

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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and the Daily Mail**

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Stop profiteers wrecking the NHS

Cancel the PFI

debts!



King's Mill Hospital, run by Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, signed a PFI deal for the period 2005-2043, for a total cost of £976m. The trust now believes PFI will cost it £2.05bn.

24 NOVEMBER: MARCH TO SAVE LEWISHAM HOSPITAL

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

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Gas prices: Enron revisited

By Colin Foster

The real significance of the reported rigging of wholesale gas prices is probably different from what has been highlighted in media comment.

In mid-November a whistleblower revealed that gas wholesale prices may have been rigged on 28 September 2011, the last day of the gas-trading year. Comment has centred on the possibility that this price-rigging may have increased households' gas bills.

The reported price-rigging was to put the gas price artificially lower, and in general it's unlikely that such price-rigging would significantly increase household gas bills. Much more important for household gas



bills, as with some other things — fares, mobile phone contracts — is tricky retail pricing, which leaves people paying higher rates than they would if they spent many attentive hours analysing the different price schemes and making sure they got the cheapest offer.

The price-rigging would have been done in order to make gains on a derivatives transaction — for example, a contract previously made to sell gas for delivery on 28 September 2011 at a low price.

Labour councillors against cuts

By Sacha Ismail

The Labour Representation Committee (LRC) conference, 10 November, established an anti-cuts councillors network.

A similar plan made last year did not materialise, but, with more councillors now pledging to vote against cuts, and more likely to come forward as the attack on local government budgets deepen, there is fresh determination to get the initiative off the ground.

The conference saw a debate about what left Labour councillors should do. Two councillors argued that there was no option but to implement cuts, while doing the maximum possible to help the working class within that framework. In London, Islington council,

unlike, for example, Lambeth and Lewisham, has made leftist reforms — while also cutting. Other councillors, from Hull, Broxtowe and Barking, argued for voting against cuts.

A resolution was passed which, while formally maintaining the LRC's demand for councillors to vote against cuts, made justifications for those who do not.

Nonetheless, the group of councillors who met at lunchtime agreed to set up a network based on a strong anti-cuts position. They also decided to make links with local government workers to push this policy in Unison and GMB, and Unite members fighting for their union to change its policy of pressuring councillors to "maintain the Labour whip".

More soon.

Defend Bob Carnegie!

By Ruben Lomas

The Bob Carnegie Defence Campaign continues to gather trade union support in Britain.

Mike Tucker, branch secretary of Southampton District Unison (which was involved in a two-year long labour war with Southampton's Tory council) has pledged his sup-

port, as has Neil Sheehan, the Vice Chair of Unite United Left and former Unite Executive member.

Lambeth Local Government branch of Unison also voted to support Bob's campaign, and to investigate any links Lambeth Council has to construction contracts held by Lend Lease, the parent company of Abigroup (which is bringing the charges against Bob).

For more on the campaign visit: <http://bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com/>

In its basics the gas industry is simple. The value of the gas is determined by the labour-time of the workers extracting and transporting it. The owners, usually states, of the areas where gas can be extracted with less labour draw a "rent" from the difference between the local cost of extraction and the world-market norm.

In the world of privatised utilities and huge derivatives markets, an army of middlemen steps in, speculating and taking bites out of the profits and rents. The price-rigging probably benefited one middleman at the expense of another.

The reported price-rigging is of the same stripe as the Enron scandal of 2001. Enron made itself into the seventh largest corporation

in the USA by slick trading in oil and gas. It channelled gains to its bosses by financial trickery (dodgy accounting in that case, not price-rigging), and then collapsed.

The trading and speculation can push prices up in one period and down in another, as it pushed oil and gas prices up in 2008. It channels a big proportion of the surplus value produced by the oil and gas workers into the pockets of traders in New York, London, and other financial centres.

Those spivs come to think of themselves, and convince others to think of them, as "wealth-creators". They siphon many of the most talented and energetic young people into their crazy trade.

Abu Qatada should not be sent to Jordan!

Earlier this month, the Special Immigration Appeals Commission ruled that Palestinian-Jordanian Islamist cleric Abu Qatada could not be deported to Jordan, because he might be tried there on the basis of evidence obtained under torture.

The government and the tabloid press are wild with rage about this, and Home Secretary Theresa May has said she will fight the decision.

Abu Qatada (real name Omar Othman) is a fascist reactionary, and we have no brief at all for him. Nonetheless, we oppose his deportation to Jordan. If the government is able to deport political refugees to countries that use torture or otherwise seriously abuse human rights, it will not just be far-right Islamists in danger.

All sorts of people fleeing persecution will be threatened, and democratic freedoms will be restricted yet further.

ANTONIO GRAMSCI: WORKING-CLASS REVOLUTIONARY

Antonio Gramsci, a leader of the Italian Communist Party in its revolutionary days, spent almost all of his last years 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 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

Day school on Gramsci's ideas —
Saturday 15 December, London
Details: <http://v.gd/ZNWvHQ>

Greece: stop the privatisation drive!

By Theodora Polenta

Greece's government is trying to pass a law to bypass the need for parliament to approve each privatisation.

The government is determined to proceed with the privatisation of all public utilities. It has already abolished the rule which obliges the state to maintain a minimum 51% share of the main public utilities.

Yet all experience of the privatisations of public utilities and services shows that they harm both service users and workers. The only beneficiaries are the capitalists who make quick and safe profits out of human misery.

Michael Sandel, the American professor who addressed Labour Party conference 2012, has written: "The use of markets to allocate health, education... and other social goods was for the most part unheard of 30 years ago. Today, we take

them largely for granted.

"Why worry that we are moving toward a society in which everything is up for sale? For two reasons: one is about inequality; the other is about corruption. Consider inequality. In a society where everything is for sale, life is harder for those of modest means...

"Where all good things are bought and sold, having money makes all the difference in the world.

"The second reason we should hesitate to put everything up for sale is more difficult to describe. It is not about inequality and fairness but about the corrosive tendency of markets... Markets leave their mark. Sometimes, market values crowd out non-market values worth caring about".

The obligation to wholesale privatisation as a precondition for bailout funds has been restated again and again by the EU-ECB-IMF "Troika". The three government coalition parties shed some crocodile tears for the

chopping of wages, pensions, and welfare provision, but boast of how they will reduce the bureaucracy and inefficiency of the Greece state.

Set for privatisation are energy and power, water, post office services, the agricultural bank, petroleum, natural gas, OSE (railways), and much more. The schedule is 4.5 billion worth of privatisations to take place by the end of 2012, another 7.5 billion by the end of 2013 and the rest by 2015.

The expected revenues from privatisation at a time of massive devaluation of all Greek assets are meagre, and the short-term boost to state revenues will be offset by the losses of revenue from the state companies which are still profitable.

ND and Pasok, over the last two decades, have sold off the Scaramanga shipyard and almost the entire shipbuilding industry, OTE (telecommunications), more than 90% of the banking sector, the port of Piraeus, Olympic Airways, the Corinth Canal, and more.

Far from privatisations being the magic pill to rescue Greek capitalism from its ills, between 2000 and 2011 Greek government debt increased by 164%.

An ideological war against public sector workers (portrayed as a privileged section) has been escalated during the last three years. Public sector workers are portrayed as

corrupt, lazy, inefficient, and hired through nepotism. The stereotype of "olive spitting, ouzo guzzling, lazy Greek public sector workers who refuse to put in a full day's work, retire when they are teenagers, and pocket pensions fit for a pasha" is being propagated by government representatives and mainstream media.

The aim of privatisation is not "to let a crisis go to waste". The aim is to transfer more wealth from the working class to the capitalist class. Their aim is to grab as much as they can, via the privatisation spree and the selling off the Greek assets and public wealth for peanuts and to create a "business-friendly habitat". They aim for a defeated, little-unionised working class with restricted workers rights and poverty wages.

The myth of the inefficient, expensive and corrupt functioning of the public sector has some elements of truth in it, but the corruption and inefficiency is not because it is nationalised but on the contrary because it works within the framework of the capitalist system and under a competitive environment, the majority of the public sector is shaped by the subcontractors, pharmaceutical companies and other capitalist entrepreneurs that make profits out of it.

We are not defending the existing public sector. We

Syriza will hold its founding conference to convert itself from a coalition into a united party in spring 2013. Cartoon shows the bourgeois parties presiding over the destruction of Greece

are defending the achievement of welfare state and provisions that are a product of the post second world war working class struggles. We are defending the welfare state and the "social wage".

The big losers of every privatisation are always the workers. They lose jobs or have their wages severely cut down and their rights compromised. OSE (the railways), which is in a long process of privatisation, has fired 55% of its staff and reduced the wages of the remaining staff by 45%.

Defending the public utility workers against the governments attack and fighting against privatisation does not mean that we defend the current public sector with its maladministration, political favouritism, and corruption. Instead, we need to fight for a public sector under workers control which will operate in the people's interest, with administrators and officials paid the average worker's wage.

It is the duty of the left to explain what is currently at stake. At stake is not whether we are satisfied with the current state of the public sector that is interrelated with corporations,

contractors and corruption. At stake is whether in memorandum Greece water, electricity, telephone, internet, transport and other public goods will be guaranteed by the state for its citizens, or left them at the mercy of private companies.

If the individual consumer is the model of capitalism, the collective producer and citizen is the hero of the socialism of tomorrow. The need and potential for a strong, united front of the left in order to win the battle against privatisation is apparent and urgent at the same time.

Syriza has pledged to declare all the privatisation illegal and unconstitutional and to reverse all privatisations with no compensation to the privateers and rehire all sacked workers. Rightly so.

But to get to that point there is a necessary precondition. Not to allow defeatism to be spread after the voting through parliament of the third memorandum.

To follow up on all the battles of the last three years, and with strikes, occupations and neighbourhood mobilisations to ensure that the coalition government is overthrown.

200 town halls in Greece are under occupation by members of the council workers' union POE OTA to resist the coming job cuts. These occupations are expected to escalate.

Farm workers join South Africa strike wave

By Ruben Lomas

The South African labour war spread to agriculture last week, as farm workers struck against low wages and poor living conditions.

Like the Marikana miners' strike, the farm workers' actions have met with severe state repression. A worker was shot dead on 14 November when police opened fire on a protest in Wolseley, 70 miles northeast of Cape Town.

While the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was quick to

claim leadership of the strike wave, and attempt to moderate its demands, independent unions not affiliated to COSATU have been integral to the actions. These include Sikhula Sonke, a largely women-worked union, and the Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU). In 2009, Sikhula Sonke organised a protest camp outside the South African parliament to highlight the case of a white farm boss who forced workers to live in pigsties.

Anna Majavu, of the South African Civil Society Information Service, writes:

"CSAAWU is campaigning publicly against farmer Willie Dreyer from Leeuwenkuil farm in Agter-Paarl.

"Dreyer allegedly evicted farm worker Patrick Philander, his wife and four children and laid false charges of attempted murder against him and another CSAAWU activist, Amos White, after they recruited other farm workers into the union.

"And the internationally-publicised Human Rights Watch report into South Africa's fruit and wine industries last year found farms to be 'ripe with abuse' — with farm workers having their water and elec-

tricity disconnected, being harassed in the middle of the night by farmers' guards and their dogs, being exposed to pesticides and being prevented from joining unions."

In the mining sector, workers employed in Anglo-American Platinum (Amplat) mines have accepted a deal from bosses that will see workers receive a one-off payment of 4,500 rand, and a monthly salary increase of 400 rand (around £28). Amplat bosses said the strikes would hit annual profits by a fifth.

● More on the farm workers' strikes: bit.ly/W8JoBj

Newsnight, McAlpine and the Mail

Press

By Pat Murphy

The BBC's actual mistake over the North Wales child abuse scandal, and it was a colossal one, was that they didn't look for enough evidence or even test the evidence they had.

They didn't show abuse victim Steve Messham a picture of Lord McAlpine and nor did they attempt to contact the alleged perpetrator for a response. They didn't examine for a minute the likelihood of McAlpine being in the area at the time of the offences.

Those facts, however, were not the most important things to emerge even from the "Newsnight" interview. The hyped-up fuss about poor old Lord McAlpine has taken attention from the powerful institutions which bear responsibility for allowing Steve Messham and people like him to be abused for years.

In the interview Messham said that, as a teenager, he went to the police telling them where the abuse took place (the Crest Hotel in Wrexham) and naming the prominent abuser. They told him he was a liar and sent him on his way.

They didn't show him a picture, or investigate or suggest that maybe it was mistaken identity and show him some other pictures. "When I made a statement to the police", he said, "the police crossed his name out and said there was no point". He also revealed that a second anonymous victim had also gone to the police and been sent on his way.

There is no comment on those failings in the *Mail* or from the execrable Piers Morgan. McAlpine is a victim more deserving of their pity than the abused; and the BBC is a target more in tune with their political agenda than a police force in hock to the wealthy and powerful.

It's probably fair to say that socialists have some degree of instinctive sympathy for the BBC. Only "some degree" because it's a huge corporation with a history of conservative news management and top-down managerialism.

In its coverage of everything from the general strike of 1926 to the long Irish conflict of 1968-98 the BBC has at best put a studied liberal neutrality above truth and insight and at worst served as the voice of the British establishment.

But "instinctive sympathy" because it stands alone in the broadcasting media as a publicly-owned, high-quality provider of news which is independent, at least, from wealthy and powerful proprietors. What its competitors resent most is not its public funding but its authority.

ATTACK

While it doesn't command the same unconditional respect and loyalty as the NHS, it's hard not to feel a need to side with the BBC when under attack by the right-wing press and media.

The furore over the flagship programme "Newsnight" has put this instinct to the test.

Two aspects of the "Newsnight" coverage are striking. First, BBC bosses have faced entirely justified criticism for two opposite blunders in the way they have dealt with child abuse.

They pulled a long-planned report which, as it was due to go out in December 2011, would have been the first to openly expose the criminal behaviour of Jimmy Savile while he worked for the corporation. The executive producer responsible has never clearly explained his decision, the reporters responsible were furious, and their anger will have been intensified by the fact that credit for exposing Savile then passed to an ITV team who did broadcast the allegations on 3 October.

Then, on 2 November, "Newsnight" did broadcast an interview with Steve Messham, who heavily hinted that one of

his abusers was a prominent Tory backer who was still alive. There were enough clues in the interview to feed internet gossip pointing to one of the wealthy McAlpine family.

McAlpine then publicly and strenuously denied the allegations and was able to provide quite a bit of prima facie evidence to support his denial. "Newsnight", on the other hand, could provide none and, worse, its reporters had subjected their story to little or no evidential testing. The embarrassment and the subsequent attacks were as inevitable as they were deserved.

Second, however, the BBC would have been slammed by the right-wing press no matter what they did.

If this seems like special pleading, consider the *Daily Mail's* coverage the day after the fateful interview with Steve Messham was broadcast. They attacked the programme for failing to name the alleged abuser.

Rather than openly make this criticism, the *Mail* hid behind the pretence of reporting supposed anger of viewers that the BBC lacked courage and had let them down. The primary "viewer" then quoted was one Piers Morgan, whose tweet read "So Newsnight bottled it again tonight re naming a paedophile. And they have the gall to mock tabloids. Grow a pair, Paxo".

The real motives of the anti-BBC press summed up in less than 140 embarrassingly adolescent characters.

The *Mail* also sneered at "Newsnight"'s explanation that there was (their ironic parentheses) "not enough evidence". In fact a decision to name, or allow the interviewee to name, the alleged abuser was the one thing which could have made the broadcast even more damaging.

You can be sure that, in that case, the *Daily Mail* would have been first in line to condemn "Newsnight" for making such an allegation when there was in fact "not enough evidence". Not for the first time during the Savile affair and its aftermath, the right-wing press attacked the BBC mainly for what it did right.

From the river to the sea

Eric Lee

At first glance, who could oppose the Palestine Solidarity Campaign? The very name implies one of the most noble human aspirations — solidarity with a people. And in particular a people like the Palestinians, whose suffering is genuine.

No doubt many people who join the PSC, attend its demonstrations, donate money to it or encourage their unions to back it are expressing their support for the idea of solidarity with the Palestinians.

But there's a difference — a huge one — between showing solidarity with the Palestinians and supporting the PSC.

Despite the PSC's best efforts to convince everyone that these are one and the same thing, they aren't.

And this becomes obvious whenever things heat up in Israel and Palestine, and when war is in the air.

Recently, I found myself at the demonstration of the PSC opposite the Israeli embassy in Kensington.

The call for the demonstration focussed on the Israeli air offensive against Gaza and was issued at a time when the only casualties seemed to be Hamas fighters, in particular Ahmed al-Jabari, the leader of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades.

Still, by the time demonstrators began to arrive at the embassy, things had gotten worse and a number of civilians — on both sides — had been killed.

The demonstration would have focussed on those killings, right?

It would have called for a cease-fire or something like that, wouldn't it?

But the very first thing I heard was not a call for an end to the violence — which would have been understandable and would have gotten sympathy from anyone — but instead was the chant, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free".

From the river to the sea?

Sorry, but there's no way to be polite about this. That chant, and the PSC's own logo of a map of Palestine from the river to the sea, and the subsequent chanting of "Israel out of Palestine" really could mean only one thing.

The demonstrators, or at least the people leading the chanting and making up the slogans, were supporting a one-state agenda, a solution to the century-old conflict between Israelis and Palestinians by demanding that one side pack up and leave.

EXPULSION

As it's unlikely the Israelis are going to do this voluntarily, realistically what the demonstrators were calling for was the expulsion of the Jews from Palestine.

Not from the illegal settlements in the West Bank — no one mentioned those.

The Jews are to leave "Palestine" — from the river to the sea. This is an exterminationist agenda. I don't think that's too strong a term.

These are not people who dislike Israelis or Jews, or who want to discriminate against them, or put them in their place, or treat them as second class citizens. That would be ordinary anti-Semitism.

This is a different kind of anti-Semitism, the kind that

imagines a Palestine without its six million Jews, from the river to the sea.

An exterminationist anti-Semitism whose solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be another Holocaust.

Of course one expects to see radical Islamists at a demonstration like this — after all, that's been their agenda for decades.

But it's not the agenda of the mainstream Palestinian national movement, not anymore.

It's been nearly a quarter of century now since Arafat and the leadership of the PLO embraced the two-state solution, which paved the way to the Oslo accords.

Palestinian President Abbas isn't calling for driving the Jews into the sea. The Palestinian trade unions aren't calling for that. But that's what the Palestine Solidarity Campaign was doing in Kensington — that's their agenda.

So what was the Socialist Party doing there — a party which historically opposes the boycott of Israel and which supports a two-state solution?

On their website, they write that "The Palestinians and the Israeli Jews have a right to their own separate states." They don't say that one of those states will be in Palestine, and the other — in the sea?

And what was the SWP doing there, for that matter? Do they too support the expulsion of the Jews from Palestine?

It is fitting and proper for people who are shocked by the violence, and angry at the decision of the Israeli government, to protest and to show their solidarity with Palestine.

But to do so by chanting for the destruction of the Jewish state is to do the Palestinians no service.

For socialists to participate in such a demonstration is a disgrace.

Stop Israel's attacks on Gaza!

The Israeli military has launched a new assault against the people of Gaza, Palestine. Many people have been killed, including children. As of 20 November, the death toll had reached 107.

Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak said: "We are at the beginning of the event, and not the end", and Israeli authorities have talked of a ground invasion. The Israeli Defence Force has drafted 75,000 reservists into the main army.

As of Tuesday 21 November, as *Solidarity* went to press, Israeli government officials were said to be considering a truce proposal, but it remains very possible that the killing will continue.

Most mainstream media are citing Israel's assassination on 14 November of Ahmed al-Jabari, the commander of the military wing of Hamas (the Islamist politico-military party that governs Gaza), and subsequent retaliation, as the immediate background to the new assault. But an intensification of Israeli pressure on Gaza dates back further.

On 5 November, Israeli border guards shot Ahmad al-Nabaheen, a young man with mental health problems, who wandered too close to a checkpoint. Then, on 8 November, four Israeli tanks and a bulldozer began an incursion into Gaza. When they were met with machine gun fire from Palestinian militants, they opened fire themselves and killed a 13-year-old boy.

"ELECTION WAR"

Why has Israel launched this attack now? Elections for the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, are due in January 2013.

After two years of social unrest within Israel — which have seen a massive "Occupy"-style movement against declining living standards for lower middle-class and working-class Israelis, as well as significant industrial action by Israeli unions — a new war against the eternal enemy-without is a helpful propaganda tool for the unpopular right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

There is also some speculation that Israel deliberately targeted al-Jabari because he was a Hamas "moderate". According to an article in Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, al-Jabari had drafted a "permanent truce agreement with Israel, which included mechanisms for maintaining the ceasefire in the case of a flare-up between Israel and the factions in the Gaza Strip".

The article's main source is Gershon Baskin, the Israeli academic who helped broker the prisoner exchange that saw Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit released.

Netanyahu may deliberately have provoked a brief flare up that he can settle in time for the elections. For him, both Palestinian and Israeli lives are expendable in his mission to cling onto power.

Hamas and other armed Islamist groups responded by increasing rocket fire into southern Israel. Three Israelis in Kiryat Malachi died when a rocket hit a residential building. By 20 November, Israel said that 640 rockets had been fired, with 324 being intercepted by its "Iron Dome" defence system.

Taken at its strongest, the Israeli case for war is that its citizens are under threat from Hamas rocket fire, and that even a pre-emptive attack therefore has a self-defensive character. Israel, like any state, has the right to defend its citizens. But there is no meaningfully self-defensive element to its new war on Gaza. As the overwhelmingly more powerful military force, and as the colonial oppressor of the Palestinians, Israel entirely holds the upper hand in the situation.

Israel has the power to end the cycle of violence by ending the occupation of the West Bank and the siege of Gaza, evicting and dismantling the settlements, and providing financial aid and reparations to an independent Palestinian state. Its government chooses not to.

Israelis protest before the house of Ehud Barak, 14 November

The Palestinian people have a right to defend themselves against Israel's assault, including militarily. But Hamas rockets aimed at residential buildings in southern Israel are not self-defensive. Targeting Israeli civilians is wrong and harms the Palestinians' cause.

Supporting the Palestinians' right to self-defence does not mean siding with Hamas, or pretending that Hamas' rocket fire into Israel takes on a progressive character in the context of this war.

Hamas won a democratic election in Gaza, and neither Israel, America, nor anyone else has the right to tell the Palestinians who they can and cannot elect. But Hamas's status as an elected government no more obliges socialists to support them than David Cameron's status as the elected Prime Minister of Britain obliges us to support him.

Like the 18th-century Prussian soldier Carl von Clausewitz, we believe that "war is the continuation of politics by other means". The politics of which Hamas's rocket fire is a continuation are reactionary. Hamas's programme is for a clerical-fascist, theocratic state that would tyrannise over Palestinian women, LGBT people, secularists, and others, as well as pose a mortal threat to Israeli Jews.

ISRAEL'S RIGHTS

As well as doing whatever we can to provide material solidarity for the battered and beleaguered people of Gaza, we must also support Israeli socialists in their efforts to provide an alternative political narrative to that of the ruling class and the state.

The anti-war, internationalist left in Israel is weak, and marginalised by a constant campaign, by the state and in the media, to reinforce a siege mentality amongst Israeli people; but there have been protests against the "election war".

Israel, as the expression of the national self-determination of the Hebrew-speaking Jewish people in the region, has a right to exist, and for its citizens to be secure. But that existence and security can never justify acting as a colonial oppressor of the Palestinians, and can never be stable while that oppression continues.

The only conceivable victors from Israel's latest war are the revanchists on both sides (such as far-right foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman, whose Yisrael Beitenu party will run a joint list with Netanyahu's Likud in the 2013 elections) who will not rest until one population or the other has been wiped out or completely subjugated.

Anyone who wants to see a democratic, internationalist settlement in the Middle East must stand in solidarity with the people of Gaza, with Israeli internationalists, and against this brutal war.

- Stop Israel's attacks on Gaza!
- Israel out of the Occupied Territories! End the blockade of Gaza! For Palestinian self-determination!
- No to Hamas! Support Palestinian workers, women and young people!
- Support the anti-war movement, the internationalists and the left in Israel!
- Two states for the two peoples, and workers' unity across the borders!

Help us raise £15,000

Solidarity has to do a lot of different jobs.

It's a tool for Workers' Liberty members to communicate our politics to people around us, to discuss and debate ideas, strategies, history and theory. In the age of smartphones and social media, very few people get their news about big current affairs from Trotskyist papers, but *Solidarity* has an important role in publicising working-class struggles and views that receive not much attention elsewhere.

Solidarity 263 (7 November) carried a front-page feature and centre-page spread about cleaners' struggles. News about strikes and other actions by cleaning workers is not widely broadcast, even by union sources, and within some unions cleaning workers are looked down upon by better-paid, more "highly-skilled" workers. We highlight disputes that the trade union activists who make up most of our readership might not know about, and in doing so attempt to build the solidarity that can help them win.

For the workers involved, seeing the story of your own struggle written down can help you contextualise it and understand its wider implications. *Solidarity* attempts to hold a mirror up to working-class political and economic experience, to help working-class people better understand our role and potential power.

Greater financial capacity will help us expand that work. *Solidarity* has no permanent staff, and relies for reports on content sent in by AWL members and friends, and other labour movement activists. Donating to our fund appeal will not only help spread the ideas of the AWL but will improve the content of *Solidarity* by allowing our volunteer journalists to expand our coverage.

Help us raise £15,000 by May Day 2013. You can contribute in the following ways:

● Taking out a monthly standing order using the form below or at www.workersliberty.org/resources. Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.

● Making a donation by cheque, payable to "AWL", or donating online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

● Organising a fundraising event.

● Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.

● Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL. More information: 07796 690874 /

awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

Total so far: £5,531

We raised £490 this week from a new standing order and a donation. Thanks to Chris and John.



Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

Account name:

Account no:

Sort code:

Please make payments to the debit of my account: Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20

(year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

Lewisham Hospital: occup

On 24 November demonstrators against the cuts at Lewisham Hospital will assemble at 2pm at Loampit Vale roundabout, next to Lewisham DLR and rail station, and march to the hospital.

Accident and Emergency, maternity, and complex and emergency surgery services at the hospital are set for closure under plans to break up the South London Healthcare Trust, which earlier this year went bust because of its spending on expensive PFI contracts.

A public protest meeting on 8 November drew maybe a thousand people, and the march is expected to be one of the largest ever against local hospital cuts.

Debates are in progress on the best way to defeat the cuts and save the hospital.

Occupations can win

By Jill Mountford

From the mid-1970s through to the early 1980s, several hospitals and wards were occupied by workers and their supporters. In many cases they stopped closures.

Between 1976 and 1978 there were approximately ten work-ins or occupations in hospitals; between 1976 and 1982, around 28 occupations.

The hospital or ward was run by the staff. Patients were cared for. Equipment stayed in place.

The Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Women's Hospital (EGA) in Central London was occupied from 1976 to 1978.

The EGA was first threatened with closure in 1974. The Nursing Council backed down after 23,000 women's signatures were collected in defence of the hospital.

In 1976 David Ennals, the Labour health minister, threatened closure. Some workers occupied Health Authorities. 700 workers staged a Day of Action and marched on the House of Commons.

In November 1976 100 nurses and 78 ancillary staff began an occupation of EGA, demanding that the Area Health Authority do essential maintenance to the run-down buildings. Pickets outside held a banner declaring: "This hospital is under workers' control".

The occupation was run by committees set up through general meetings — the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee, the Medical Committee, and the Action Committee, which was made up of reps from all sections of staff, including consultants.

The occupation required a manager to be on-site at all times in order for the insurance to be valid. At EGA this meant the hospital secretary.

In 1978 the hospital was threatened with closure again and a big demonstration stopped the traffic on Euston Road. In 1979 EGA was reprieved as a specialist gynaecology hospital.

The EGA building has since been closed, and its services moved (in modified form) to the nearby UCL Hospital. But the occupation was a success.

Occupations and work-ins at hospitals threatened by closure force management to keep providing the service, and enable workers to create a rallying point and an alliance with people who would be deprived of the service if it closed. As John Lister said in a London Health Emergency pamphlet *Occupy and Win*, published in 1984:

"It is not certain that occupying a threatened hospital will keep it open, but it is certain that if you do not occupy it will close".

Workers at the Hayes Cottage Hospital occupied in 1983 and 1990. Occupations and work-ins can stop closures today!

"The hospital is done for if the A&E closes"

A Lewisham hospital worker spoke to *Solidarity*

This has happened because of the debts that have built up from the PFI schemes in the South London Trust, but I think that they're picking on Lewisham because the Tories know they're never going to get in here.

The Lib-Dems and Tories know they'll take a hit in the ballot box in Bexley and Greenwich, so they're trying to save money here instead. It's because there's a load of Etonians running the government. It's because it's a Tory government.

RCN

I'm in the RCN (Royal College of Nursing) like most people I work with, but I haven't heard anything from them. My colleagues, and the patients I work with are really concerned, but I couldn't really comment about the unions.

There are definitely problems here. But getting rid of services is no way to make things better. We need maternity and A&E services here.

I'm sure there are efficiencies that could be made if services were better organised, but some areas need to be better staffed, and there's a lot of work to be done in training staff to get really good services here.

The NHS cannot continue to be a comprehensive health service if it continues to be funded the way it is. There just isn't enough money allocated.

Healthcare becomes more expensive all the time, as new expensive treatments become available. Pharmaceutical companies, with their patents, charge the NHS large amounts of money.

Even as it is, the NHS is not really able to provide the best level of care to everyone. The treatments that people get vary according to where they live.

A&E cuts trigger closures

By Gerry Bates

Around 26 accident and emergency departments are scheduled for closure across the country.

Emergency departments account for a relatively small proportion of the NHS budget (5.1% in London), so what is behind this wave of closures?

In the last ten years there has been a centralisation of specialist emergency services, including for major trauma, cardiac and stroke care. This change has been partly based on evidence that departments treating larger numbers get better results; but it has also meant these services are further away for many people.

With those changes established, only a minority of A&E departments treat all emergency conditions. That leaves the remaining units vulnerable to being replaced by Minor Injuries Units or GP walk-in centres.

But it has been shown that only ten to thirty per cent of A&E patients could be safely treated in primary care alone. The walk-in centres and Minor Injuries Units have been very expensive and do not take much strain away from emergency departments.

In many other cases the "alternative community provision" does not exist, and the closure of an A&E is simply a

cut. In the current plan for closure in north-west London there is a planned cut of 14% of A&E attendances (100,000 fewer patients), with no substantial increase in alternatives.

Emergency departments are not only the public face of many hospitals but also a key part of core clinical services. The loss of an emergency department reduces demand for intensive care and high dependency beds in the hospital. Less emergency surgery is carried out, and it can then be argued that the emergency surgery would be better done in a busier centre.

As services wither it becomes harder to recruit medical and nursing staff. The closure of A&E departments is often the first step towards decline and closure of a district hospital.

...y to stop A&E closure!

How they won at the Whittington

Shirley Franklin is chair of the Defend Whittington Hospital Campaign, which in 2009-10 defeated plans to close the A&E and other departments there. She spoke to *Solidarity*.

We had petitions – not just e-petitions, but also petitions we took onto the streets. We collected about 25,000 names altogether, of which about 20,000 were got face-to-face, on the streets. That was hard work, but it was important.

Support from the Islington Tribune played a crucial role. Someone had told [local Labour MP] Jeremy Corbyn about the closure plan. As soon as the news leaked out, there was a public meeting. That first meeting was huge, and the campaign just kept getting bigger.

We called ourselves a coalition. It was a cross-party thing; we got local Lib Dem and Labour members involved. We even had a bunch of Tories from the Highgate Society come down to get involved!

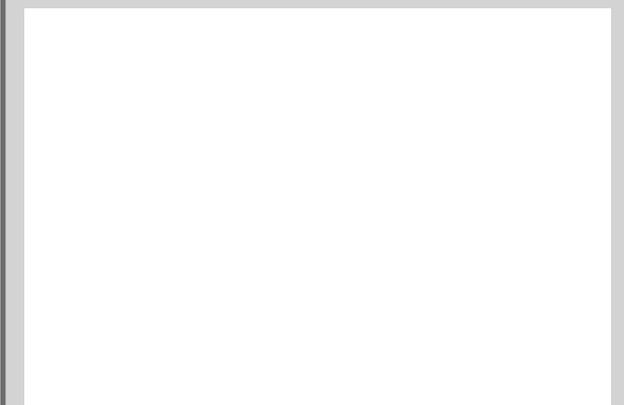
The other thing that was crucial was the involvement of unions. We went to their meetings and asked for donations, which was a way of engaging with them and getting them involved. On our final day of action, we had activities right across the borough – not only outside health centres, but at post offices, at the bus garage, at universities, at colleges, at schools. Everyone was involved.

Dealing with the involvement of people like [Tory health spokesperson Andrew] Lansley [who offered support to the campaign] was difficult. Lansley spoke at the demo saying that the A&E would be safe in Tory hands; we got all that on the website, on tape. None of us could quite believe he'd said it.

I think we saved the hospital. If the A&E had gone it would've been a first step towards closure. But there have still been massive cuts to A&E. They've cut the staffing right back, and there are worse waiting times than ever.

The Unison branch at the Whittington hadn't even had a general meeting, and our encouragement and engagement helped them to have one. It was hard to engage with workers at first, because health sector unions are very intimidated.

When we first organised actions at the hospital, managers told workers they'd be sacked if they attended in uniform. But their involvement is irreplaceable.



Shirley Franklin

The involvement of health workers will be crucial to campaigns to stop closures

Cancel the PFI debts!

By Todd Hamer

Despite excellent clinical outcomes, South London Healthcare Trust has failed to balance its books because it is bled dry by PFI (Public Finance Initiative) debt.

Last year the Trust "overspent" by £65 million and paid out £69 million on PFI. Instead of cancelling the debt, the government wants to close down wards and services.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was a scheme set up by the Major government in the 1990s and continued with enthusiasm by New Labour.

PFI allows a consortium of private investors (usually a mixture of finance, construction and service industry capitalists) to build and maintain a public building, like a hospital, and then rent it back to the public like a massive hire-purchase scheme.

EXTORTIONATE

The consortium also locks the public sector into extortionate maintenance contracts. After several decades of extortion the building eventually falls into public ownership.

A lot of the PFI contracts were sold off after the initial building work. Carillion, for example, sold its rights to future PFI income from Portsmouth's Queen Alexandra Hospital for £31 million after an initial investment of just £12 million (160% profit!).

According to analyst Dexter Whitfield, a great majority of PFI assets are now held by private individuals in offshore tax havens.

If the government wishes to borrow money for big capital

investment projects (like building hospitals), it can do so at rock bottom rates. By using PFI, the government is choosing to pay more (to the private contractors) for less (for the NHS).

Total PFI payments will reach £65 billion by 2048 — for hospitals that cost just £11.3 billion to build. Three major PFI hospitals in Norwich, Peterborough and Chelmsford cost £642 million to build but will end up costing the NHS £4.25 billion by 2043.

South London Healthcare now pays out 15% of its operating budget on servicing PFI.

Allyson Pollock states: "the high costs of PFI debt charges means that the NHS can only operate anything from a third to half as many services and staff as it would have done had the scheme been funded through conventional procurement. In other words, for every PFI hospital up and running, equity investors and bankers are charging as if for two".

The socialist solution is to cancel the debt and take the hospitals into public ownership. By doing that we can liberate the NHS from its role as a slush fund for private investors and free up taxpayers' money to be spent on equitable healthcare.

Labour pledged at its last conference that it would "liberate the NHS from extortionate PFI debt"; but the Labour leadership will need to feel the force of a mass working-class movement behind them before they stand up to capitalist class interests and reverse their former policy.

Even the Tories could easily take the PFI debt onto the public accounts, thus cancelling it for South London Healthcare Trust and enabling it to continue without closures.

● nhsunity.com

A founder of Italian Trotskyism

Our Movement By Mich el MacEoin

Pietro Tresso (1893-1943) was a leading member of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) and one of the first Italian Trotskyists.

Initially a member of the "maximalist" (left-wing) current of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), Tresso was accused in 1917 of distributing documents from the anti-war Zimmerwald Conference. He was acquitted and became a PSI councillor in Schio, north-east Italy, editing the maximalist newspaper *El Visentin*.

Tresso joined the PCd'I in January 1921. That year he was attacked by fascists and moved to Berlin. He began contributing to the publications of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), or Profintern, the body established by the Communist International to co-ordinate communist work in the trade unions.

Tresso returned to Italy and in 1926 was elected to the PCd'I central committee. From 1928 the Communist International was arguing that the world had entered a "new phase of revolutionary upsurge", a "Third Period". In July 1929 the CI dropped the united front in favour of the ultra-left line that social democrats were to be considered "social fascists".

Trotsky's critique of the "Third Period" was shared by members of the Central Committee of the PCd'I, including Tresso, Alfonso Leonetti and Paolo Ravazzoli.

However, the group lacked the political coherence to launch a successful faction fight in the party and they raised no dissent on the Central Committee until March 1930. The Stalinist faction, now led by Palmiro Togliatti, then removed them from their positions in the party.

The oppositionists made contact with the Trotsky's International Left Opposition (ILO) in April 1930. They began to contribute to *La V rit *, the French Trotskyist paper, and wrote a criticism of the Stalinist "Third Period" policies and an attack on the Italian majority. They also declared their affinity with the ILO, announcing the formation of the Nuova Opposizione Italiana (NOI, Italian New Opposition).

The ILO already had an Italian section, led by some followers of Amadeo Bordiga. The appearance of the Leonetti group pushed things to a break between the ILO and the Bordigists. It also provided a reason for the Stalinist majority in the PCd'I to expel the oppositionist comrades from the party in June 1930.

When Antonio Gramsci's brother Gennaro visited him in jail the next month, Antonio Gramsci said that he thought the oppositionists had been right.

The Italian oppositionists were, in fact, all political  migr s living in France, because of the repressive conditions in Mussolini's Italy. The five members of the NOI leading committee became members of the French section.

The French group was soon rocked by a factional disagreement between the followers of Pierre Naville and those of Raymond Molinier. Tresso sided with Molinier's faction and drifted away from the NOI, developing disagreements with the rest of its leadership. At one point, in 1933, the NOI leadership expelled him. The International Secretariat overruled the NOI's bureaucratic methods. Thereafter Tresso became more involved in the Ligue Communiste.

One of the tests of facing the Trotskyist organisations in this period was responding to the growth of a left current within social democracy. Trotsky urged the French section to enter the Section Fran aise de l'Internationale Ouvri re (SFIO).

RESISTED

Tresso was amongst those who initially resisted this turn, eventually leaving along with Naville to found the Groupe Communiste Internationaliste. The GCI, however, later joined the SFIO and co-operated with the official French section.

When Gramsci died on 27 April 1937 it was Tresso who wrote the obituary for the French Trotskyist paper *La Lutte Ouvri re*, attempting to prevent Togliatti and the Stalinists in the PCd'I from "exploiting Gramsci's personality to serve their own ends."

On 3 September 1938 Tresso represented the Italian section, by now almost non-existent, at the founding congress of the Fourth International, and was elected to the International Executive Committee (IEC).

When the war broke out, Tresso remained in Paris. By mid-1941 the Gestapo became aware of his underground activities and he moved to the south of France. He was reluctant to leave France, but he attempted to get papers to reach Mexico with the help of his brother-in-law, Ignazio Silone.

This was unsuccessful and he resumed work in the leading committee of the French Trotskyist organisation in the French Southern Zone. In June 1942, Tresso was arrested along with several others by a special police unit sent from Vichy for the purpose of rounding up Trotskyists. He was sentenced to a ten-year term of forced labour.

The prisoners were later moved to a military prison and,

after the dissolution of the French army, to Puy-en-Velay, in the Haute-Loire along with many Stalinist prisoners, with whom relations were hostile. In October 1943, on the third attempt, all the prisoners were freed by Stalinist partisans.

Tresso became part of a band of guerrillas in the Haute-Loire department, led by the Stalinists, which was dissolved in November 1943. By the time it was reconstituted in June 1944, Tresso and three younger comrades had disappeared. His death was first announced in September 1944 by the French Trotskyists' underground newspaper, although no mention was made of the circumstances.

After 1944, Tresso's companion Debora Seidenfeld learned from Paul Schmierer, a left-wing doctor associated with the PSOP and the POUM, that he had knowledge of Tresso from another partisan in the same region.

His source was the historian Marc Bloch, who was executed by the Gestapo near Lyons in June 1944. According to Bloch, Tresso "continued to be regarded as a suspect man and treated as a prisoner" by the Stalinists and he was forced to do hard labour.

It is beyond doubt that Tresso and his three comrades were executed by the Stalinists when the band of guerrillas was initially dissolved. Although he subsequently denied all knowledge of events, Th odore Vial, a commander of the unit who later became a member of the French Communist Party (PCF) Central Committee, told local police in 1945 that: "They were Trotskyists. They were executed as traitors. The local chief of police of the time knew all that."

PARTISAN

Controversy has raged in Italy about the case, especially after the publication of a biography of Tresso by Alfredo Azzaroni.

There were challenges to Togliatti, who as PCd'I leader, resident in Moscow until February 1944, was likely to have known about the liquidation of French Trotskyists. In 1978, a special edition of the far-left newspaper *Lotta Continua* was dedicated to the 35th anniversary of Tresso's death.

As Pierre Naville has written: "The memory of the Trotskyist militant Pietro Tresso does not belong either to his assassins or to their direct or indirect accomplices. It belongs to the working people, to the young workers and peasants of Italy.

"Let the best amongst them rise and take once more the banner that Tresso upheld high for his whole life! It is in this way, and only in this way, that justice will be done to him."

The threat from the Islamists in Tunisia

concerning democracy and freedom, and also the social and economic problems, which are fundamental.

If things are going badly in Tunisia, it is because no answer has been given to the demands of the poorest and the middle layers of society, and instead their situation has worsened with the policies of the Ennahda neoliberals.

There has been an increase in the number of unemployed, maybe to a million, and a big rise in prices. Daily life is becoming more difficult. In different regions and sectors, people are mobilising.

To want to make that sort of all-inclusive front against Ennahda, without taking into account the economic aspect, is a bad choice.

Some say Ennahda represents "moderate Islamism"...

I do not think that is true. We challenge the very idea. Ennahda is a very heterogeneous movement, with which extremists and moderates. Admittedly, some of its members are moderate, but the project itself is not moderate.

Ennahda refuses, for example, to include a reference to universal human rights in the preamble of the constitution. That religious reflex is very worrying, and all the Ennahda members of parliament voted for it.

Ahlem Belhadj, a doctor and a member of the UGTT trade union, is best known as the president of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women. Ahlem has also been a Trotskyist for many years, and is currently a member of the Left Workers' League (LGO).

Against Ennahda [the Islamist party currently ruling Tunisia], what about those who propose a broad front ranging from the left to the supporters of the old regime?

Several problems are posed by Ennahda. There are those

Is Tunisia moving towards a theocratic dictatorship like Iran?

That risk would arise with a counter-revolution. But I am more optimistic. The social movement is lively, and we have a society that is truly mobilising.

A process that was unleashed long before 14 January [the outbreak of the uprising which toppled the old regime] is still ongoing. The proof is what happens on a daily basis. Every day, there are dozens if not scores of mobilisations in all sectors: workers, journalists, lawyers, feminists, etc.

It is really a very important social awakening. Nothing is yet, definitive, in one direction or the other.

What is certain is the need for answers to the needs of the Tunisians people, and Ennahda is unable to provide them. For that reason, either Ennahda will try to impose a dictatorship or the movement will sweep it aside. Everything remains open at this time, because the people are still mobilised.

And there is the international factor. Tunisia is not a country isolated from the rest of the world.

In other words, the revolution continues. It is a permanent revolution!

• From *Tout est   nous*, weekly paper of the NPA, 1/11/2012.

The Quebec student revolt

Kevin Paul was a member of the “strike maintenance and enlargement committee” of CLASSE, the radical Quebec student organisation that led this year’s struggle against tuition fee increases. He spoke to *Solidarity* during his recent speaking tour of the UK, organised by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

In 2011 the Liberal Party government of Quebec announced plans to raise university tuition by 75 percent over five years. This year, after a long campaign of political education and simmering protests, the student movement escalated into an explosion.

An unlimited student strike — the only tactic that activists believed could win — began in February. Most of the local participating student associations were affiliated with the coalition CLASSE. After two months the government began negotiating.

In April there were mass actions linking the tuition hike to opposition to the Plan Nord, which is an economic plan to “develop” northern Quebec in the interest of mining companies, with bad consequences for indigenous peoples and the environment. On 4 May fifty busloads of students besieged the Liberal Party conference in Victoriaville.

Negotiations resulted in concessions, limiting the fee rise and staging it over seven years, but this was not nearly enough to demobilise the movement.

At this point, the government attempted repression. The courts had already granted anti-strike student injunctions against picketing and disrupting classes, which we defied. Now Parliament passed an emergency law, Loi 78 [Bill 78], which suspended the student semester, banned picketing at universities and required all demonstrations to submit their planned routes to the police.

This backfired massively. On 22 May, hundreds of thousands of people protested in Montreal in defiance of the law, on a demonstration not registered with the police. The more moderate student organisations attempted a legal march, but perhaps 99 percent of the protesters went with CLASSE.

The fight against Loi 78 involved many thousands of new people in the movement.

In August, afraid of a revival of the student movement after the summer, the government dissolved parliament and called an election a year before it had to. The Liberal Party lost office. The new Parti Québécois [PQ: nationalist, broadly social democratic] government cancelled the fee hike and other neo-liberal measures such as increased electricity rates and a healthcare tax, and repealed Loi 78.

STUDENT MOVEMENT STRUCTURE

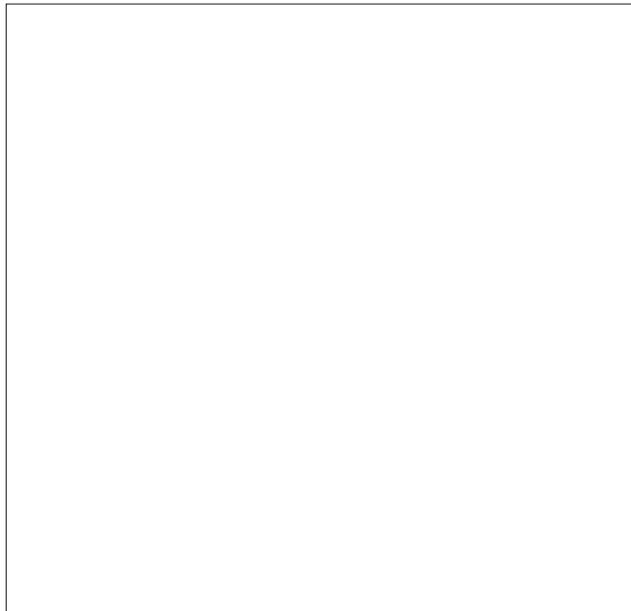
Unique to us is a large and effective counterpower which sees its role as militantly defending students’ interests as well as engaging with bigger political issues.

This is ASSE [the Association for Student Union Solidarity], the organisation which at the beginning of this struggle launched the coalition CLASSE [“Big Coalition of ASSE”]. [CLASSE has now been dissolved]

ASSE was established in 2001, but it comes out of an oppositional current in the student movement and goes back decades. Its slogan is “Democracy, Solidarity, Combativity”. We stand for a syndicalisme du combat (“combative student unionism”). ASSE is an explicitly anti-racist, feminist and anti-imperialist, and implicitly anticapitalist, organisation.

ASSE is and CLASSE was based in large part on local, directly democratic structures which as far as I know are unique to Quebec — associations in university departments, each with its own general assembly. Students tend to organise around these units, working most closely with people on the same courses, who they know well, sharing the same issues, which for obvious reasons makes it easier to mobilise than university-wide structures. Different departmental associations affiliate to different student federations.

CLASSE also had higher-up structures, but with the emphasis very much on control from below. During the struggle decisions were made by weekly congresses, but the delegates at these congresses could only take positions on issues which had been discussed in their assemblies. The delegations were often rotated week to week. In several cases the congress had to send the issue back to the associations for discussion,



Striking against a tuition hike

which obviously took longer but ensured that CLASSE decisions really represented the views of the grassroots

The more mainstream federations, FEUQ [university students] and FECQ [sixth/FE equivalent], also include local associations but are more heavily based on campus-wide student unions, which are much less democratic and responsive and play a more minor role in student struggles. Many FEUQ- and FECQ-supporting associations joined the CLASSE coalition because they wanted to play a full role in the strike.

These ongoing structures are very important for allowing knowledge and skills to be transferred from one generation of students to the next. They are not set up spontaneously during the struggle but already exist, which means activists can concentrate on actually mobilising.

Unlike in earlier struggles, for instance 2005, FEUQ and FECQ could not dominate negotiations with the government and use this position to demobilise the grassroots struggles.

Students can most effectively build power when we act outside the spaces that the state deems appropriate for political argument and engagement.

We should rely on our own alternative forms of democracy, not on dialogue with politicians, or even just on stunts that look good in the media.

At its best ASSE and CLASSE and the movement around them got “out of control” in the good sense; not only that no one political organisation could control them, but that many of the actions were not called from above or even by official bodies, but spread like wildfire with more and more people autonomously organising on their initiative.

Clearly the government and the ruling class viewed this as a serious threat — hence new proposals to “give legal recognition” to student strikes, which in reality means legally limiting them.

MY OWN UNIVERSITY

My university, McGill, is largely Anglophone and quite politically conservative. There were more and larger barriers to successful mobilisation than elsewhere.

At McGill we began with a very small minority and never had the majority on strike. It was mainly students from certain departments — English, Philosophy, Art History, Gender and Sexual Diversity Studies, French Literature, Social Work...

Nonetheless the McGill strike was highly significant. The fact that there was mass involvement at such privileged and prestigious institution will have caused major alarm to university management, the bosses and the government.

One thing which helped prepare the ground was a strike of non-academic staff over wage scales, benefits and pensions in autumn 2011. The strikes lasted four months and won a partial victory; there was major student solidarity and as a result a much more political atmosphere developed on campus.

QUEBEC NATIONAL QUESTION

Historically the left in Quebec has been closely tied to the movement for sovereignty [i.e. independence].

This has introduced tensions into many social movements, particularly given that the nationalist movement has many reactionary, chauvinistic and xenophobic elements.

During the protests there were some Quebec flags on the streets, and we were very aware of the potential for deeper social questions to be distorted through a nationalist lens. My view, and it is a view shared by many, is that independence would bring little benefit and could bring new threats. The same people who are somewhat excluded from the student movement, for instance international students and students of colour, who are also most affected by the neoliberal assault, have the most to lose from nationalism.

ASSE is very much non-nationalist and committed to internationalism. For instance, we demand free education for everyone studying in Quebec, regardless of their origin. The other student federations are closer to the nationalists — one FECQ leader became a PQ MP. Their politics mean they not only fail to demand free education, but accept this discrimination against non-Quebecois students.

There was a strong sense that our struggle was unfolding in the context of similar international battles — in Chile, in the UK, in Spain, Greece, California.

We also took inspiration from the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, though I think it was right to be cautious what was said about this, given the difference between a campaign against a tuition hike and the overthrow of dictators.

OFFICIAL POLITICS?

My attitude is that the government’s decision to call an election was an effective and intelligent tactic, pulling students away from our own grassroots forms of democracy and into liberal representative democracy.

Some in the movement advocated a vote for particular parties — generally the PQ or Quebec Solidaire [a small left social-democratic party] — others just a vote “against” the Liberals. Some explicitly advocated not voting. Others — I think this is the most interesting position — didn’t tell people not to vote, but argued that we should use the elections to expose the limitations of liberal democracy and get discussion about the alternatives. The crucial thing was advocating that the struggle continued regardless of the election.

Students’ and workers’ struggles are, of course, inherently connected.

At one point aviation workers at Aveos [which does airframe and engine maintenance for Air Canada] were on strike: CLASSE moved its congress to the town where they were based and our delegates took part in their march.

Relations with the national trade unions were mixed. A number of unions provided financial support, but there were also attempts to limit the solidarity movement, for instance when the FTQ [Quebec union federation] told unions in other parts of Canada not to get involved. At negotiations with the government there were often trade union executive members present, and they generally allied with the moderate student federations to advocate students accept a bad deal

WHERE NEXT?

The PQ government is holding an “education summit” early next year. ASSE is demanding free education. The government is talking about indexing fees to inflation, which would obviously mean indefinite increases.

There’s a debate about whether the student movement should participate in the summit. It is a forum in which corporate interests which will have a disproportionate voice, but we need to decide what our tactics towards it should be.

On 22 November there will be a mass student demonstration under the slogan “Education in the service of globalisation — no pasaran!” (part of a national week of action).

Things are quieter, but the radical wing of the Quebec student movement is getting stronger. Many of the associations which joined CLASSE are now affiliating to ASSE. This bodes well for future struggles.

Our Remembrance

This is the abridged text of a speech given by Workers' Liberty member Edward Maltby to an AWL forum entitled "Our Remembrance: a working-class history of war" at the University of London Union on Thursday 15 November.

The meeting was attended by over 100 people, stirred up by a controversy around Workers' Liberty member and ULU Vice President Daniel Cooper's refusal to take part in an official University of London Remembrance ceremony.

Daniel had been subjected to a right-wing smear campaign. For a report of the meeting, see workersliberty.org/warmeeting. For a statement supporting Daniel Cooper signed by student activists and academics, see workersliberty.org/dlcstatement

This week Britain remembers. Day-to-day politics has been suspended and we are treated to a spectacle which is said to be "apolitical", above and beyond politics. The leaders of opposing parties put aside their quarrels and rally round to show their respect.

Officially, they are showing respect to the dead. But the symbols at the centre of the Remembrance Day ceremony aren't simply symbols of the dead, or of human suffering, or grief. This is also a pageant of nationalism, monarchism, militarism. It is based on selective memory of historical events.

The Union Jack predominates and military dress uniforms evoke an imperial past. Weapons are flashed around. The inscription on the Cenotaph does not read, "the murdered dead", which is what they are. It says, "the Glorious Dead".

Who officiates at these ceremonies? This year it was Tony Blair, architect of a war in which one million Iraqis have died. And David Cameron, recently returned from selling arms to the Bahrain government for them to use on protesters.

What is this Remembrance institution? The President of the British Legion resigned in October, having been caught using his position to broker arms deals. The Poppy appeal itself was founded by General Haig, who organised the slaughters at the Somme and Passchendaele.

MONARCHY

The monarchy and the military — the institutions which organised the First World War — are what is really venerated in the official Remembrance ceremonies.

What a perverse way of mourning the dead! The only way to defend this perversity is to build up great walls of moral hysteria, of mawkish sentimentality which turns to self-righteous aggression when it encounters critical thought, as in the case of the Tory witch-hunt against Daniel Cooper or the arrest of a teenager in Kent for burning a poppy. Such tactics have nothing to do with defending the dignity of the dead and everything to do with defending the sanctity of the institutions, the symbols, and the politics of the war and of the British state.

Revolutionary socialists like the AWL are not pacifists. We do not denounce the First World War because we simply denounce all war.

In 1936 a war broke out in Spain. Fascist and monarchist generals organised an offensive against the Spanish Republic and the mass struggles of the working class. They rolled northward across Spain, crushing democracy and outlawing dissent, free association, free speech and trade unions as they went.

On the Republican side, the labour movement rose to defend itself. The workers' movement organised its own battalions, to prosecute the war of defence.

Socialists around the world supported the Republican side in this war, and the workers fought, through their factory committees and political parties, to make a Workers' Republic in Spain. They organised international brigades of volunteers to travel to Spain to fight on the side of the Republic.

2,000 British people went to Spain to fight, mostly organised by the Independent Labour Party and the Communist Party. 500 of them died. 28 British ships were sunk by the fascists. There are no parades, no pious speeches from prime ministers for these dead. Princes and generals do not appear in public to lay wreaths for them.

Capitalist politicians knew what Franco represented — a reaction against the revolutionary-minded workers of Spain.

David Cameron lays a wreath. We do not participate in capitalists' glorification of their own crimes.

When news reached the House of Commons that ships carrying British volunteers had been sunk, Tory MPs cheered.

So what is the criterion socialists use to decide what to make of a war? The Prussian officer Carl von Clausewitz wrote that war is the continuation of politics by other means. We agree with that. The question we ask is: "what is the politics of which this war is a continuation?"

In the case of the First World War the answer is clear: competition between colonial powers for the plunder of the global south, and a struggle between world powers for dominance.

Since the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Britain had been the dominant industrial and world power in Europe. Whereas France was wracked by a series of revolutions, Britain's ruling class defeated the Chartists. It avoided upheavals in the year 1848. It had been able to colonise India and dominate the world markets through aggressively promoting free trade against other colonial powers.

By 1870, Britain's world domination was being challenged. In 1871 Germany unified itself under Prussian leadership, and rapidly industrialised.

SLAUGHTER

Following the slaughter of 30,000 workers in the crushing of the Paris Commune, a period of revolutionary upheaval was temporarily ended in France.

Following the victory of the North in the American Civil War, US industry and trade vastly expanded. Japan, Italy and Russia began to modernise with increasing speed from the second half of the 20th century.

As competition between Britain and these emerging powers intensified, Britain could no longer easily dominate the world system of free trade through economic superiority alone; it became necessary to use direct military conquest to wall parts of the world off from the influence of competitor nations and to secure markets and resources.

It was competition with France, and a fear that France would directly seize previous areas of British influence, that led Britain to send troops to seize large parts of Africa, for the first time. Other European nations followed suit; each power rushed to seize sufficient territory to bolster its own industry and prestige.

Half a billion people became the subjects of European empires, to be used as chattels and fodder for the metropolises back in Europe.

The source of the inter-nation tensions that exploded in 1914 was a worldwide race to enslave. The First World War resembled nothing so much as a smaller slaveholder waging war on a larger slaveholder in the name of a more equitable distribution of slaves. To dress this up as a war for freedom in any sense is a piece of grotesque, wheedling hypocrisy.

But the development of capitalism also created something which carried with it the hope of a higher form of human society, of the future of civilization — the working class.

Amidst the squalor of the newly industrialising cities, the

working class began to organise and move, where it had previously been considered too dissolute, too downtrodden, to make anything of itself.

In the 1880s and 1890s in Europe, this movement took great steps forward. In Russia, a wave of strikes began which would culminate in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. In Britain a great strike and unionising movement of the unorganised and lowest paid workers began.

This continent-wide movement of awakening and self-assertion became the foundation for the socialist project. It expressed an unquenchable desire for human liberty and dignity, for the human potential of even the poorest to be developed to the full.

This movement for the liberation of mankind from crushing poverty, 12-hour days, ignorance and disease was the authentic force for freedom and liberty, against despotism and slavery — not the armies of the British crown, the Tsar or the French capitalist class.

The disgust and hatred of the capitalist class for this movement was reflected and acted on in the conduct of the war, not least in the shooting of deserters and the use by officers of Field Punishment Number One — the act of strapping soldiers to crucifixes for hours at a time, a punishment which frequently resulted in death.

The nationalism and chauvinism generated in the build-up to the war was used as an ideological bulwark against socialism — the idea that we are "all in this together", a national community united under one ruler and one national destiny, rather than a collection of competing classes.

NATIONALIST

The British Legion, founded by Haig and Lord Derby as part of a nationalist drive, was set up explicitly to displace and undermine grassroots organisations such as the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors, which were linked to the labour movement, and which campaigned under the slogan "justice not charity".

In all belligerent countries, entry into the war was used as a pretext to outlaw public criticism of the government, strikes and organising. In the UK, the use of military force to suppress strikes was not new: Winston Churchill had deployed troops and special constables to suppress the Cambrian Combine coal miners' strike in Wales in 1910.

Under the Defence of the Realm Act, hundreds of activists were jailed and strikes were suppressed. Dozens of labour movement and socialist presses were seized and smashed. The Defence of the Realm Act continued after the war as the Emergency Powers Act. Under this Act, soldiers were deployed against strikes in the north east in 1921 and against the General Strike in 1926. The law was only repealed in 2004.

The greatest blow struck against the workers' movement in the war was simply physical destruction. Writing from prison in 1915, German socialist Rosa Luxemburg described the significance of the mass death:

"The world war today is demonstrably not only murder on a grand scale; it is also suicide of the working classes of Europe. The soldiers of socialism, the proletarians of England, France, Germany, Russia, and Belgium have for months been killing one another at the behest of capital. They are driving the cold steel of murder into each other's hearts. Locked in the embrace of death, they tumble into a common grave.

"This is more [significant] than the ruthless destruction of Liege and the Rheims cathedral. This is an assault, not on the bourgeois culture of the past, but on the socialist culture of the future, a lethal blow against that force which carries the future of humanity within itself and which alone can bear the precious treasures of the past into a better society. Here capitalism lays bear its death's head; here it betrays the fact that its historical rationale is used up; its continued domination is no longer reconcilable to the progress of humanity."

The "sacrifice" of the dead of the First World War was not the noble sacrifice of nationalist myth. It was the human sacrifice of a barbarian, irrational system butchering people for barbarian ends. Better, and ultimately many times more respectful, to remember the dead in a way which is truthful.

Cleaners' revolt continues

Rail cleaners' co-ordinated strike

By Ira Berkovic

Rail cleaners across multiple services and contracts will strike together on Friday 30 November and Saturday 1 December.

ISS cleaners on London Midland and East Coast service, Carlisle cleaners on the Docklands Light Railway and First TransPennine Express, Churchill cleaners on the Tyne & Wear Metro, and Initial cleaners on London Underground are all in dispute with their employers over a raft of issues including living wages, sick pay, and pension rights. Cleaners on four of the contracts had previously struck together on 2 November, while Tube cleaners took high-profile strike action during the London Olympic Games this summer.

As well as picketing stations and depots, cleaners will hold rallies in every town affected by the strike. The RMT has declared its intention to strike again over the Christmas period. Janine Booth, who represents London Transport workers on the RMT Executive, said: "Every trade unionist, socialist, and decent human being should get behind the cleaners' strikes."

"Our different disputes are coming together as a national movement which, with support and solidarity, can win."

A London rally will also take place in Conway Hall at 7pm Thursday 29 November.

John Lewis cleaners win

From the Industrial Workers of the World

Outsourced John Lewis cleaners have won an immediate and backdated 9% pay rise following their pledge of industrial action.

The increase, backdated five months, takes their pay to £6.72 per hour at three central London sites, and £6.50 at one outer London site. Supervisors will now get £8.00 per hour and £7.84 respectively.

The cleaners notified their employer, ICM, last week of the trade dispute and impending ballot for industrial action. This ballot could have seen visible and noisy industrial action by cleaners at four John Lewis sites in London in the run up to Christmas.

John Lewis has seen pre-Christmas profits increase on last year already. The company are proud of their partnership structure, where all staff are "partners" who share in the company's profits.

SUBCONTRACTED
But John Lewis' cleaning contract is outsourced to MML, who outsource it again to ICM.

The cleaners have seen their hours reduce and workload increase, while they were paid minimum wage of £6.19 – and they don't share in the profits.

This increase, including a backdated lump sum just before Christmas, will make a real difference to our members' lives. ICM further pledged to look at the potential to pay a Living Wage of £8.55 as they enter contract talks early in 2013.

IWW National Secretary Frank Syrratt said:

"It is our members' unity, solidarity and courageous stance that has won this increase. They are an inspiration and a lesson to other workers. There is still work

to do. John Lewis needs to ensure all their workers — whether partners or outsourced — take home a Living Wage of £8.55 and receive full sick pay, lifting them out of poverty and insecurity.

"IWW pledges to continue organising and campaigning to make this happen".

Unison must back its members!

By a Unison activist

Despite winning the London Living Wage last year, following a dynamic and militant campaign, sub-contracted workers (cleaners, catering staff, and others) at the University of London do not have access to the same pensions, sick pay, and holiday rights as their directly-employed colleagues.

Workers have launched the "3 Cosas" ("Three Causes") campaign to fight around those issues. University of London's central administration — which includes the Senate House library and the intercollegiate halls of residence — outsources its cleaning, maintenance, security, and catering services. Aramark takes care of catering, and Balfour Beatty Workplace does everything else. These companies have their own employment and wage policies and their own standards about what constitutes fair treatment in the workplace, distinct from

the policies and procedures of the main employer.

Can the university afford these basic rights? Yes, without question. The University has operating surpluses of £4.1 and £2.8 million in the 2010/11 and 2009/10 academic years, respectively. Furthermore, as of end of July 2011, the University of London had £93.2 million in reserves.

So far the campaign has primarily been about building involvement of wider sections of the workers, and building the campaign amongst students. There is growing media attention on the campaign, and the workers even spoke alongside David Miliband at the launch of the Labour Party's own Living Wage "campaign".

Recently, the campaign sought their Unison branch's support for the demands of the campaign and funding for much needed campaign materials. This was rejected. The leadership of the local branch have played disgraceful role, backed up by bureaucrats in the regional office. They have claimed that supporting the campaign would be "illegal", and because it is not being run directly by the branch, they cannot provide funding. The regional office have even stepped in to conduct management's propaganda campaign for them and say that the pensions demand is not possible!

Workers within the branch are continuing their pressure on the leadership, but are growing increasingly frustrated.

Wildcats at Crown Paint

Workers at three Crown Paint factories have taken wildcat strike action after bosses announced plans to cut workers' pensions.

Shop stewards at the factory in Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, convened a mass meeting after bosses announced they were reducing early retirement payments for members of the final-salary pension scheme. Union representatives were informed of the attack at 10am on Monday 19 November, and were told that the cut had come into effect from 9am that day!

Following the meeting, workers walked off the job. According to a report from the National Shop Stewards Network, the walkout included many younger workers who are not even able to join the final-salary scheme, as it was closed to new starters two years ago, and even some junior managers.

There are also reports of wildcats at Crown plants in Gateshead and Liverpool, and a brief sit-down strike in the staff canteen at a plant in Neath.

Uni strike

Lecturers at Queen Mary University of London will strike on Thursday 22 November, in protest at restructuring and job losses.

A statement from the University and College Union (UCU) said: "Queen Mary managers have restructured 17 departments and schools, resulting in large-scale redundancies in Biological and Chemical Sciences and Medicine and Dentistry.

"[Management's new performance assessment system also] seeks to frighten staff into working even harder than they currently do by using crude metrics to assess them."

Love Music, Hate Poverty Pay

Barbican cleaners' protest, Saturday 24 November, 6pm @ The Barbican, London. Organised by the Industrial Workers of Great Britain.

More: iwgb.org.uk

Tube Lines workers strike again

pensions and travel pass equality with the rest of Transport for London staff.

Tube Lines is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Transport for London; the RMT says its refusal to equalise its staff's pensions and travel pass rights is "inexcusable".

The Tube Lines workers' strike committee has discussed plans for an ongoing programme of action, targeting key engineering projects over the coming months.

Members of train drivers' union ASLEF employed by Tube Lines are also striking on Friday 23 November as part of a separate dispute over management bullying, increasing the pressure on Tube Lines bosses.

In next week's *Solidarity* class war in Southampton — different views from Unison branch secretary Mike Tucker and rebel councillors Don Thomas and Keith Morrell.

By Darren Bedford

Engineering and maintenance workers employed by Tube Lines on London Underground will strike on Friday 23 November, in an ongoing battle to win

Construction electricians and their supporters clashed with police on Oxford Street on 14 November, as they picketed the Crossrail site to demand reinstatement for union activists sacked from Crossrail's Westbourne Park site. The picket was called to coincide with the European general strike.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Fight for women's right to choose

By Rosalind Robson

Campaigners for women's rights staged

demonstrations in Dublin (pictured) and all over the world in protest at the death of Savita Halap-

panavar.

Savita, living and working in Ireland, had asked for an abortion 17 weeks

into her pregnancy.

Her request, based on the knowledge that she had miscarried, was refused by doctors because they said they could hear a foetal heartbeat.

Savita fell ill as the pregnancy continued and later died of septicaemia.

Abortion is strictly illegal in Ireland.

However, in 1992 the courts ruled that women could have an abortion where there was substantial risk to their life.

Since then there have been numerous delays and obstacles to passing legislation which reflects that ruling. Savita is not the first woman to die.

We must rally in support of women in Ireland and everywhere where church and state conspire in bigotry to stop women from having the right to choose.

Ford: occupations can stop the closures

By Darren Bedford

Nearly a month after the announcement that Ford was axing 1,500 jobs (closing its Southampton Transit Van plant, and cutting jobs at the Dagenham stamping plant which supplies it), there are still no details of a high-profile, public campaign against the closure from Ford unions.

Shop stewards, conveners and union officials have been conducting negotia-

tions with management.

Unions are in a difficult position, particularly as Ford is attempting to bribe workers by offering handsome severance packages; but they must go on the offensive to stand any chance of saving jobs.

In a context of job cuts, wage freezes, and other attacks across both the public and private sector, a fight-back by Ford unions involving workers and the local community could become massive. It should in-

clude demonstrations, public meetings, and occupations of the plants to stop equipment being moved. Unite says it hasn't "ruled out" industrial action: good. It's time to rule it in.

Any action should demand the defence of jobs, and not engage in quibbling with the bosses over "business plans".

If there is insufficient demand for Ford Transit Vans to maintain work at Southampton, the factory should be repurposed and

the workers retrained with no loss of earnings.

If Ford refuses to repurpose the factory and retrain its staff, unions should demand that the government take the plant into public ownership. There is no shortage of products that a large manufacturing facility could make; Ford workers' skills should be put to use on socially-useful, stimulating labour.

They should not be cast aside because of the whims of the market.

Wal-Mart workers plan "Black Friday" strikes

By Ira Berkovic

Workers at Wal-Mart stores across America are planning to strike on Friday 23 November – "Black Friday", the biggest holiday-season shopping day, falling in the week preceding Thanksgiving and a month from Christmas.

Wal-Mart workers, mainly organised in union-affiliated workers' centres such as Making Change at Wal-Mart (which runs the "OUR Walmart" campaign), have waged a long-running campaign for rights at work which has already seen strikes and other direct actions at many stores.

Wal-Mart, the world's biggest retailer, has long been seen as one of the main foes of organised labour in America and equips managers with advice on how to keep their stores "union-free".

It is already moving to take legal action against the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), the union behind the Making Change coalition, for disruption that its actions have caused.

Wal-Mart lawyer Steven Wheelless said:

"The UFCW has orchestrated numerous pickets, mass demonstrations, flash mobs and other confrontational activities both inside and outside Wal-Mart facilities in support of its bargaining and recognition demands.

"Now, with the busiest shopping season of the year just days away, the UFCW is openly orchestrating and promoting attempted mass disruptions of Wal-Mart's customer shopping experience."

Wal-Mart spokesman David Tovar warned that "there could be consequences" for employees who participated in the strike.

OUR Walmart said: "We are tired of low pay, irregular schedules, and being treated with disrespect at our stores.

"As OUR Walmart, we are standing up on behalf of every Associate who is ready for change by refusing to work on Black Friday in protest of Walmart's attempts to silence us when we speak out."

● More information: facebook.com/ourwmt

Stop Israel's attacks on Gaza!

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The independent Israeli trade union WAC-MAAN, which organises Jewish and Arab workers, calls for an end to the war on Gaza, an end to the Israeli occupation, and a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.

● Their statement "Stop the war!" is available at: <http://www.wac-maan.org.il/en/>