

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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www.workersliberty.org

For a workers' government

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conference**
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so far**
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MILIBAND SAYS: "BREAK UP THE BANKS." WE SAY:

Seize the banks!

Reclaim

our wealth!

**Labour leader Ed
Miliband
has pledged to
"break up" banks
and separate
their retail and
investment arms.
TUC congress
backed the call
from FBU General
Secretary Matt
Wrack (bottom) to
nationalise the
banks.**

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Teachers push for escalation

By Pat Murphy, Leeds NUT

On 3 October the National Union of Teachers begins its "non-strike" industrial action, a sort of work-to-rule, jointly with the other large teachers' union, NASUWT.

The NUT postponed the start from 26 September, apparently because of some question about whether the legally-due seven days' notice had been received by all employers.

The rank-and-file local associations network LANAC met on 29 September in Leeds to take stock.

Almost all delegates agreed that teachers are already winning limited but

important victories by demanding head teachers comply with the work-to-rule. Union members are organising better in many schools.

LANAC will be producing newsletters and e-circulars, and we agreed those will promote the escalation of the current action to strikes. This will be espe-

cially needed where managers deduct pay, impose disciplinary sanctions, or just ignore requests to cut back managerial lesson observations, for example.

According to official union strategy, the non-strike action is about the whole range of issues, from workload through pay and pensions to cuts, and is to

demand that education minister Michael Gove negotiate and concede on all those issues. The theory is that if he doesn't, then at some point the unions move to strike.

LANAC delegates were much less confident about that working out, and especially about actually getting new strikes over pensions.

The meeting had 25 delegates from 23 union branches. The network will call a further LANAC conference on 8 December.

It defeated proposal from SWP members to postpone the conference until 2013 on the grounds that a conference has been called by Campaign Teacher for 24 November.

• www.nutlan.org.uk

Education bloc at O20

The University of London (ULU) has organised an "education bloc" on the TUC's 20 October demonstration.

ULU Vice President Daniel Cooper said, "The government's austerity agenda affects us all. The attacks on education form part of the wider assault on public services.

"Many students now work part-time or are destined for a precarious job

market. On 20 October we will be marching together with the organised labour movement to send a message of defiance and opposition to the Coalition."

The call is backed by several Unison and University and College Union (UCU) branches, as well as ULU's constituent member unions.

• For more information see tinyurl.com/o20edbloc

Fight for sites!

To mark the one-year anniversary of the eviction at Dale Farm, Essex, the Traveller's Support Network are organising an action against the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Friday 19 October, 1pm at Victoria Station

Eric Pickles' Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funded the Dale Farm eviction to the tune of £1.2 million. They are also leading the wholesale attack on Gypsy and Traveller rights, abolishing local government targets for the provision of sites and strengthening powers to evict through the Localism Act.

It's time to fight back! Join this mass action to evict DCLG - the eviction to end all evictions!

QCH workers win after eight weeks

By Martin Thomas

On Tuesday 2 October the workers at the Queensland Children's Hospital site in Brisbane returned to work victorious after being stopping work on a community protest since 6 August.

The main contractor, Abigroup, has conceded the workers' two central demands. The existing non-union enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) will be cancelled and replaced by a union EBA. And the new EBA will contain a subcontractors' clause ensuring the rate for the job for every worker on the site whatever subcontractor employs them.

The outstanding problem from the workers' point of

which kept them on the community protest for almost two months

• Strong organisation. Early on union officials received court orders to stay away from the site, which they obeyed. The workers invited in Bob Carnegie, a former Builders Labourers Federation organiser, to help lead the dispute. Bob defied court orders to stay away from the site, and helped ensure that there were regular democratic mass meetings; that the workers and their supporters were kept informed, both through the meetings and through leaflets; and that other workers were drawn into the leadership of the action.

• Solidarity. Maintaining the dispute required a major effort of collecting

cash and supermarket vouchers from supporters to help hardship cases among the workers. Some socialists, including the Socialist Alternative group, did good work helping on this. Messages of support to the dispute from overseas, and the organisation of a protest in support of the workers at the London office of Lend Lease (Abigroup's parent company) also helped.

Other sites stopped work in solidarity with the dispute — early on, the major Grocon site in Brisbane, and later on Baulderstone sites across Australia. (Baulderstone is another subsidiary of Lend Lease).

• www.workersliberty.org/qch

Labour simmers in Manchester

By Colin Foster

In the first three days of Labour Party conference (30 Sep/ 4 Oct, in Manchester), delegates have three times voted down the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) report.

Each time the chair, Michael Cashman, has bulldozed on, declaring the report accepted and ignoring calls for a card vote.

Delegates had a struggle to get the composite on the NHS onto conference floor, and avoid it being gutted. Many other proposals were manipulated off the agenda.

Two rank-and-file rule-change proposals were rejected for debate after being held up for a year on the grounds that the National Executive had put its own rule-change to conference — with no notice — which was to do with roughly the same area of the rulebook, even though the Executive proposal did not contradict them.

At a “High Pay” fringe meeting TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady said that the brief she’d be given was to talk about how to inject morality into capitalism, and commented that was like putting compas-

sion into conservatism.

From the conference platform, though, caring capitalism and empathetic exploitation were the line. And Ed Balls declared he would maintain Tory pay curbs and not reverse Tory cuts.

Five Labour activists in Manchester spoke to Solidarity.

Christine Shawcroft is a long-standing member of Labour’s National Executive

I would hope that the leadership would adhere to conference policy on things like supporting council housing, and taking the railways back into public ownership. They need to stop accepting the premise of the Tories’ arguments that there has to be austerity and cuts.

I fear that the leadership will carry on talking about

“difficult decisions”, and saying they’ll make cuts too, just not as far and as fast as the Tories.

If we want to shift things before the 2015 election, selections and the composition of the Parliamentary Labour Party are vital.

Miliband is surrounded by Blairites. If he does want to fulfil the things he said during the leadership election, he’s surrounded by people who are undermining him.

We have got to try and stop Blairites from being selected as candidates. We’ve got to have people who are committed to a democratic, open party which carries out party policy, and makes the policy-making process more open and transparent.

Dominic Curran is an activist in Young Labour

Passing the Bridgend CLP proposal to allow conference to amend National Policy Forum documents passed is important.

We don’t want a return to the politics of the Blair years. We need the unions to put sufficient pressure on the leadership to make a break with that.

Getting the unions behind party reform has always been difficult, even with left union leaders. The issue should be raised at union

conferences, to get unions to support rule changes within the party.

Maria Exall is an activist in the Communication Workers’ Union and LGBT rep on the TUC General Council

Shifting the party in time for 2015 is both a question of structure and one of political will. We need to open things up to real discussions of big ideas.

There’s been a long-term trend of de-politicisation within the party and retreating from those big debates. Even after the surge in new members in 2010, you can see that trend reflected at this conference.

The Blairites did a good job of hollowing out the party and its structures. There’s a lot of cynicism, and it’ll take time for things to revive.

Pete Firmin is joint secretary of the Labour Representation Committee

There are struggles both inside and outside the party. Inside, the left and the unions need to go on the offensive to change the policies and the process by which the policies are made. Hopefully some of the things Len McCluskey has been saying will get carried through.

That has to be combined with involvement in local anti-cuts campaigns, industrial disputes, campaigns around the NHS. We have to get the party involved in that to show that there is an alternative to rolling over and accepting those things.

There have been some successes already. Ealing had a demonstration of nearly 5,000 against hospital closures. Labour councillors and local Labour MPs were out on that demonstration, as well as local party members.

In Hammersmith, the Labour MP Andy Slaughter has been leading the NHS campaign. That clearly has an effect.

Russell Cartwright is treasurer of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and a member of the Unite delegation

I hope there’ll be moves towards greater democracy in the party, with conference winning the right to amend National Policy Forum documents.

I fear that we’ll end up saying too little. At this stage through the Coalition’s government, we need to set out our stall more clearly.

We need to work with the unions and supportive CLPs to change the policies before the 2015 election. Unite’s new strategy is still in its early stages and will need sustained effort, not only up to the next election but under the next Labour government too.

Lamont pushes Scottish Labour rightwards

Scotland
By Dale Street



Poor old Mrs McDonald starved to death in a cash-strapped NHS hospital last week because your dad has a free bus pass and your daughter gets a free university education.

That was Scottish Labour Party leader Johann Lamont’s message to Scottish voters in a heavily trailed policy speech last week.

Like Scottish Labour’s policy on the 2014 referendum, there had been no prior discussion with the party membership or affiliated unions about this “new” policy initiative.

Lamont argued:

“The idea that Scotland is a land where everything is free is a lie. Someone always pays for it in the end ... Scotland cannot be the only something-for-nothing country in the world.”

In fact, most people in Scotland would probably agree that children should be able to get a free education without having to clean chimneys to pay for it.

In a throwback to the Blairite tradition of equating “real” leadership with making unpopular decisions, Lamont boasted of

her readiness to make the supposedly necessary tough decisions.

And like a parrot on George Osborne’s shoulder Lamont endorsed the Tories’ claims that cuts have to be made because there simply isn’t enough money to go round:

“There is, and there is going to be, less money around. We are in a new age with less money and more demands. We need to say... what we can realistically afford. (We are) in a time of scarce resources.”

In fact, there is plenty of money around. The problem is that it is “around” very unequally and more and more unequally, it is “around” in the wrong people’s pockets.

The rhetorical core of Lamont’s speech was that the SNP is ducking out of ad-

dressing “the big questions” by its single-minded focus on the 2014 referendum and pursuing populist policies which are either paid for by cuts elsewhere or simply unaffordable:

There is, Lamont said, nothing progressive about the SNP’s policies: “What is progressive about a chief executive on more than £100,000 a year not paying for his prescriptions while a pensioner needing care has their care help cut?”

But Lamont’s only specific commitment was to the creation of a “joint economic group” involving MPs, MSPs and academics which would deliver a “costed analysis of available policy options at this time of financial austerity.”

The sub-text of the speech is unmistakable. Lamont is attacking the

principle of “universality” (i.e. that benefits should not be means-tested).

But “universality” should be defended by socialists (and not just by socialists) because it guarantees the highest take-up of available benefits (i.e. not just welfare benefits). Means-testing is more costly (because it needs an army of administrators) and inefficient (because those most in need of them fall foul of the paperwork generated by means-testing). Moreover, once the principle of universality is ditched, where does one draw the line? Should tuition fees be paid for anyone with parents on an income of more than £100,000? Or £80,000? Or £60,000?

The politics of Lamont’s speech amount to a capitulation

to social inequality and the Tory political agenda. She does not even hint that what is needed is a redistribution of wealth. Nowhere does she advocate a labour movement fightback against the Con-Dem coalition.

And nowhere does she attack the nature of capitalism itself as the root cause of poverty, inequality and falling living standards in Scotland. Instead, “the fundamental problems (faced by) any Scottish finance minister” are due to the Tories cutting “too far and too fast”, the economic rise of China and India, and people living longer.

Labour activists and affiliated unions — especially Unite — need to challenge the “new” political agenda which Lamont is now unrolling.

Not just a set of boobs and a smile



“We are asking Dominic Mohan to drop the bare boobs from The Sun newspaper. We are asking very nicely...” So begins Lucy-Anne Holmes’ petition to the editor of the Sun newspaper.

The petition (41,000 signatories so far) has renewed debate on the Sun’s 40 year old “Page 3”. Though polite petitions are unlikely to persuade former showbiz hack Mohan, if the Sun were to get rid of Page 3, it would be a very good thing.

Some liberals and socialists will not want to back a call for censorship, nor line up with the prudish. They may argue this campaign is no substitute for systematic criticism of all the Sun’s reactionary content. Fair points, but not decisive.

Unlike others who have campaigned against Page 3 (Object), or Clare Short in 1986, Holmes is not calling for a government or press-regulator ban of Page 3. Bans are not the way to tackle depressingly ordinary sexism like Page 3, but this is not a ban.

This is an attempt to use the fact that News Corporation

have been on the back foot to open up a debate and persuade them to be plain reasonable. As Holmes says, “I just think that in 1970, a group of men, in a male-managed media, in a male-managed country, decided to put the naked breasts of young women in the newspaper, and in 2012, hopefully, we’re a different society.”

Realistically the Sun will only get rid of Page 3 if they thought there would be a short- or long-term boost for their circulation. But “realism” is never a reason to stop a debate.

So prudish then? In my eyes Page 3 is more sexist than sexual. Page 3 is a woman wearing just a pair of knickers, a smile, and a patronising captions. Page 3, like Miss World (still going apparently), is a throwback to the days when beautiful women were “dolly birds”, “sexy ladies” or a “nice bit of crumpet”. Page 3 depicts women as one-dimensional humans, reduced to a set of limited statistics. And you are not “36, 26, 36” you just don’t make the grade. It is this sexism that we need to do something about.

Page 3 is not as bad as the tabloid denigration of the miners’ strike, or the trashing of the Hillsborough victims, or hacking into a dead girl’s phone. But it’s not a competition. Someone wants to do something about Page 3 — good!

Before the miners’ strike, and before it was stopped by a campaign by Women Against Pit Closures, the official paper of the National Union of Mineworkers carried a Page 3 “feature”. It was, it was argued, a bit of harmless fun for hard working blokes. Women involved in the dispute rightly said

it demeaned women and by implication trashed the hard work, ideas and courage women contributed to the collective struggle against the Tories.

We should object to Page 3 in the Sun for similar reasons. We don’t think the Sun’s “journalism” is worth much, but it is a mass circulation newspaper, read by an estimated seven million people every day. The Sun has enormous cultural power; Page 3’s in-ye-face demeaning representation of women must have negative impact on how women are regarded in society.

The arguments used to defend Page 3 by Neil Wallis, former Sun hack and ex-executive editor of News of the World are telling. According to Wallis the three million working-class women who read the Sun have more important things to worry about than Page 3.

Like all tabloid hacks Wallis thinks he knows what the “man in the street” thinks. And the “woman in the street”? She thinks the same as “her man”? And of course she either has or wants a man? She is not allowed to be a feminist and she is certainly not allowed to care about politics!

Our answer to Wallis’ “Know your place love!” has to be a better world without sexism; a fight to stop mass circulation news publications printing crap can help us win it.

Despite the limitations of Holmes’ campaign and without wanting to ally with those who sign the petition because they want to ban all porn, socialists have to take her side.

AWL debates perspectives for the next year

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty gathers in London on 27-28 October for our yearly conference. One big task there is to assess where we and the labour movement are, and map out how to go forward.

Here, abridged, are three contributions to debate: excerpts from the main perspectives document put out for discussion by the National Committee, a criticism from Tom Unter-rainer, and a response from Martin Thomas.

1. AFTER THE LULL (NC)

The global capitalist crisis remains febrile, and new upheavals are therefore likely within the next year. We need to prepare ourselves.

In Britain we have had a relative lull in working-class struggle since 30 November 2011 and the quickly-following setbacks on public-sector pensions.

The labour movement generally, and AWL, have suffered from the lull. Our move to a weekly paper, from early 2011, boosted AWL membership, activity, and tempo. Those have levelled off since early 2012, though they remain on a clearly higher level than 2010.

We cannot at will change the level of militancy and confidence of the broad labour movement. In principle, a shrinkage of “broad” activity should for us, as revolutionary Marxists, simply mean that time and energy previously given to “broad” activity is shifted to the “narrower” activity of our own education, training, paper-selling, contact work, etc.

In practice the shift is not automatic. It requires conscious and deliberate effort. A central function of revolutionary Marxist leadership and of a revolutionary Marxist organisation is to provide that conscious and deliberate effort.

We cannot predict the form of the next upheavals. They will not necessarily be mass strike movements, or even mainly mass strike movements. We can make ourselves ready to intervene.

There were 1,388,000 worker-days of strikes in 2011, according to official figures, but only 207,000 in January-June 2012. (Other recent years: 2010, 365,000; 2009, 456,000; 2008, 759,000; 2007, 1,040,000).

Despite this decline in industrial combat, the Tories have sagged electorally in 2012 after doing relatively well in 2011.

The Labour lead (9%) is modest in the circumstances. The Labour lead does, however, give more weight to the cautious arguments that the answer to the Tories’ measures is to protest with the main hope of getting a Labour government

in 2015 and of that Labour government doing some good.

We seek dialogue with the workers who welcome 20 October as a move against the Tories and as yet have little confidence about proposing more radical policies or action. We patiently explain that an economy which will work for the working class requires expropriating the banks; public ownership and democratic and workers’ control of public services; and restoration of the NHS.

We urge both unions and local Labour Parties to demand such measures from the Labour leaders, and by doing so we both build a current in the labour movement able and willing to fight now and prepare the future.

2. ANTI-TORYISM (UNTERRAINER)

As it stands the perspectives document fails to clearly capture what seems to be the central problem of labour movement politics today. The problem, briefly stated, is this: within the labour movement — and the left of the movement in particular — there is a growing, vocal, but politically incoherent wave of anti-Toryism.

Opposition to cuts, austerity and neoliberalism (however understood) is combined with palpable class hatred against the government. At the same time, there is an expectation that a Labour government installed in 2015 will reverse the programme of the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition.

[But] all the signs and signals from the leadership of the party indicate that Labour will govern — as they did before 2010 — as neoliberals.

It is our duty to answer this question: how to organise the anti-Toryism within the labour movement into a coherent political force? Rather than committing ourselves over the next year to our own political consolidation — educational and organisational — alone, we should combine an orientation to the developing problems and dynamics of the labour movement with the task of building the AWL.

Unless we can construct political movements and organisations to challenge the state and governments at the national level then we have no hope of constructing a viable internationalism to address the deeper roots of capitalism. The current proposed perspectives document lacks the reasoned urgency required.

For people who are concerned with addressing the question of who will govern and how — i.e. not the SWP, SP and other sects who substitute themselves for the labour movement — the contradiction between the anti-Toryism of a thick

seam of workers and their electoral support for Labour and hopes for a Labour government is key.

Our urgent task should be not only to find a means of organising and grouping together this fragmented and currently incoherent constituency — which includes established activists from the Labour Party itself as well as the unions, a significant layer of newly radicalised youth etc. — but to organise them into a socialist force that recognises the roots of the crisis and the neoliberal continuation and addresses the likely path of the next Labour government.

In taking on this task, we face a number of problems: The first is how to overcome the apparent blind faith of many anti-Tories in a future Labour government.

We must honestly explain to ourselves and those around us that there will be no quick dash to victory. Our task is to organise the confrontations. Such work takes time and preparation.

3. POLITICAL MARKERS (THOMAS)

I think Tom’s criticism of the first draft on “crisis and perspectives” is essentially correct.

Our error in the first draft was to drift from recognising the setbacks so far on organising the left into tacitly accepting large-scale political relations in the labour movement as fixed, so there’s not much we can do in the way of campaigning for the political transformation of the labour movement.

The error was not one of snapshot assessment, nor one of inaccurate predictions. Political ferment in the labour movement is at a low level. On a cold estimate, it is quite likely to remain low. But our task is to advance big ideas about the labour movement transforming itself politically.

Administrative actions will follow from the big ideas. But our first focus should be on the big ideas, not on the administrative nuts and bolts.

I think Tom’s argument about people having high expectations from a Labour government is probably wrong factually and a digression rather than central to the issues here. Lots of people want to see the coalition ousted, accept a Labour government is the alternative, and either think that it will at least not be as bad as Cameron, or choose not to think that far ahead.

The fact of them having low expectations (or choosing not to think that far ahead) makes it more, not less, important that we argue for rallying the left to put down political markers for the next Labour government.

Seize the banks! Reclaim our wealth!

As Martin Wolf, chief economics writer of the big-business *Financial Times*, has noted: “banks, as presently constituted and managed, cannot be trusted to perform any publicly important function”.

He wrote that after it came out that big banks have been systematically fiddling the Libor rate, a reference interest rate used as a benchmark for trillions in financial transactions across the world.

The banks perform many publicly important functions. They control the bulk of the fluid, mobile wealth in society. They stand at the crossroads where investment decisions are made. They are at the middle of the mechanism where investment funds are allocated in order to boost the profits of a few rather than the well-being of the many.

The control of investment funds by the banks makes it apparently not “realistic” to invest in health, education, welfare, and other public services, but very “realistic” to invest the £38 billion currently being put by property developers into building new luxury housing in London at an average of £2.5 million a dwelling.

Banks are also a vast engine of inequality.

After being bailed out by the taxpayer in 2008, banks are set to make about £35 billion profits *this year*. That is a sum comparable to the total cuts planned by the coalition government in education and welfare for *five years*.

Despite a few high-profile bankers like Stephen Hester of RBS being shamed into not taking bonuses, the banks and other financial firms paid out £13 billion in bonuses in 2011-2. That £13 billion, plus £7 billion from the huge salaries paid to top bankers, would be enough *from one year* to cover all the £20 billion cuts the coalition has planned to the NHS *over five years*.

To organise investment for social benefit; to redress inequality; to give any reforming government the means it needs to fend off the pressure of global financial markets - there is no alternative but to expropriate the banks and high finance.

They should be converted into a public banking, mortgage, and pension service, under public ownership and democratic and workers’ control.

The good thing about Ed Miliband’s speech on the banks on 30 September at the Labour Party conference in Manchester is that he raised the question of doing something about the banks. The bad thing is the limits of what he proposed.

If the banks do not ring-fence off their everyday retail functions from their investment banking (bigger, more complex operations in the markets of high finance), then, said Miliband, a Labour government will legislate to split them.

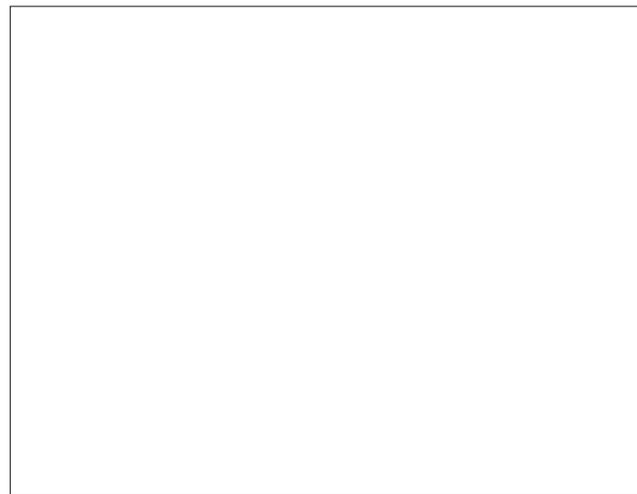
Miliband, or the “two nations”

In his speech to Labour conference on Tuesday 2 October, Labour Party leader Ed Miliband took up the “One Nation” idea of Benjamin Disraeli, a Tory prime minister of the 19th century.

In one sense this deserves the sneer from Scottish National Party politician Angus Robertson: “The extraordinary message in Ed Miliband’s speech is that Labour now amounts to nothing more than a party of one nation Toryism”.

“One Nation” was the catchcry of many Tories in the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand, the Disraeli who coined the phrase “the two nations” to describe class-divided England in 1844-5 was not quite the same Disraeli who became Tory prime minister in 1868.

In 1844-5 Disraeli was part of a group called Young England, radical enough to deserve a comment in the *Communist Manifesto* scorning it as “feudal socialism”. Disraeli had op-



The investor’s choice: luxury London housing

The separation of retail banks from investment banking was US law from 1933 to 1999. Experts differ on whether the repeal of the separation law in 1999 had anything to do with the 2008 crash. Lehman Brothers, the big bank that went bust and tipped the crisis into a crash, was a pure investment bank with no retail operation.

In any case, the Cameron government plans to push through separation by 2019. Miliband’s proposal was only to do what the Tories plan, but quicker. It is not an anti-capitalist move, but a technical adjustment within capitalism, the value of which experts debate.

The TUC congress at the start of December tackled the question more seriously, passing a motion from the Fire Brigades Union which called for comprehensive public ownership and control of the banks.

Yet none of the big unions put that idea into their motions for Labour Party conference. Unite put in a motion on investment and banking; but it didn’t include comprehensive public ownership.

What little reference to nationalisation it did have, Unite officials allowed to get lost in the compositing process, so the final text talked only about launching a British Investment Bank, an idea which even the coalition government favours.

To deal with capitalism, we have to make Labour fight; to make Labour fight, we have to make the unions fight; and to make the unions fight, we have to organise the rank and file.

posed the New Poor Laws — the welfare cuts which sparked the Chartist movement — and declared in Parliament: “however much he disapproved of the Charter, he sympathised with the Chartists”.

One of the earliest socialist writings of Frederick Engels was a review of a book by Thomas Carlyle, whose thinking was somewhat similar to Young England’s.

Engels wrote: “Carlyle recognises the inadequacy of competition, demand and supply, Mammonism, etc., and is far removed from asserting the absolute justification of landownership. So why has he not drawn the straightforward conclusion from all these assumptions and rejected the whole concept of property?”

“How does he think he will destroy competition, supply and demand, Mammonism, etc., as long as the root of all these things, private property, exists?”

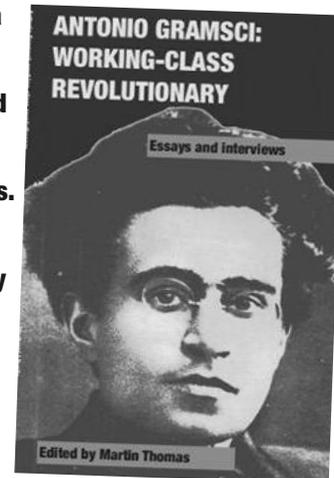
Maybe Ed Miliband should extend his reading.

ANTONIO GRAMSCI: WORKING-CLASS REVOLUTIONARY

Antonio Gramsci was a leader of the Italian Communist Party in its revolutionary days, and spent all his last years bar a few weeks in Mussolini’s fascist jails. *The Prison Notebooks* he wrote in jail have been quarried to justify many varieties of reformist or liberal politics.

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.

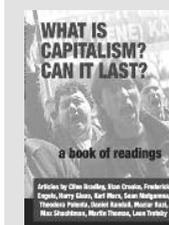
£4 from AWL, 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG. Order online at www.workersliberty.org/gramscibook.



Launch meeting for the book

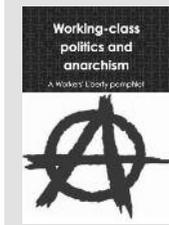
Speakers: Martin Thomas in discussion with Peter Thomas, author of *The Gramscian Moment*.
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General strike: neither ploy nor dream

By Chris Reynolds

There had been general strikes before 1905. The so-called Plug Riots of July-August 1842 were in fact a spontaneously-spreading general strike over large parts of England against wage cuts and for the ten-hour working day. The Belgian workers launched three general strikes, in 1891, 1893, and 1902, to widen voting rights.

But the mass strike movement which erupted in Russia in 1905 after ten years of strikes and agitation by a fresh and growing industrial working class, and after the defeat of Tsarism in its war with Japan, was something else again. It was a new starting point for all discussions of mass strikes and general strikes, and the basis for Rosa Luxemburg's classic pamphlet, *The Mass Strike*.

The 1905 movement started with strikes in January and February, at first in St Petersburg and then spreading.

Strikes rumbled through the summer, and then exploded into a general strike in October. On 13 October the strikers formed a representative coordinating committee in St Petersburg: the St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers Deputies. It

began to function as an alternative government. Leon Trotsky was a leading figure in it.

The general strike ended on 21 October, but agitation continued until 3 December, when the St. Petersburg Soviet was arrested en masse, and 10-15 December, when an armed workers' rising in Moscow was defeated. Ferment continued into 1906; only in hindsight did it become clear that the arrest of the St Petersburg Soviet and the defeat of the Moscow uprising had marked the ebb of the revolution.

Repression then escalated, under interior minister Pyotr Stolypin. Over 3000 people were arrested and put to death for political activity.

The workers' movement was driven back underground; but only for the moment. It began to rise again in 1912, and then exploded onto the scene in February 1917, eventually conquering political power in October 1917 and ruling for several years until it was stifled and suppressed by a new bureaucratic ruling class under Stalinism.

The Russian workers' movement of 1905 jolted workers' movements internationally; in the USA, for example, it prompted the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Rosa Luxemburg opened her pamphlet *The Mass Strike* by arguing that the Russian events had made previous debates between anarchists and Marxists over the general strike obsolete. Anarchists had argued for the general strike as the sovereign remedy for capitalism, and as the way for workers to bypass the travails of politics. One fine day, when the workers had become sufficiently rebellious, they would fold their arms; capitalism would collapse; and the new stateless and socialistic order would emerge of itself.

Luxemburg summarised the Marxist response: "either the proletariat as a whole are not yet in possession of the powerful organisation and financial resources required, in which case they cannot carry through the general strike; or they are already sufficiently well organised, in which case they do not need the general strike" (because they can move directly to take political power by political means).

But Russia was something new. In the first place: "The revolutionary struggle in Russia, in which mass strikes are the most important weapon, is, by the working people, and above all by the proletariat, conducted for those political rights and conditions whose necessity and importance in the struggle for the emancipation of the working-class Marx and

Laying the foundations of the united front

Our Movement

By Micheál MacEoin



Paul Levi (1883-1930) was one of the founders of the German Communist Party (KPD) and a powerful voice in the early Communist International.

Levi was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Hechingen, south-west Germany. In 1906 he joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and became part of its left wing along with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

During the First World War, Levi was conscripted. Discharged in 1916, he joined the Zimmerwald Left, headed by Lenin, which attempted to uphold revolutionary internationalism amidst the wreckage of the war and the treacherous capitulation of the Second International's leadership to social-patriotism.

Levi became a founding member of the Spartacist League, which soon became the KPD. Following the death of Luxemburg, Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches after the failure of the Spartacist Uprising in January 1918, Levi became the KPD leader, waging an immediate political struggle against the council communists who split in April 1920 to form the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD).

One of the first tests for the KPD came in March 1920 when a putsch was launched against the Weimar Republic by a right-wing general, Walther von Lüttwitz, and the fervent nationalist, Wolfgang Kapp.

During the so-called Kapp Putsch, KPD propaganda in Berlin declared that "the proletariat will not lift a finger for the democratic republic" and urged workers not to participate in the general strike call issued by Karl Legien, the Social Democratic trade union chief.

The KPD quickly corrected itself; but, at first, following a similar logic to the later theory of "social fascism", the KPD refused to intervene in what they saw as a battle between

two reactionary forces — the social democrats and the putschists. Levi, in prison at the time, denounced this position as "a crime" and argued vehemently for KPD intervention to raise the political level of the general strike.

Space had opened up for day-to-day co-operation between the various parties of the working-class. At a local level, many KPD cadres took to the streets to defend the Republic alongside members of the SPD and USPD.

Following the defeat of the putsch the trade union leader Karl Legien, previously a hidebound conservative, called for a "workers' government", meaning a coalition of the SPD, USPD, KPD, and trade unions. That this did not happen was due in part to the left-wing of the USPD not wanting to co-operate with the SPD, and to the weakness of the KPD which had marginalised itself by its initial hesitancy in the face of the strike call.

Levi's believed the KPD needed to find its way to the masses and anticipated the Communist International's strategy of the United Front. Following the expulsion of the ultra-left from the KPD, Levi set about winning over the rank and file of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) to Communism.

SUPPORTIVE

The USPD's leadership had sided with the counter-revolution but its rank and file comprised hundreds of thousands of workers who were supportive of the German Revolution and the young workers' state in Russia.

Levi's tactics proved their worth when, at the Halle Congress in October 1920, a motion to urging the USPD to join the Communist International was passed by 237 votes to 156, provoking a split which saw around 400,000 USPD members merge into a new united German Communist Party.

The new KPD soon ran into problems. Levi resigned his position in 1921 and came into sharp conflict with the new party leadership. Increasingly influenced by Bela Kun, and the "theory of the offensive" propagated by Zinoviev and Bukharin within the Communist International, the KPD launched an ill-fated armed uprising, known as the March Action, in 1921.

Levi, loyal to Luxemburg's theories of mass action, with an emphasis on the self-organisation and movement of the working-class, was furious and denounced the March Action in a pamphlet which accused the party of launching a "Bakuninist putsch". According to Clara Zetkin, Levi "firmly believed that [the leadership] had thoughtlessly put the existence of the party at risk, and frittered away that for which Karl, Rosa, Leo and so many others gave their lives. He had wept, literally wept with grief at the thought that the party was lost. He believed that its rescue was only possible by using the strongest means. He wrote his pamphlet in the mood of the legendary Roman who voluntarily plunged into the open abyss, there to sacrifice his life in order to save the fatherland. Paul Levi's intentions were of the purest, and the most unselfish."

Levi was expelled for breach of discipline. Lenin's view was that "Levi lost his head", and made his criticism in a "unilateral, exaggerated and even malicious fashion". Nevertheless, Levi's criticisms were substantially correct. This was confirmed when Lenin and Trotsky argued at the Third Congress of the Communist International in June-July 1921 for the need to turn away from the "theory of the offensive" and seek to convince the broad mass of workers of revolution through the method of the united front.

Lenin told Zetkin that "we must not lose Levi, both for ourselves and for the cause. We cannot afford to lose talented men; we must do what is possible to keep those that we have." Unfortunately, Levi was to be irrevocably lost to the Communist movement. In 1922 he published, against Luxemburg's wishes, her pamphlet on the Russian Revolution. Levi then drifted back into the left-wing of the SPD, via his own short-lived Communist Working Collective.

He died tragically in 1930 after sustaining injuries from falling out of a window and, during a minute's silence in the Reichstag, Nazi and KPD (by this time completely Stalinised) deputies ostentatiously left the chamber.

Levi was a revolutionary in the Rosa Luxemburg school. His leadership of the German Communist movement provided a necessary connection between the best elements of the revolutionary Second International and a new generation communists.

Engels first pointed out, and in opposition to anarchism fought for with all their might in the International" — that is, for the right to freedom of organisation, free elections, and parliamentary-type democracy.

Secondly: "the Russian Revolution teaches... above all that the mass strike is not artificially 'made', not 'decided' at random, not 'propagated', but that it is a historical phenomenon which, at a given moment, results from social conditions with historical inevitability". So "abstract speculations on the possibility or impossibility, the utility or the injuriousness of the mass strike" must be superseded by "objective investigation".

The mass strike emerged from the logic of the class struggle, not as a cunning final blow, but rather as part of the warp and woof of the struggle. It was not exclusively political; nor was it a substitute for political action — it was part of a development which showed a constant interaction between political and economic struggles of the working class, *both* economic struggles leading into political *and the converse*, political struggles leading into economic.

"The sudden general rising of the proletariat in January under the powerful impetus of the St. Petersburg events was outwardly a political act of the revolutionary declaration of war on absolutism. But this first general direct action reacted inwardly all the more powerfully as it for the first time awoke class feeling and class-consciousness in millions upon millions as if by an electric shock". It thus led to a rumbling, rambling spread of strikes on economic issues.

"The economic struggle was not really a decay, a dissipation of action, but merely a change of front, a sudden and natural alteration of the first a general engagement with absolutism, in a general reckoning with capital, which in keeping with its character assumed the form of individual, scattered wage struggles".

This was not a step back. "Only complete thoughtlessness could expect that absolutism could be destroyed at one blow by a single 'long-drawn' general strike after the anarchist plan.

"Absolutism in Russia must be overthrown by the proletariat. But in order to be able to overthrow it, the proletariat requires a high degree of political education, of class-consciousness and organisation.

"All these conditions cannot be fulfilled by pamphlets and leaflets, but only by the living political school, by the fight and in the fight, in the continuous course of the revolution" — which must include its molecular form of economic battles.

"There are not two different class struggles of the working class, an economic and a political one, but only one class struggle, which aims at one and the same time at the limitation of capitalist exploitation within bourgeois society, and at the abolition of exploitation together with bourgeois society itself.

Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919)

Striking workers march on 30 November. How can Rosa Luxemburg's work on the meaning of general strikes help us build mass strike action today?

"When these two sides of the class struggle are separated from one another for technical reasons in the parliamentary period, they do not form two parallel concurrent actions, but merely two phases, two stages of the struggle for emancipation of the working class".

Cautious trade-unionists saw the slow building-up of trade-union organisation as the necessary preliminary to any large struggle. "The attitude of many trade-union leaders to this question is generally summed up in the assertion: 'We are not yet strong enough to risk such a hazardous trial of strength as a mass strike'."

Luxemburg replied: "The rigid, mechanical-bureaucratic conception cannot conceive of the struggle save as the product of organisation at a certain stage of its strength. On the contrary, the living, dialectical explanation makes the organisation arise as a product of the struggle..."

In Russia "the apparently 'chaotic' strikes and the 'disorganised' revolutionary action after the January general strike are becoming the starting point of a feverish work of *organisation*... From the whirlwind and the storm, out of the fire and glow of the mass strike and the street fighting rise again, like Venus from the foam, *fresh, young, powerful, buoyant trade unions*".

EXPLOSIVE

In an explosive struggle, groups of workers whose position previously seemed hopeless stirred, and even came to the fore.

"Whole great categories of the proletariat have to be taken into account which, in the 'normal' course of things in Germany, cannot possibly take part in a peaceful economic struggle for the improvement of their condition and cannot possibly avail themselves of the right of combination".

From these observations Luxemburg developed primarily, for her day, an argument against the trade-union leaders of her day in Germany who, though members of the Social Democratic Party, argued that the trade unions must defend their autonomy and, in effect, have a veto on radical political agitation which might tip them into risky struggle.

The observations have relevance today too. They have relevance against those who would deprecate immediate battles and insist that the only way to beat the coalition government is a set-piece, all-unions-together battle in the future.

They have relevance against those who say that not much can be done in any industrial battle now, and we had best focus on unity to ensure that Labour wins a 2015 election.

Rosa Luxemburg's observation that the mass strike is an organic part of high class struggle, not a tactic planned and controlled from above, has often been interpreted as a doctrine of working-class revolution developing as a spontaneous industrial explosion, with little contribution from a revolutionary political party.

There is matter for debate about Luxemburg's understand-

ing of what a revolutionary socialist party can and must do; but she was a party activist all her political life, and a founder of the German Communist Party. *The Mass Strike* was also a plea against the subordination of the socialist political party to elemental, organic trade unionism.

That the mass strike could erupt in Russia as it had done, and intertwine with socialist and democratic agitation, she saw not as a fact of nature but as a product of years of work by socialists. "The modern large capitalist development of Russia and the intellectual influence of social democracy [i.e., in the terminology of the day, the revolutionary Marxist party] exerted for a decade-and-a-half, which has encouraged and directed the economic struggle, have accomplished an important piece of cultural work."

As Leon Trotsky explained: "Rosa herself never confined herself to the mere theory of spontaneity... [She] exerted herself to educate the revolutionary wing of the proletariat in advance and to bring it together organisationally as far as possible. In Poland [Luxemburg was Polish by origin, though mainly active in Germany] she built up a very rigid independent organization.

"The most that can be said is that in her historical-philosophical evaluation of the labour movement, the preparatory selection of the vanguard, in comparison with the mass actions that were to be expected, fell too short with Rosa; whereas Lenin — without consoling himself with the miracles of future actions — took the advanced workers and constantly and tirelessly welded them together into firm nuclei..."

In *The Mass Strike* Luxemburg explained: "To fix beforehand the cause and the moment from and in which the mass strikes in Germany will break out is not in the power of social democracy [the revolutionary Marxist party], because it is not in its power to bring about historical situations by resolutions at party congresses.

"But what it can and must do is to make clear the political tendencies, when they once appear, and to formulate them as resolute and consistent tactics. Man cannot keep historical events in check while making recipes for them, but he can see in advance their apparent calculable consequences and arrange his mode of action accordingly".

She emphasised that when battle got under way, "the task of social democracy will then be to regulate its tactics, not by the most backward phases of development but by the most advanced".

What are the lessons from Luxemburg's discussion for today? To reject agitation for a general strike which makes it appear as a clever cure-all to escape the difficulties of current battles.

But equally, to watch out for the potential explosiveness of class struggle which can make immediate what previously seemed far-distant; not to let our thought be flattened by dispirited acceptance of the accomplished facts.

Bloody dilemmas in Syria

By Levent Toprak

Unless an independent and powerful initiative of Syrian toilers develops we are faced with a great danger of devastation in Syria which will last many years even if the Ba'th regime is overthrown.

The general picture gives the impression that the course of events has arrived at the gates of a Lebanon-like bloody civil war and chaos that will last many years.

The revolt started in March 2011 and reached a climax at the end of summer, and after that point we have seen a general decline though with fluctuations. There was another peak in the beginning of 2012 in mass demonstrations but that did not last long.

The relatively capable Syrian state apparatus surely played a role in this, but there is substantial section of people that support the regime in fear of Islamist rule.

Alawites, Christians, Druzes, Armenians and also many moderate Sunni Muslims side with the regime for fear of an oppressive Islamist regime. Islamists come increasingly to the fore among the rebel forces and use a religious rhetoric of hatred.

In the first period of the revolt slogans that stressed the unity and fraternity of Syrian people against the regime were on the forefront, but now divisive slogans tend to prevail. Those who put forward these slogans describe the struggle as "jihad against infidels", and can target Alawism, for instance.

DEMOCRATIC

Thus the revolt that started with mass demonstrations with a democratic content gained a new course where military struggle quickly dominated as a result of both the heavy repression of the regime and the pressure of the Islamist forces and foreign powers.

And this led, on the one hand, to the mass movement experiencing a serious retreat, and, on the other hand, passing to a passive position to watch the military conflict. This acted as a harmful factor for the democratic content of the revolt against the repressive and reactionary Ba'th regime.

That we make this warning surely does not at all mean that the present Ba'th regime is the lesser evil or that it must be supported. Nor is it a call for sympathy for it.

We know that there is such a mood on a rather wide section of the left, although it is not overtly stated. One should not fall into this trap. The correct attitude is to defend an independent line of struggle against both reactionary Ba'th regime and other reactionary bourgeois forces that may replace it. There can be no favour for the toiling masses from either the Ba'th regime or the bourgeois forces that have been fostered by imperialists and other reactionary powers of the region.

Western imperialists and Israel are concerned about the fact that the struggle against Ba'th regime in Syria shows

symptoms of degeneration along radical Islamist lines and that the Ba'th regime proved stronger than expected. Clinton's recent visit to Turkey should be considered mainly in this context.

The increasing influence of Islamist militants and that they are not fully under control, as it appears, is a source of problems for the imperialists.

The statements of Clinton in her visit to Turkey clearly show the goal of increasing the control over local and scattered forces. There was also the message that they would set out to work to increase the possibilities of more direct intervention. "There has always been coordination between us [Turkey and the USA] since the beginning of the conflict. But now we have to go into the details of operational planning. Our intelligence services and armies have great responsibility and to accomplish that we started a study group", says Clinton.

CRITICAL

Turkey plays a critical role in all this process. Portraying itself as the protector of the Syrian people, Turkey plays on one hand the role of a merciful country embracing the refugees, and on the other hand provides all-round support for the armed rebel forces together with the USA, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The AKP government has embarked on a risky gamble about Syria and apparently it is anxious to play it through. Turkey has now become a sub-imperialist country and has ambitions to become a regional power.

Turkey tried to achieve this goal through economic, commercial and diplomatic means and also utilising its position in the Western camp (NATO and OECD membership, EU candidate membership etc.) until the start of the revolt of the Arab peoples, which caught Turkey quite unprepared.

They were busy developing close relationships and common interests with the existing regimes when the mass revolt erupted against these regimes. In Libya this led Turkish diplomacy to scandalous zigzags. First it came against imperialist intervention, but then made a complete turn to take part in the intervention when it became clear that Qaddafi's overthrow was imminent, in order to limit the damage and get part of the loot.

When the wave of revolt reached Syria, the Turkish ruling class made the zigzag much more quickly, also because of the danger of the revolt spreading over to Turkey through the Kurdish question.

AKP has been put into trouble by the fact that Assad's overthrow proved not to be as easy as it was thought in the beginning and that the Kurdish movement has gained new positions in Syria. Another risk that appeared is that the hostile position it puts itself in relation to Syria, Iran, and Russia may cause operations of these countries to destabilise Turkey.

On the other hand AKP has not been yet able to create a sufficient level of justification for a military intervention against Syria, which is a positive factor in relation to the possibilities of mounting an anti-war movement.

Turkey and the USA are in close collaboration to raise the issue of refugees on international level in order to lay the ground for a buffer zone. There is a special effort to raise the number of refugees above 100,000. They will use this as a psychological limit and then push for a buffer zone within Syrian territory on the pretext of "I cannot host this amount of people in my country".

On the other hand the refugees who are settled in the provinces in the southern border of Turkey are becoming also an internal problem.

While it is clear that the Ba'th regime in Syria has little chance to survive in the long term, it is unclear what will happen in the short term. The conflict gradually tends to turn from being one between simply the state and the people to a conflict among various ethnic, religious and sectarian groups.

KURDISH

Also the Kurdish movement, although it does not side with the Ba'th regime in the conflict, does not take part in the ranks of the rebel side. Moreover, it considers the rebel forces a serious threat.

There are more than 100 different groups waging armed struggle under FSA umbrella, acting largely autonomously and with very loose links among them. It is quite possible that a period of chaos will be opened, where these warring groups and radical Islamist militants will be riding up and down the country.

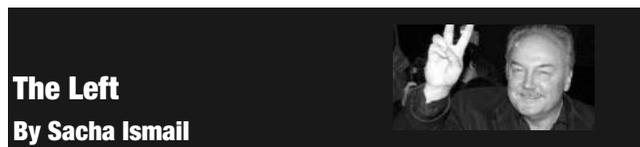
Therefore in the context of Syria there has to be a clear attitude against both the reactionary Ba'th regime and equally reactionary elements among the opposition groups, and an effort to create a structure that will satisfy the democratic and social aspirations of Syrian toilers has to be made. This structure must absolutely satisfy the righteous, legitimate, democratic demands of ethnic and religious minorities living in Syria.

This approach must also include the question of borders. It cannot be the business of Marxists to sanctify the borders drawn a hundred years ago by the will of imperialists which in many cases do not fit with the real living peoples. From the standpoint of revolutionary struggle, borders can only be considered legitimate insofar as they are drawn by the democratic will of peoples.

Therefore, for instance, should the Kurdish people in Syria demand self-determination and their own state, nobody has the right to object to this on revolutionary grounds.

• This is an abridged version of an article from the Turkish socialist journal *Marksist Tutum*

Why George Galloway is suing the NUS



The Left

By Sacha Ismail

The debate in the student movement over the Assange affair and rape apology has taken a surreal turn, with George Galloway suing the National Union of Students.

The controversy has focused around a motion to the 26 September meeting of NUS National Executive, at which 13 women members moved a motion condemning apologies for non-consensual sex and saying NUS should not "offer" or "share" a platform with those who make such apologies — including Tony Benn and George Galloway, because of their comments in the Assange debate.

Pretty much the entire right and centre of the committee (and the broader movement) rallied to the motion, as did

much of the left, including independents in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

We do not currently have any members on NUS National Executive, but we have tried to use the controversy to educate ourselves and those around us about the issues raised. Following a lot of discussion, Workers' Liberty Students made clear that we disagreed with the "not sharing platforms" bit but were in solidarity with the motion's basic spirit.

The Stalinist sect Socialist Action, who have some foothold in the bureaucracy of NUS, naturally felt differently, since their basic stance is uncritical support for anyone in conflict with the US. They proposed a set of amendments which, while they criticised Galloway's comments, overwhelmed the original in "anti-imperialist" rhetoric and praise for these anti-war "leaders". They also strongly implied that the proposers of the motion were attempting to undermine NUS's "No Platform" policy — despite the fact that the motion did

not refer to No Platform as such, in the sense that this is used for fascists.

The SWP, whose recent coverage on Assange has in fact been pretty good, unfortunately but predictably decided to follow their allies in Socialist Action. Unsurprisingly, the motion was passed and the amendments defeated overwhelmingly, but only after some extremely vitriolic and unpleasant debate, in the real world and on the internet.

Now Socialist Action's ally Galloway is suing NUS for defamation. This is not a surprise to us, since over the years we have become familiar with his litigiousness and use of the law to silence opponents.

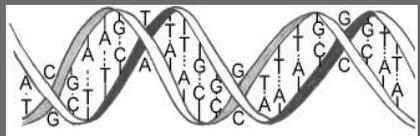
Hopefully the student left will draw some lasting political conclusions about Galloway, the "socialists" who defend him, and the politics they represent.

• For AWL Students' statement on the controversy, by Kate Harris and Esther Townsend, see www.workersliberty.org/nusrapedebate

AIDS: where have we got to?

Science

By Les Hearn



Just over 30 years ago, the disease soon to be called AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency disorder), but then termed GRID (gay-related immune deficiency), was first reported in the US. Sufferers predominantly came from the “four H’s”, homosexual men, heroin users, haemophiliacs and, curiously, Haitians.

Many had unusual infections, including a type of pneumonia, and a rare cancer (Kaposi’s sarcoma). Death rates were high, the cause being infections that the body was unable to fight, due to the loss of a vital component of the immune system, CD4+T lymphocytes or T helper cells.

Quite soon, it was found to be caused by infection with a virus, dubbed human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The virus was not itself directly harmful but caused the T-cell count to fall dangerously low, leaving the body susceptible to infections that it could normally easily overcome. Such “opportunistic” infections typically affect people with weakened immune systems. The appearance of various tumours confirmed the role of the immune system in suppressing some cancers, now known to be caused by viruses.

It was transmitted through body fluids exchanged in sexual activities involving men (both homo- and heterosexual), sharing needles (intravenous drug users or patients in some medical settings), transfusion of blood or blood products from donors with HIV infection, and from mother to child during pregnancy, birth or breast-feeding.

AIDS-related bacterial infections could be treated with antibiotics, though antibiotic-resistant strains rapidly became a serious problem.

However, viruses can’t be treated with antibiotics (a fact not realised by many people with ‘flu or colds). Anti-viral drugs are less available and less successful. And, as we have seen, the other line of defence, the immune system, had been breached. Furthermore, HIV, as a “retrovirus” (see info box) could lie dormant for up to 20 years by incorporating a copy of its genetic material in the DNA of the “host”.

Transmission of HIV is high in the early stages, before an immune response reduces the levels of virus particles in the

blood, and later, when the disease re-emerges and serious illness starts to develop. A small percentage, perhaps 5%, of people, have a delayed response to HIV infection or indeed no response – they have partial or even complete resistance to HIV.

In the absence of a reliable cure (so far), prevention has been the main medical focus. Protected sex reduces transmission to almost zero; proper screening of blood products protects haemophiliacs and recipients of blood transfusions; provision of clean needles protects intra-venous drug users and people having medical injections; Caesarean delivery and formula milk protects babies.

Several treatments have been developed and have greatly increased the life expectancy of HIV-positive people able to receive these. There are several anti-retroviral drugs, which specifically target the enzyme reverse transcriptase, produced and used by HIV but, crucially, not by human cells.

The first of these, AZT (azidothymidine or Zidovudine), was synthesised as a potential anti-cancer drug in 1964 by chemist Jerome Horwitz, who has just died, aged 93 (see below). Unfortunately, AZT has serious side-effects, damaging bone marrow and causing anaemia. HIV was also able to develop resistance to it so that mutant reverse transcriptase no longer used it. It is now used in moderation and in combination with other drugs.

TREATMENT

HAART (high active anti-retroviral therapy) is the current treatment of choice, slowing the progress of the disease greatly.

Typical combinations of drugs include reverse transcriptase inhibitors, AZT and compounds like it, or, later on, protease inhibitors (these make it difficult for the virus to assemble itself for release to infect another cell). Side effects are fewer and costs are lower, though this is still an issue in poorer countries and where people have to pay for medication up front.

Alternative therapies used include vitamin supplements which only seem to help where the diet is deficient. Herbal medicines have not been shown to be effective.

Some virus infections (such as smallpox and polio) can be prevented by vaccination. So far, attempts to develop an effective vaccine against HIV have been thwarted by its fast rate of mutation. There are two ways a vaccine could be given: before infection to large numbers of the at-risk population to prevent them catching HIV; or after the infection with the aim of boosting the patient’s immune response. A field trial involving 16,000 Thai volunteers recently reported a modest success, with the risk of contracting HIV being reduced by about one-third.

One leukaemia sufferer with HIV was given stem cells with

resistance to HIV. This seems to have resulted in either a cure or a long-term suppression of the infection. This is still experimental because of the risks of such transplants and the lack of suitable donors. Two more recipients of ordinary stem cell transplants seem to have benefited also and have no HIV in their blood.

Abzymes (antibody enzymes) have been developed to recognise the protein on the surface of the HIV particles that binds to CD4 cells, attach to it and destroy it by enzyme action. This would prevent the virus sticking to CD4 cells, preparatory to entering it and taking it over. Being an enzyme, a type of catalyst, the abzyme would then detach and be free to attack more HIV particles.

Another possible line against HIV involves preventing HIV incorporating its DNA into host’s DNA. The virus would then be susceptible to attack with anti-retrovirals.

And yet another experimental technique involves giving anti-retroviral therapy to patients soon after infection and maintaining this for three years.

A group of 14 patients still had very low levels of HIV six years after stopping all medication. Though HIV-positive, they seem effectively cured.

AIDS villains

Government failures

Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government and the NHS failed to ban unsafe blood products being imported from the US, where blood was bought from intravenous drug users. This was known in 1983. 1,200 haemophiliacs were infected with HIV (900 died). Lord Robert Winston called this “the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS”. Subsequent Labour and Con-Dem governments have refused adequate compensation.

AIDS denialists

Lynn Margulis, was an eminent scientist who showed that mitochondria, the powerhouses in all living cells, are descended from bacteria. However, she persisted in the misguided and insulting theory that AIDS was caused by tertiary syphilis and not HIV. (She was also a “9/11 Truth Seeker”!)

Peter Duesberg, an eminent cancer researcher, proposed that HIV was harmless and that AIDS was caused by long-term use of recreational drugs (news to the haemophiliacs and babies that get AIDS) or by taking anti-retroviral drugs (for AIDS!). He was an adviser to President Thabo Mbeki, under whose “leadership” anti-retroviral drugs were not provided in a timely fashion. This has caused over 300,000 preventable AIDS deaths in South Africa.

Duesberg once offered to infect himself with HIV to prove his theory but, sadly, did not do so.

Quack cures

Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, the South African Health Minister under Thabo Mbeki, recommended treating AIDS with alcoholic beverages, garlic and beetroot.

Matthias Rust, a German vitamin salesman, recommended that South African AIDS sufferers stop taking anti-retrovirals and take high doses of vitamins.

Some non-mainstream churches, including the Christian Scientists, claim that prayer will heal AIDS sufferers and that they therefore need not take medication.

Conspiracy theorists

A theory that HIV was genetically engineered by US scientists as a form of biological warfare seems to have arisen in the then Eastern Bloc.

Gerry Healy’s Workers Revolutionary Party published a sympathetic treatment of the “theory” that AIDS was an “imperialist plot” in *Workers Press*.

What is a retrovirus?

Most viruses have a genome of DNA which codes for the proteins they need to replicate. These include genes for coat proteins, which self-assemble into a virus particle and enclose a copy of the genome.

Viruses use the host cell’s own machinery to make messenger RNA (mRNA) from the genes, and proteins from the mRNA. They are obligate parasites which can do nothing by themselves.

Some viruses have their genetic material as RNA (which can be directly translated into proteins by the host cell). One gene codes for an enzyme, reverse transcriptase, which translates the RNA genome into DNA. This can be incorporated into the host cell’s DNA and lie dormant for up to 20 years. Significantly, RNA is less stable than DNA so mutations are more frequent, leading to faster evolution.

Sometimes something goes wrong and the genetic material becomes permanently incorporated into the host’s DNA. Some of the genes are harmful to the host while others are useful. Incredibly, it has recently been shown that about 8% of our (and other organisms’) DNA is of viral origin, including the gene that causes the placenta to attach to the wall of the mammalian uterus!

Since DNA is normally translated into mRNA and not the other way round, viruses which do this are called retroviruses.

Who was Dr Jerome Horwitz?

Jerome Horwitz designed a new class of compounds, modified nucleotides (the building blocks of DNA), which would disrupt rapidly multiplying cancer cells by wrecking production of new DNA.

Unfortunately, they didn’t work and he forgot about them, not even taking out a patent. In 1984, when HIV was identified, Burroughs Wellcome started screening its archive of compounds and found that AZT was able to do to viruses what Horwitz had originally hoped it would do to cancer cells – fool reverse transcriptase into incorporating AZT into the growing DNA strand, instead of the proper nucleotide, thymidine. The DNA could grow no longer and the virus could not multiply.

But the new therapy cost \$10000 a year, with sales of \$400million for BW in 1992. Horwitz received nothing.

However, his work was valuable and shows yet again that research unsuccessful for its stated goal may have great worth in unsuspected areas.

Triumph of the ideologues?

By Martin Thomas

Recent events on the Australian left will probably stir wide discussion among activists internationally as the news filters out.

The two Castroite groups in Australia, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the Socialist Alliance (SA), are talking about merging into Socialist Alternative (S Alt), the group there which claims the same tradition as the SWP in Britain but is out of favour with the SWP.

Probably Socialist Alternative will follow up this coup by a new unity offensive on the fourth of the larger left groups in Australia, the SWP-linked Solidarity: it did a previous one in 2010.

I don't expect all this talk of unity to come good. But even the talk is startling.

Socialist Alternative are not preachers of broad live-and-let-live unity. Rather the opposite. Until recently they were generally reviled on the Australian left as the arch-sectarians. They themselves were forthright that their priority was their own "propaganda routine" rather than building broad campaigns. Only in recent years have they become the largest group on the left; a decade ago they were much smaller than the others.

The talk will reverberate internationally because, despite their remoteness, Australia's left groups are well-connected. Solidarity has links with the SWP and SWP-linked groups in other countries, mostly small but including the relatively sizeable SEK in Greece.

Socialist Alternative has links with other groups which claim the same tradition as the SWP but dispute the SWP's claim to international leadership. One is DEA in Greece, the biggest revolutionary socialist faction in Syriza. Another is the ISO in the United States, the biggest revolutionary socialist faction in that country.

The Socialist Alliance (formerly DSP) sustains many international connections, with a wide range of correspondents for its paper *Green Left Weekly* and its magazine *Links*.

Since the collapse of Stalinism in Europe, in 1989-91, we have had twenty years where much of the talk on a dispirited left has centred on rather desperate claims that old arguments and theoretical debates are no longer relevant; we should all huddle together "broadly"; we should "build the movement", or at least build whatever campaigns we can when the labour movement is subdued, without fussing too much about ideas.

After twenty years of that, the Australian surprise may jolt the debate.

S Alt has grown through a rationalised version of the "propaganda routine" of the 1980s SWP. Starting from a base in Melbourne University and not much else, it focused relentlessly on maintaining a political presence on campuses by literature sales, stalls, meetings, and occasional stunts.

S Alt's doggedness has eventually paid off. There is talk on the Australian left now of S Alt having changed and become more flexible. I see no real evidence of a change other than S Alt having become larger, more confident, and more willing to spread itself and take risks.

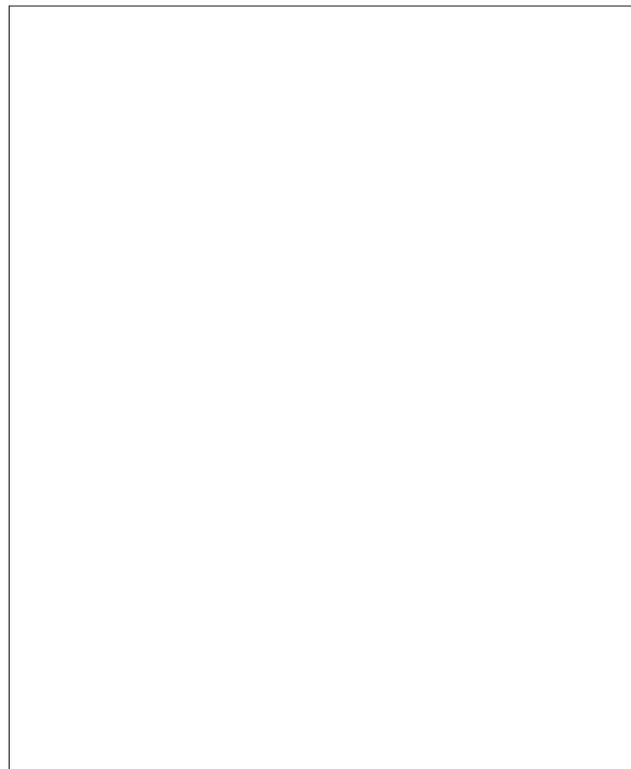
S Alt has not grown through a general radicalisation in Australia. Strike levels have been and remain low. Union density is now lower than in Britain.

S Alt has not grown through catching the wave of some political surge, or by being able to locate itself at the centre of some big new campaign or movement.

S Alt has not grown through being vindicated in some political crisis with a clear, trenchant political line while other groups flounder. Recent political differences on the Australian left have been subdued.

It is not even some special flair to its "propaganda routine" which has helped S Alt.

S Alt has blundered, too. At the 2000 blockade of the World Economic Forum in Melbourne — the largest mobilisation of the Australian left for some time — it distinguished itself by every so often marching round the site, on its own, waving red flags. Maybe that helped consolidate the esprit de corps of some of its young members. Objectively, it was cranky.



The Socialist Alliance may link up with S Alt.

Its progress has not been smooth and easy. S Alt has had a large turnover of young recruits, most of whom did not stay long. It has had splinters and losses.

And it may be that S Alt's current success will prove shallow. I find its politics fundamentally faulty, and the fact that it has gained a few hundred members does not mean it will deal well with future crises requiring political astuteness and depth.

And yet, and yet, and yet... Gaining a few hundred members, reversing the balance of forces within a small activist left milieu, are small things in the scale of our big historic tasks. They are big things in the day-to-day.

In part it's luck. Openings were made for S Alt by damage DSP-SA and ISO-Solidarity have done themselves since 2003 by faction fights and splits. But maybe also S Alt got something right. I think so.

PROPAGANDISE

The term "propaganda routine" is off-putting. In the late 19th century, the most popular summary for socialists of what their activity should be was Wilhelm Liebknecht's: "Study, Propagandise, Organise".

Propagandising, then, just meant spreading socialist ideas. It meant educating, or enlightening, people. Since then the word propaganda has acquired connotations of manipulation and deception.

But there is a core idea in the term "propaganda routine" which is profoundly correct. It is that the pivotal struggle for socialists is on the ideological front. That the first duty of socialists is to learn and understand, and then argue for and spread, socialist ideas.

That can be done only by developing a continuous line of argument, with which we try to grab as many people as realistically possible.

We give them an alternative story about current events which they may at first reject but which one twist or another can jolt them into accepting.

For "propaganda routine" read "a visible, consistent activity of socialist advocacy, expressed through sales, bulletins, stalls, speeches, conversations, and so on", and we are describing what should and must be the bedrock of all socialist activity.

On that bedrock, large structures must in time be built. But there is a constant temptation to suppose that by some trick or guile we can find a short-cut, and build large socialist structures without the bedrock. It is deceptive.

Solid socialist organisation cannot be built by manipulation. It cannot be built by deftly inserting socialists into the leadership of broad campaigns, or into high trade-union positions, and then hoping that the personal prestige accruing to those socialists will automatically spill over into persuasive power for the socialist ideas they privately hold.

In our earliest years as a tendency, in the 1960s, we explained that "the ideological tasks of the revolutionary party of the working class" were central. "If all the proletariat needs is an organisation, then the tightly knit revolutionary organisations are just sects, premature and almost certainly irrelevant.

"If what the proletariat needs is only a machine, then it does not need to have its militants labouring for decades in advance of the maturation of the situation where it requires an uprising".

In 1976 we had to consolidate our understanding, in a faction-fight with people who held that to describe ourselves as "a fighting propaganda group" (as we did, using the term propaganda in the sense of advocacy, education, enlightenment) was sectarian, and we should instead be broader and more "agitational". The "anti-propagandists", who formed the Workers' Power group, would later become genuine sectarians themselves, but that is another story.

If the working class is not yet aroused, then no amount of organisational and administrative busywork by us will arouse it. We cannot manipulate the working class into militancy by deft backroom work, or by simulating militancy in gimmick campaigns.

What we can do is arm ourselves, and those we can reach, with *ideas* which arouse and inspire — that is, socialist ideas. As the French socialist group Lutte Ouvrière explains, our job is not to get people to be active, but to *convince* people to *want* to be active.

When the working class is aroused we can contribute the essential thing which cannot possibly be improvised in the flux of struggle: not organisational mechanics, but ideas which are thoroughly worked out and based on decades and centuries of theoretical study and learning from experience.

It is primarily through our ideological activity of education and self-education that we can serve the broad working-class struggle — on condition that our ideas are shaped, and constantly reshaped, by the experience and the interests of the working class, which they will be only if we are constantly responsive to the struggles of the working class.

S Alt has, unashamedly, oriented heavily to students. It is regularly on campuses, postering, leafletting, advertising meetings, selling magazines. It presents itself directly to students, rather than operating through the mediation of this or that campaign, and limiting its direct socialist talk to the cognoscenti within the campaign.

There is much sense to that. New socialists have always been, and will always be, recruited mainly among young people. These days the biggest accessible concentrations of young people are on university campuses.

Small revolutionary groups can sometimes influence large numbers of older workers and set them against conservative leaders, at least for a while. Recruitment is harder. No small revolutionary group, in times of relatively quiet class struggle, can by deft manoeuvre jump the hurdles which make it hard to recruit large numbers of older people who in their formative years chose *not* to be political activists.

In 1976 the Workers' Power people told us that if only we would be less abstruse, then we could by a snappy "action programme" win over large sections of the "lower local levels" of the trade-union machine. That was fantasy.

So was the more recent speculation by the Socialist Alliance in Australia (based on the sympathy of a couple of prominent trade unionists, Craig Johnston and Chris Cain) that it could swivel itself into a leading position on the trade-union left without the prior work of recruiting, educating, and training a solid corps of young socialists who then win experience and influence in the trade unions.

Socialists build and organise a core of educated and trained activists — and we cannot do that by manipulation and spurious detours — or we are helpless.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/salt

Cleaners discuss coordinated strike

By Ollie Moore

Cleaning workers across Britain could take part in a national, co-ordinated strike, as rail workers' union RMT discusses how to galvanise and bring together its several live disputes involving cleaners.

Workers on London Underground, Docklands Light Railway, London Midland, East Coast, Tyne and Wear Metro, and elsewhere could be involved in the strike, which may be a 48-hour action in October or November.

Although London Underground bosses won't feel extra industrial impact if Tyne and Wear Metro cleaners take action at the same time as their own staff, the workers themselves will gain an increased sense of their own power and collective issues

Tube cleaners strike in August

by taking action alongside fellow workers engaged in similar struggles across the country. Many of the issues — such as low pay, pensions and travel pass inequality, and precarious working arrangements resulting from subcontracting — are the same across all the disputes, and a high-

profile, nationally-coordinated industrial campaign would be a clear signal that the union, sometimes accused of privileging the struggles of higher-skilled or better-established grades of workers, takes its cleaning members' battles seriously. It may also make it harder for bosses to organise scabbing!

On 26 September, Newcastle City Council agreed to implement a new policy committing to pay the living wage (calculated at £7.20 per hour for Newcastle) to all employees to be implemented in November. This means a pay increase for 2,000 low-paid workers, including cleaners. The policy also includes a commitment to use this living wage for directly-contracted services and for the council to a campaign to encourage other employers to do pay the same. Although the Tyne & Wear Metro cleaners are not directly employed by the council, they do work on a contract tendered out by public authorities, and the council's new policy will

give weight to their campaign.

Outside of the rail industry, cleaning workers in the financial sector are continuing their fight against Société Générale bank. Just days after announcing a pay increase to the London Living Wage (£8.30 an hour), bank bosses and cleaning contractors announced a unilateral 50% cut in workers' hours. This represents a huge loss of pay, and means that workers are now expected to eight hours' work in a four hour shift. Workers who have been involved in pickets and protests at the bank have been suspended, and now face suspension. The workers are organised by the Industrial Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), a small split from the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), are continuing a campaign of demonstrations and the IWGB has called for widespread labour movement support.

The RMT in London has been supportive of IWGB and IWW cleaners' struggles, with workers from their disputes addressing Tube cleaners' picket lines.

That mutual support and coordination should continue, and the RMT should reach out to the IWGB — and any other union with live disputes involving cleaning workers — to discuss involving them in the proposed national strike.

• More on the IWGB dispute at Société Générale - bit.ly/Otxm8c

Fighting the bosses' plan on London Underground

By Darren Bedford

Tube drivers' unions ASLEF and RMT are balloting their driver members for industrial action after it emerged that train testing workers could be asked to test driverless trains as early as this month.

Introducing driverless trains, which are already on place on the Docklands Light Railway, is a key plank of transport bosses' and City Hall's plan to radically reshape the Tube network — along with plans to cut maintenance, close ticket offices, further de-staff stations and re-structure service control. It is a measure that will allow them both to cut costs and significantly weaken the unions. The immense risk posed to passenger safety is, for them, acceptable collateral.

The ASLEF ballot has already concluded, and returned a 90%+ vote in favour of action. RMT is balloting both for action short of a strike (i.e. a refusal to test driverless trains) and for strikes, in an attempt to prevent an anticipated employers' injunction on the basis that a refusal to work on driverless trains constitutes a wholesale withdrawal of labour, and therefore a strike rather than an action short of a strike.

This skirmish over the testing of driverless trains is likely to be a shot across the bows from both sides, and it appears that London Underground management are already backing away from the testing plan, blaming Tube Lines and its signalling upgrades contractor Thales.

TubeLines workers themselves are reviving their battle for pensions and travel pass equality. The workers, who provide essential maintenance and engineering work on a number of Lon-

don Underground lines, will resume their action with a 60-hour overtime ban commencing on Friday 5 October at 5.30pm. RMT leaders have visited workplaces and addressed ad hoc mass meetings, as well as convening reps' meetings to discuss the next steps in the dispute. Tube Lines workers understand that at stake is not just their membership of one of the best pension schemes around (the TfL scheme), but the future of the company — behind the scenes, bosses and politicians are discussing whether to fully re-integrate Tube Lines' work into the publicly-owned London Underground, to re-privatise it, or to cobble together a hybrid of the two.

STRENGTH

Ultimately, workers' ability to halt bosses' plans for the Tube depends on their strength of organisation in the workplace and their ability to win their unions to positive strategies for reshaping the transport system on a basis that puts workers' and passengers' needs first.

The resumption of action by Tube Lines workers, and the momentum created by mobilising around the driverless trains ballot, should be used to engage rank-and-file workers in discussions around this strategy.

Only if workers feel that they own and can direct a positive, offensive strategy — rather than being treated like a stage army by union bureaucrats and mobilised largely in defensive, reactive struggles — will they have the confidence to take the action necessary to beat the bosses.

• More — tinyurl.com/tubeworkerjobsstrategy

FTPE train cleaners strike

By Derek O'Mealey

Cleaners and security guards employed by Carlisle Cleaning and Support Services working for First TransPennine Express (FTPE) struck on 1 October, in protest at a pay freeze imposed by the employer.

The picket in Hull leafleted members of the public outlining their reasons for the strike. Workers have been offered a below inflation pay increase and no enhanced rate for weekend, night, bank holiday or overtime

working. Those employed by Carlisle have no access to a company sick pay scheme, and no leisure travel facilities on First TransPennine services as offered to workers employed directly.

A striker told *Solidarity*: "Management has refused to negotiate on any of our demands, and we are being paid below a basic living wage. We are asking people to contact Carlisle's director and FTPE's Director to show their support for our action.

"The strike is fairly solid so far, we have only seen supervisors inside."

Higher education workers vote to strike

By Pdraig O'Brien

Higher Education workers in Unison have voted (with a 50.3% majority) to take strike action over pay.

The union had recommended that members voted yes to strikes against a below-inflation pay offer from university bosses. Unison represents some of the lowest-paid workers in the higher education sector, including cleaners, catering staff, and porters, many of whom are paid well below levels calculated by the union to represent a "living wage".

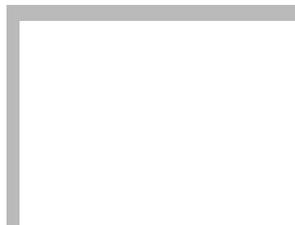
If the strike ballot is now acted upon it

will feed other industrial action now being taken on university campuses.

On 10 October, lecturers at the University of East London will strike over changes to workload agreements that will substantially increase their marking loads, and lecturers at Queen Mary University (East London) are also set to strike against redundancies and bosses' performance management regime after a ballot returned a 65% majority.

Supporters of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts are active in organising solidarity with workers' struggles on their campuses.

• More — www.anticuts.com



Rank-and-file construction workers took to the streets on 26 September to picket the Crossrail site on New Oxford Street, central London. Workers are demanding that Crossrail bosses reinstate 28 electricians whose employer, EIS, had its contract terminated on the Westbourne Park Crossrail site after union reps raised health and safety concerns. The action succeeded in blocking traffic for an hour.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Labour must rebuild the NHS!

By Colin Foster

More than 150 activists lobbied the Labour Party conference on Sunday 30 September, under the banner of the NHS Liaison Network.

As delegates went in, they heard vigorous chants: "Seize the banks/ Reclaim our wealth/ Spend it on/ the National Health". It was the biggest and loudest mobilisation at Labour Party conference for many years.

Inside the conference, constituency Labour Party delegates voted to put the NHS top of the four issues they can get onto the agenda.

After the conference session, the compositing session for NHS motions — with 15 motions roughly on the lines of the motion supported by the NHS Liaison Network, and one "spoiler" — took two and a half hours of wrangling, because of heavy pressure from

Lobby of Labour Party conference 2012, Manchester

Labour Party officials for a bland composite. Delegates stood firm, and agreed a clear composite. It is due to be debated on Wednesday 3 October. Further procedural moves against it — for example, proposals to remit — remain possible. As *Solidarity* goes to press, the rumour is that the platform may do a swerve and not oppose the composite, hoping that no-one much will notice or press the Labour leaders to do what the composite calls

for. That mustn't happen. Whatever happens inside Labour conference, activists will follow up on 30 September by seeking to launch new united NHS coalitions or campaign networks in cities round the country, bringing together trade union branches, trades councils, anti-cuts groups, Keep Our NHS Public groups, and others.

One of their priorities will be to take the fight into the labour movement, sharpening up the general pro-NHS sentiment in unions and Labour Parties into a clear and powerful demand for the NHS to be restored as a comprehensive public service, the PFI burden lifted, and cuts reversed.

● labournhslobby.wordpress.com

Speakers on the lobby included Mick Whelan, ASLEF General Secretary (above); John McDonnell MP (below); and Pat Smith, Hull North CLP delegate, who will move the contemporary motion on Wednesday (bottom).

Local campaigners joining the lobby, including Salford Pensioners Association, and users of mental health services protesting against cuts proposed by Labour-led Salford Council

Migrants evicted in Calais

By Rosalind Robson

Wednesday 25 September began days of evictions and arrests of the 200 migrants who are still sleeping rough and in tents and other makeshift shelters in Calais.

Although police harassment is an everyday occurrence in Calais, this is a step-up, if not a repeat of the exceptional brutality of three years ago, when a camp set up by Afghan migrants was razed to the ground.

An article on Indymedia describes the conditions prior to the latest police crackdown: "Most people present in Calais now have papers; either they have applied for asylum in France or they have refugee status in some other EU country.

"The asylum seekers should be given accommodation, by law, but there are

not many bedspaces available, so they are left to wait for the result of their asylum application in the street, for up to two or three years."

The new French Socialist government of François Hollande has shown it is capable of the same brutal racism as that of Sarkozy. East European Roma have also been the victims of mass deportations earlier this year.

Come to the protest on Saturday 6 October at 4.30pm at the French Tourist Office, Lincoln House, 296-302 High Holborn, London WC1V 7JH.

International activists in Calais need donations of sleeping bags and men's clothes. Please bring to the protest on Saturday or find out more here:

- calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com
- calais_solidarity@riseup.net

Protests say: "Rajoy out"

By Gerry Bates

Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Madrid on 25 September and marched on Spain's parliament building as MPs discussed its 2013 budget.

The demonstrations were called by a coordination originating in the "Indignados" movement, who set up protest camps in Spanish cities in 2011.

Many demonstrators were demanding new elections. The manifesto said: "Winning an election does not give the government the right to act as it wants, betraying the voters who elected it.

"The people, under these conditions, have the right to demand that the government quits. This is the essence of democracy and popular sovereignty."

Police responded with violence, firing rubber bullets at protesters and arresting 26. At least 60 people are thought to have been injured during the demonstrations. Around 1,300 riot police were deployed to police the protests — over half of Spain's riot police force and a ratio of one cop to every six protesters, accord-

ing to some figures. A statement from Izquierda Unida (United Left) MPs said that the criminalisation of protest and the heavy-handed policing of demonstrations was "pouring gasoline on the streets".

The government's austerity budget includes a 12% spending cut and a third year of public sector pay freeze. The spending cuts are projected to reduce the deficit by less than 1%.

The political perspective of the demonstrations centres on popular-democratic, rather than class-based, slogans and ideas. Spain's two main union federations, CCOO and UGT, have both threatened action against the public sector pay freeze in particular; if the dynamism of the protests can be used to energise and galvanise the labour movement against austerity with the power to shake the government could be built.

There have also been huge demonstrations in Portugal, with 100,000 marching against austerity on 15 September. Unions were central to the protests, and dock workers have struck against contractual reforms that threaten jobs.