rally was supposed to be the first step in a renewed campaign about pay, pensions, and quality of education.

The next step is strikes in some regions on 1 October and others on 17 October. I know that from socialist leaflets distributed at the door of the rally. I can confirm it on the NUT website, though that website leaves me puzzled on why Wales has been deleted from the list of strike areas published earlier.

If I relied on the speeches at the rally, or on the official union leaflets about “what next” placed on the chairs at the rally, or any other official union posters or placards there, I still

Teachers need to organise independently of union leaders

wouldn’t know about the strikes at all.

I left the rally at 12:15 for another meeting. The rally was due to close at 12:30. Up to 12:15, no speaker from the platform — not NUT exec member Alex Kenny, introducing the rally; not Patrick Roach, deputy general secretary of the NASUWT — had even hinted at the strikes.

In effect, “the dispute” is being narrowed down to an appeal to Gove to negotiate with the unions, with very few specifics about what the unions will ask for in, or hope to get from, the negotiations.

The necessary groundwork for any effective ac-

Tube cleaners to boycott biometrics

By Jonny West

Tube workers have returned a 98% vote in favour of industrial action against the introduction of biometric fingerprinting in their workplaces.

Cleaners employed by ISS are now expected to sign in and out of work using biometric thumbprint machines. Their union, RMT, has called the introduction of the machines “a draconian attack on civil liberties”. Tube bosses and cleaning contractors have a history of colluding to use cleaners’ often precarious immigration statuses to intimidate workers and undermine union organisation; there are fears that the introduction of biometric booking on will increase their ability to do so.

The action, a boycott of the machines, will begin on Thursday 19 September.

ISS cleaners on East Coast Mainline also struck on Monday 16 September to win living wages. The RMT said: “ISS Ltd. is loaded with cash. Even after deducting for its liabilities, it had total assets of over £129 million. The directors also continue to be highly rewarded.

“As a group they received £2.265 million in remuneration, up from £2.115 million the year before — a rise of over 7%. And the highest paid director alone received £620,000.”

More industrial news online

• Cleaners’ strike in Britain’s richest borough bit.ly/kenchel-cleaners

• Unison ballots for Higher Education pay strikes bit.ly/unison-he-ballot

• Abridged from bit.ly/nut-rally

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Defend unions' say in politics

By Liam McNulty

Activists meeting on 16 September have decided to launch a broad "Defend the [union] Link" campaign, based on a statement issued in July which has already got wide support.

Keith Ewing will be the president of the new campaign, Mark Seddon will be chair, and Jon Lansman and Marsha-Jane Thompson will be joint secretaries. They are confident of winning the official support of at least some unions.

The campaign will be out and about as delegates will assemble on 21-22 September in Brighton for the Labour Party Conference 2013, in the shadow of Ed Miliband's proposal to count out trade unionists who do not individually "opt in" to pay the political levy to Labour.

Former Labour general secretary Ray Collins was asked by Miliband to carry out a review on the Labour-union link, and into a "primary" (with non-members participating) for the selection of Labour's London mayoral candidate.

Collins conducted an "interim review" over the summer. It is possible that he will provide an interim report to the Sunday (22 Sep) session of conference. Probably it will be a token affair. We hope so: we do not want a repeat of 2011, when a huge package of rule changes, entitled Refounding Labour, was bounced through conference with scarcely a chance even to read them and no speakers taken against them.

As we understand it, the Labour leadership then plans a "consultation process" culminating in a special conference, probably 1 March 2014. From past experience, the leadership will be hoping for a fix, in which

Collins produces a report rubber-stamped by the National Executive Committee and then bounced through the special conference.

Yet we know that some even within the Miliband camp have misgivings about the danger of damaging the union link on which Labour depends, and most of the affiliated unions do not like Miliband's plan at all. A vigorous campaign across the movement can force the leadership to back down.

Delegates for the spring conference will probably be the same as for the 2013 annual conference. The Defend the Link Campaign will organise to convince delegates and unions of the need to preserve the collective affiliation and voting power of the unions at its current level.

We should also resist any move by the Labour Party to try to force its affiliated unions to change their own rulebooks.

POLICY MAKING

The opportunity for real decision-making by conference has been heavily curtailed since the changes imposed by Tony Blair in 1997.

Most policy is now just "announced" by the party leadership, with a desultory sham of consultation through policy commissions and the National Policy Forum.

Nevertheless, annual conference will debate some contemporary motions and rule changes to the party constitution.

The NHS Liaison Network is promoting a motion re-affirming last year's unanimously-agreed policy, committing Labour to the repeal of the Health and Social Care Act, the cancellation of PFI debts and a reversal of cuts and mar-



Ray Collins

ketisation. On the Sunday morning of conference, Save Lewisham Hospital and other NHS campaigners will be outside the conference centre on the demonstration organised by Brighton People's Assembly and Brighton Benefits campaign.

Rule-changes were submitted last year by a total of 21 CLPs. There is a one-year delay on rule changes from CLPs, though not the NEC. But five of the proposals have been ruled out of order by the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC), without grounds or on flimsy pretexts.

This year, for the first time in ages, there has been a strong campaign to elect

democrats to the CAC: Katy Clark MP and Pete Willsman from the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD).

One rule-change, submitted by the train drivers' union ASLEF, proposing to crack down on the hugely-funded Blairite organisation, Progress, has been withdrawn under pressure from the party leadership, and apparently without ASLEF wringing any concessions in return.

Of the two remaining rule-changes one, from Northampton Borough Labour Party, seeks to end open-ended suspensions of party members by reducing the period of suspension pending investigation to a year. The other, from Leyton and Wanstead CLP and Redcar CLP, would allow local Labour parties to elect their group leaders on councils through an electoral college, rather than leaving the decision in the hands of a small group of councillors. Delegates should support both.

Miliband cannot be allowed to come out of this conference without visible discontent from party members and trade unionists over his threats to the collective affiliation of the unions.

• bit.ly/d-t-l

Syria: bombing averted, prospects still grim

By Stephen Wood

Plans by the USA to bomb Assad's military bases have been stalled by the "Framework for the Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons".

This agreement between the US and Russia demands Assad hand over his chemical weapons and allow for the handover to be verified by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). This would be a condition for Syria joining the Chemical Weapons Convention and removing its stocks of chemical weapons much faster than other signatories to the agreement — including the USA and Russia!

As socialists, we are glad of the reprieve from bombing. Military experts had said that a short spate of bombing would achieve little; more sustained bombing would bring "mission creep". We detest Assad, but the victory of the militarily dominant groups in the opposition would bring nothing better.

The UK, US and France say they want a UN resolution under chapter VII of the UN Charter which would allow UN cover for military action against the Syrian regime should the "Framework" fail. The US says it is still prepared to bomb without UN agreement if it sees fit.

But for Russia and Syria the deal has obvious advantages. Russia can continue to back the regime and provide weapons, and increases its diplomatic prestige. Assad can continue his war, only with fewer or more discreet chemical weapons, and avoid US bombing.

Tellingly Syrian Government reconciliation minister Ali Haidar thanked his "Russian friends" for helping achieve a "victory for Syria".

It may well be, though, that despite the official statements Obama is relieved that he has been "forced" not to bomb: there were no clear gains, even from a US point of view, which he could expect from a bombing raid.

FSA

The opposition Free Syrian Army has condemned the deal as allowing Assad to get away with further massacres.

Even if chemical weapons are removed, the Syrian state will still attack its own people. The FSA has called for further supply of arms and more direct political support for overthrowing the Assad regime.

Increasingly, however, the militias on the ground are quite distinct from the FSA.

Military consultants IHS Jane's have released estimates of the makeup of the estimated 100,000 fighters of the Syrian opposition. They count 35,000 "hard-line Islamists" and 30,000 "moderate Islamists".

There are 10,000 "jihadists", many of them foreign fighters linked to salafist groups. The remaining 25,000 are listed as nationalist and secular groups.

Progress in Syria depends on the emergence of a democratic and working-class Third Camp opposed both to Assad and to the sectarian militias.

LABOUR — STOP SUPPORTING TORY POLICIES

Labour Party Conference demonstration

- Oppose austerity
- Support real paid employment
- End corporate welfare
- Tax the rich to fund decent benefits

Sunday 22 September. The Level, Brighton, 10.30 am

UN chemical weapons inspectors