

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 234 15 February 2012 30p/80p

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For a workers' government

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Bankers' loot: too big to tolerate

By Jon Derwent

Bonus payouts in banking and finance totalled £14 billion in 2011. If such amounts were redirected to social spending, they would be way more than enough to reverse all the Government's social cuts. Benefit cuts to 2015: £18 billion. Cuts in education and local services: £16 billion.

This year the bonus total will be a bit smaller. It could hardly not be, even on the most shameless capitalist criteria, since banks did poorly in 2011.

Prime minister David Cameron is bidding to "call a truce" and "call off banker-bashing". The startling thing, though, is that the top bankers are still shameless taking home truckloads of loot after they were bailed out by the taxpayer in 2008 and at



Citigroup: caught up in the Libor manipulation scandal

the same time as revelations of their rapacity multiply.

Banks are apologising about ripping off people with "payment protection insurance". They are a bit apologetic about ripping off pensioners who get "defined contribution" pots on retirement, have to swap those pots for an annuity (a yearly payment until death), and are often swindled into signing poor

annuity deals.

As the *Financial Times* reported on 10 February, often "a bank can be too big to fail", so its bosses reckon they can gamble at will with an implicit guarantee that the Government will save them if things go bad.

And... "a penalty could be too catastrophic to impose". The scale of bank transactions is so large that the top bankers know that even in the worst case of misdealings being exposed, a few people may lose their jobs, but penalties will be much smaller than the previous gains.

Bank regulators internationally are now investigating charges that banks manipulated the interest rate for banks to borrow from each other overnight, as they routinely do. That rate, the London Interbank Offered Rate (Libor), is set daily as an average of

banks' "bids", and could be manipulated by banks colluding to make artificially high or low "bids". More than a dozen employees have been fired, suspended, or placed on leave at banks including Citigroup, UBS, Royal Bank of Scotland, JPMorgan Chase and Deutsche Bank.

The *FT* comments: "There are about \$350 trillion worth of Libor-linked products globally. Should a bank or two be found guilty of manipulating the rate by, say, 0.03 percentage points over 10 years, the theoretical compensation could be \$1 trillion... Such a penalty could, of course, never be practically implemented".

These huge concentrations of wealth should be under social and democratic control, instead of being manipulated for private profit.

Labour Party formed in Hong Kong

By Stephen Wood

In December 2011, after a meeting of 131 activists, a new party was formed in Hong Kong, China.

Activists in several trade unions have been part of the new initiative. Eleven of the 20-strong committee are connected to the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions. Lee Cheuk-yan was elected chairman unopposed and was one of the prime motivators of the new party. Lee Cheuk-yan is currently an elected member of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong and is currently General Secretary of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions. Since its foundation it now has three elected members of the legislative council within Hong Kong, although none of the representatives have contested the election as Labour Party candidates.

Adopting the language of the Occupy movement Lee Cheuk-yan has stated

that the party is their to unite the "99%"

"We will mobilize power outside the Legislative Council. The government has to bow to the people's power if we are united. So we need the power of the masses, instead of any particular party."

"The working class, the underprivileged, young people, women, small and medium enterprises — all are victims of the current system."

The trade union federation is not affiliated to the party, formed in order to contest the 2012 legislative council elections.

Its political aims are targeted primarily at meeting the basic needs of the working class of Hong Kong, including a universal pension fund and standardising working hours, protection for part-time workers and legislated collective bargaining agreements.

It calls for the abolition of all legislation that has been passed based on Article 23 of Basic Law in

Hong Kong. This law includes the clause that;

"The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government".

The Central People's Government is the Chinese Communist Party. Hong Kong has more political freedom than mainland China, but it is subservient to the CCP and the system known as "One Country, two systems." Political organisations are barred from making international links outside of the territory.

Many of those involved are veterans of the student protests in Tiananmen Square, and a complete vindication of all those involved in the protests known as the "June Fourth Incident" in mainland China is a founding platform of the party.

They have also called a for "a pan-democratic" candidate to contest the

chief executive election. The current chief executive who effectively governs Hong Kong, is the pro-Beijing Sir Donald Tsang elected unopposed in 2005.

The formation of the party is a positive step towards working class representation in Hong Kong. Like the struggle in Wukan village, which the Communist Party have already manipulated to ensure their preferred candidates win the election, it may open up possibilities for worker and democracy activists in China.

Zimbabwe: stop the treason trial!

A group of socialists, trade unionists, student activists and human rights activists are on trial in Zimbabwe for treason.

Many of them are members of the International Socialist Organisation of Zimbabwe. If convicted they face years in prison.

At one point the government was prosecuting 39 individuals, but this has now been reduced to seven (though the charges against the others have not actually been dropped).

The comrades will find out on 15 February whether the government will proceed with the trial. They need solidarity!

Please send messages to iso.zim@gmail.com

Freedom for Hamza Kashgari!

On 12 February, Malaysian police deported 23 year old Saudi columnist Hamza Kashgari, who fled Saudi Arabia after making comments on Twitter claimed by some to be "insulting" to the prophet Muhammad.

There have been widespread calls from Islamists for his execution — and in Saudi Arabia, blasphemy is punishable by death.

Theocratic regimes like Saudi Arabia will not tolerate the most basic freedom of thought and expression. We defend the right of everyone in the world to freely express their views, including to criticise religion.

We condemn the Malaysian government for handing over Kashgari to the Saudi authorities. We demand that the Saudi authorities do not harm him

in any way. We will campaign internationally to protect Kashgari and expose any harm done to him.

To join our campaign please sign this statement by sending your or your organisation's name to: kashgaricampaign@yahoo.com

Initiated by Houzan Mahmoud, Kurdish women's rights activist from Iraq.

Vultures circle around NHS

By Martin Thomas

A vultures' conference on Wednesday 29 February will dramatise what the Government's Health and Social Care Bill means.

It is a briefing session (at £354 a head) for private profiteers dealing with the NHS, run by a communications firm, GB Communications PR, whose bosses Geoffrey Bowden and Roy Lilley have strong NHS connections and a background in NHS-linked jobs.

The speakers include Mark Simmonds, Tory MP and shadow Health Minister 2007-10, probably the highest-placed Tory able to speak on the issue without the constraints of a current government position. Simmonds is paid £50,000 a year, on top of his MP's salary, to work just 10 hours a month as "strategic adviser" to Circle Health, which on 1 February became the first private firm to take over the running of an NHS hospital, Hinchingsbrooke Hospital in Cambridgeshire.

Lilley prides himself on having been chair of the first NHS establishment to push its workers into a no-strike deal.

CORPORATIONS

As NHS experts Alyson Pollock and David Smith have written: "up to £100 billion annually of taxpayers' money is likely to be handed over to large corporations that will run and operate our NHS services for profit..."

"The winners will be shareholders, CEOs and directors of new companies while the losers will be the poor, the elderly and the infirm — those whom the health service was designed to protect... The reforms mean that the NHS will remain as a brand name only with health services will be run

on US lines by, and largely for, shareholders and profit."

The 29 February conference is about profiteers positioning themselves to get their slice of the £100 billion.

Prime minister David Cameron has reaffirmed support for the Health and Social Care Bill, while Tim Montgomerie, described by the *Observer* as "one of the most influential Tories outside the cabinet", declares that the Bill should be dropped just weeks before the end of its almost-three-years journey from White Paper to law.

The Bill is clunky and cumbersome, says Montgomerie; "nearly all of the necessary efficiencies [cuts] could have been delivered with existing powers"; and it could be as discrediting for the Government as the poll tax was for Margaret Thatcher in 1989-90.

Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg is scurrying to stop a debate on the Bill at Lib Dem conference on 9-11 March in Gateshead, while Lib Dem deputy leader Simon Hughes has said that health minister Andrew Lansley should be sacked.

The Bill can be killed. But that will take mobilisation on the streets, not just e-petitions.

The Bill abolishes the NHS as a coordinated public service, and replaces it by a health market. For now the main purchasing-power for the market will come from Government funds channelled through GP clinical commissioning groups, but the ground is prepared for a switch to private purchasing-power with, as in many countries, a "social insurance" back-up.

NHS hospitals will all be transformed into businesses operating independently in the market, where they are not put under private bosses outright, as at Hinchingsbrooke. They will compete against new private-profit health-care outfits for "business" (treating patients).

The "private patient cap" which now limits the proportion of income which NHS hospitals can draw from private patients will be abolished.

NHS hospitals will be able to treat any number of private patients they like, even if that is to the detriment of NHS patients.

And, of course, if the private patients pay well, they will have an incentive to take more.

As well as the £100 billion honeypot, the profiteers attending on 29 February will also be concerned by the Government's planned yearly cuts of at least £4 billion a year in the NHS.

New Labour's NHS reorganisations were damaging enough, but they were driven through together with a large rise in NHS budgets to soften their effects. The current reorganisation is being rammed through together with cuts.

LAW

The Bill is currently at its last-but-one stage in the House of Lords.

In March it is due to go to its last stage in the House of Lords, the "third reading". Then it goes back to the House of Commons, for the Commons to consider amendments passed in the Lords, and the Government's schedule is to finalise it to become law some time in April or May.

Thus Labour leader Ed Miliband has called for a

campaign to "save the NHS" over the next three months, up to May. Local Labour Parties are being encouraged to get out and campaign.

The Unite union has called a protest against the Bill on 7 March (from 1pm at Parliament), and the TUC has called a rally the same day (6pm at Central Hall, Westminster).

More active, on-the-streets, rank-and-file mobilisation is also urgent. A loud and colourful protest at the 29 February vultures' conference (from 8am at 11 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0AN) is being planned, and there are moves for a "save the NHS" protest as part of the demonstration at the Tories' local government conference in Leeds on 25 February (assemble Woodhouse Moor at 10.30, march to City Square).

The run-up to those protests should include dozens of local street stalls and stunts, and they should be followed by a large and concerted campaign of street action.

Activists in London are working to assemble a mobilising committee. Watch this space.

Welfare reform: attacking the vulnerable

By Dan Rawnsley

The government's Welfare Reform Bill has now returned to the House of Lords. Although the Lords will not return to its previous amendments which lessened the blow for the worst affected, they will be able to table new ones, meaning a prolonged dispute over the Bill is still possible.

The Commons reversed all the changes from the Lords — exempting parents from £50-£100 charges to access Child Support Agency services; exempting Child Benefit from the £26,000 "benefit cap"; continuing non-means tested access to Employment Support Allowance for cancer patients; lessening reductions in benefits for disabled children who don't need overnight care; and delaying the replacing of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payments, which would mean less money accompanied by frequent medical assessments.

The Lords may now discuss the introduction of a regional system for the benefits cap to reflect the variation in housing costs and a limitation on the impact of the "bedroom tax" — housing benefit cuts for tenants with more than one spare bedroom.

The bill is an attack against the disabled and ill, against those who are buffeted between precarious work and unemployment and against adults who need more than £26,000 a year (£500 per week) to provide for dependants. Should people not fall ill with cancer? Should they not be made unemployed? Should they not be born or become disabled? Should they not have children? They can do all those things, says the government — they should just not be a burden on the state!

The workers' movement should not be relying on the House of Lords — an unelected body which in other circumstances would be attacking working-class people. It should be mounting its own campaign against the benefit cap, and the whole of the Welfare Bill.

Tax the rich to fund the welfare state!

Handovers sneaked through already

By Chris Reynolds

Alongside the demand to "kill the Bill", campaigners must now demand the reversal of those large parts of the Health and Social Care Bill which have already been implemented by administrative action.

The BBC reports that the 151 primary care trusts, which are losing control of the NHS budget to GPs under the plans, have already been merged into about 50 clusters, shedding thousands of jobs in the process. The ten strategic

health authorities have been merged into four super hubs.

Enough GPs have come forward to set up new commissioning groups, which will take charge of the NHS budget from April 2013, to cover 97% of the country. Some are even commanding the budgets ahead of time.

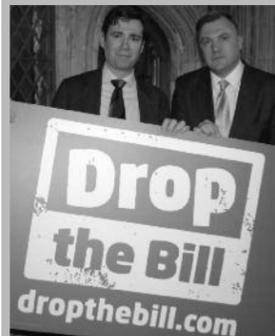
The national board to oversee the NHS under the new regime already has a chief executive, a medical director, and an interim finance chief has been appointed. Seven other members are being recruited with salaries of up

to £170,000, to be in place by March, before the Bill is law.

Campaigners should demand:

- Kill the Bill.
- Reverse the marketisation of the NHS — not just the pre-emptive implementation of this Bill, but the prior marketisation pushed through by New Labour.
- Stop the cuts in the NHS.
- Liberate the NHS from the extortionate payments due on PFI (Private Finance Initiative) deals.

Hold Labour to its NHS pledge



By Gerry Bates

At the Labour Party National Executive on 24 January, health frontbencher Andy Burnham pledged that a future Labour government

would reverse all this Government's changes which increase marketisation in the NHS.

That is not enough, because the NHS also needs to be relieved of the marketisation imposed by New Labour and the PFI payment burden. But it is a more definite commitment to undo Tory / Lib-Dem damage than any other yet made by the Labour front-bench.

Labour and trade union activists should demand that the pledge be publicly reaffirmed — and honoured by the next Labour government.

The Sun going down?



The wagons are beginning to circle at the offices of the Sun after five more of the papers' journalists were arrested by Metropolitan Police.

Veteran *Sun* hack Trevor Kavanagh — who has worked for the paper for 40 years — described the arrests as an “extraordinary assumption of power” by the police. Kavanagh’s a man who knows more than a thing or two about exercising unwarranted power.

Those arrested have been implicated in making payments to police officers and other public officials in exchange for information. Members of the police force and a ministry of defence official have also been arrested.

These latest arrests were made possible by a special unit set up by the paper’s parent company, News International,

which handed over a large amount of evidence to the police. This has apparently created huge divisions down at their Wapping offices, with some members of the investigation unit openly bragging about the assistance given to Scotland Yard! Others are less amused by proceedings.

General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists, Michelle Stanistreet, is quoted in the *Guardian* as saying “Once again Rupert Murdoch is trying to pin the blame on individual journalists hoping that a few scalps will save his corporate reputation.”

The NUJ surely has a point. But the issues raised by these arrests are not confined to the employment rights of journalists. The *Sun*, Rupert Murdoch and the senior staff — including those who were arrested — at his papers represent something much “bigger” than rotten employers with rotten business practices.

Yes, Murdoch is very interested in making vast sums of money.

Yes, he’s obviously taking measures to protect his business interests in the UK and US — where News Corporation, the parent of parent companies, is under scrutiny. But the Murdoch newspaper empire is more than a simple business. The *Sun* in particular has been an active political agent, never

shy of throwing its weight around, for very many years.

Along with filling its pages with the dreary details of “celebrity” life-styles, love affairs and the latest hairstyles, the *Sun* has a consistent line in politically reactionary commentary and the scapegoating of workers, ethnic and social minorities. It has never been shy of attacking those it sees as “scroungers”, “crooks” and the corrupt in public life, and so the current state of affairs has a pleasing irony.

No tears should be shed for those arrested, for Murdoch, or for the now compromised “sanctity” of the *Sun*’s freedom of expression. The fact is, socialists have no concern in protecting the sort of “freedoms” that allow Murdoch to bully governments and political parties; whip up hatred against Muslims, immigrants, gays and other minorities; attack workers, their trade unions and encourage scabbing. The “freedom” to bribe, bully and intimidate closes off the freedoms of others.

We should encourage the complete opening of the *Sun*’s, News International and News Corporation’s books. Let’s see all the dirty secrets and dirty deals that no doubt linger in the vaults.

This would be a true test of the “freedoms” some journalists are starting to preach about.



Separate religion from politics

A high court ruling has stated that councils have no statutory right to hold prayers at meetings.

The case, brought by the National Secular Society, has resulted in outrage from Tory MPs, the *Daily Mail*, the Christian Institute and churches. They say this is discrimination against believers and an attempt to destroy Christianity.

They claim it will lead to the end of prayers before Parliament, at remembrance services and that even the Coronation oath will have to be abolished. The Christian Institute also complains that the logic of this decision is that councils won’t even be allowed to sing the national anthem before council meetings!

The *Daily Mail* ties it in to another legal decision taken by the appeal court, which has upheld the ruling that two Christian guesthouse owners acted unlawfully when they discriminated against a gay couple by refusing to allow them to book a room. Christianity is under attack!

A few years ago, when I lived in Scotland, I was organising a campaign against a PFI school and the fact that it wouldn’t be fit for purpose once built.

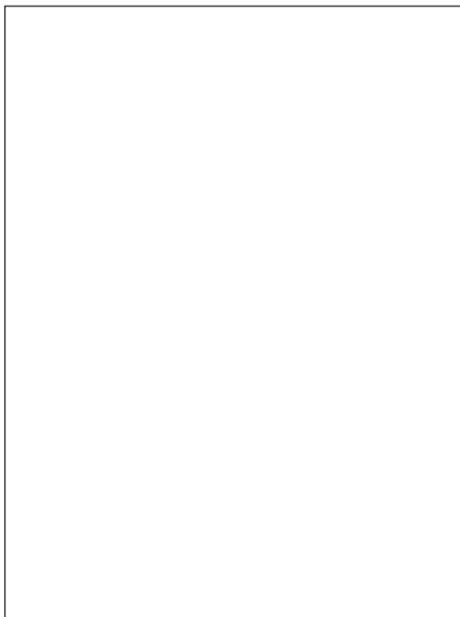
We collected petitions, organised a lobby of the council and went to present the petition. However, before we could start we had to wait for prayers.

All of the Tories, Labour and Liberal councillors all began to pray asking for guidance from God and for his help in making wise decisions!

If you needed any more proof that God doesn’t exist then surely the fact that all of these calls for God to help them make wise choices hasn’t resulted in any wise choices is proof enough.

At that council meeting they voted to carry on with the PFI project. Now councillors across the country are voting through massive cuts. In Liverpool they will cut £50m from their budget for 2012/13. Among the cuts are school uniform grants and funding for young people with mental health problems.

Across the country adult care services, children’s care services, day centres for people with disabilities, day centres for the elderly, respite care homes, libraries, youth centres, youth offices, children’s homes are all being cut. So the prayers don’t work.



Daily Mail comment on the NSS legal victory

More seriously we should support all attempts to separate religion from politics.

Religion should not be part of politics or education — it should be a private matter. People should have the right to believe what they want but their beliefs should not be imposed on others who may hold different beliefs or hold none.

The separation of religion from politics and education would help the process of allowing logic and reason to shape our decisions.

Jayne Edwards, Merseyside

Stalin and the invasion

In May 1920, the Bolshevik workers’ government in Russia signed a treaty with Georgia, which had been ruled by a Menshevik government since 1918, under which Russia recognised the independence of Georgia (formerly part of the Tsarist empire), and Georgia undertook not to give a base to anti-Bolshevik forces in the civil war then raging in Russia.

In February 1921, Josef Stalin and friends, alleging Georgian breaches of the treaty (possibly real, but minor) and the need to support a (largely fictional) Bolshevik-led workers’ uprising in Georgia, engineered a Red Army invasion of Georgia.

The army secured Moscow rule over Georgia, but not popular assent. In late 1922, severe clashes between Stalin and

the Georgian Bolsheviks, who argued urgently for more autonomy and better treatment of Georgian national feeling, prompted the dying Lenin to launch his last major political campaign — against Stalin — and to ask Trotsky to continue that campaign when and where Lenin himself, crippled by ill-health, could not.

Stalin won out there too. Resentment in Georgia grew into a veritable mass uprising in August-September 1924. The Moscow government, by now seriously Stalinised, was able to crush that uprising, but only at the expense of holding Georgia by force for decades to come.

Leon Trotsky, although still Commissar for War, had the 1921 invasion of Georgia organised behind his back. He had been opposed to an invasion.

After the fact, Trotsky wrote a polemic against the social-democratic demand for the Red Army to be withdrawn from Georgia, glossing over his earlier opposition to invasion.

In the civil war, inevitably, there were many villages, railway junctions, and so on, where Red rule came first by military triumph, and could gain popular support only afterwards. Maybe, faced with a fait accompli in Georgia, Trotsky thought he had no alternative but to see it as a large-scale example of that.

In hindsight, though, there is a strong case for seeing the invasion of Georgia as a pivotal step in integrating a segment of the Bolshevik party into a conservative central-government bureaucracy and stifling working-class politics.

Almost 20 years later, in his unfinished biography of Stalin, Trotsky wrote: “Lenin... insisted on an especially resilient, circumspect patient policy towards Georgia... Stalin... felt that since the machinery of state was in our hands, our position was secure... we had recognised the independence of Georgia and had concluded a treaty with her... [but] detachments of the Red Army... invaded Georgia upon Stalin’s orders and... confronted us with a fait accompli...”

The invasion was not just a mistake, like the Red Army’s attempt in 1920 to follow Polish forces against which it had been fighting into Poland itself, in the hope of sparking workers’ rebellion within Poland (a move which Trotsky also opposed). Nor was it a “tragic necessity” forced on the workers’ regime by adversity.

The invasion was a cynical, bureaucratic act, initiated behind the back of the Bolshevik party, with what must have been deliberate mendacity.

It committed the workers’ government to ruling over a whole nation, not just this or that locality, by scarcely-diluted force, and the clash with the Georgian Bolsheviks established Stalin and his circle as arbiters whose default response to dissent or political complications was force.

The Red Army had certainly used force in the civil war — but there it won, essentially, not by superior military equipment, but by superior political agitation and propaganda.

Eric Lee (*Solidarity* 232) is therefore, I think, right about the invasion of Georgia having been a “historical tragedy”.

Whether the large campaign conducted by social-democrats against revolutionary Russia after the invasion should retrospectively be endorsed is another matter.

Martin Thomas, Islington

Down with Assad! For liberty and democracy in Syria!

The revolt in Syria began in March 2011, in the wake of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. So far at least 8,000 people have died, largely from regime violence as peaceful protesters came out onto the streets to demand freedom.

The pace of the killings is increasing as armed opposition grows, the rebellion spreads and the regime becomes more desperate. According to the the Local Coordination Committees opposition network, since 4 February almost 700 people have been killed, including more than 400 in Homs.

Syria's rulers are willing to do anything it takes to stay in power: destroying residential neighbourhoods with tank fire; cutting off electricity, water and medical supplies to whole towns for weeks; over 400 children have been killed, 600 people have died under torture (figure from Avaaz quoted in the *New York Times*, 5 January).

Syria, a country of 23 million, is nominally secular. Its regime claims to be socialist. In reality it is a backward and corrupt police state with many political-structural similarities to the Eastern European Stalinist states.

The rule of the Ba'ath Party rests on the Alawi, a Shia sect and a ten per cent minority in Syria. It is a sectarian state. Although Syria is formally a republic, the leading family, the Assads, behave like monarchs. The current ruler, Bashar al-Assad, came to power after his thuggish father, Hafez, died in 2000.

Assad's justifications for his recent actions — that he is confronting "armed gangs" and "terrorists" organised by outside powers — are believed by almost no-one. Assad still has some bases of support among Alawites and Christians, people who are scared of the Sunni majority taking revenge on them.

Assad is also still able to use state largesse to buy support — 30% of all jobs are in the state sector. Pro-Assad demonstrations are combined with the closure of public buildings and colleges as the workers are turned out to march for their president.

As the rebellion has spread the Syrian economy has contracted rapidly.

The currency has declined (by a third against the dollar), unemployment has increased (estimated at 30-45%), tourism has collapsed, shortages are widespread (especially cooking oil and heating oil). In Aleppo, the commercial centre and biggest city, power cuts last between two and five hours per day. The west continues to hope that Aleppo's Sunni merchants will turn against the regime (some are apparently funding medical supplies for the opposition, as they look to the future).

The EU and US have implemented a boycott of Syrian oil (the government estimates a \$2 billion loss from sanctions on oil since September). Travel bans are in place against scores of regime leaders.

Following a failed peace agreement and an observer mission to the country, many Arab states have now withdrawn their ambassadors and are boycotting Syrian financial institutions. They are now proposing a "peacekeeping mission" to Syria, which the Syrians have rejected.

The big western powers' diplomatic activity has been stymied by Russia and China's vetoing of motions condemning Syria at the UN.

The aim of all these initiatives has been to get Bashar Assad to step aside, stabilise the situation, allow a relatively peaceful transition, and the continued unity of Syria. The EU, US, Israel and Arab states all fear chaos, even the break up of the state through inter-communal civil war, of a type similar to that experienced by Lebanon in the 70s and 80s.

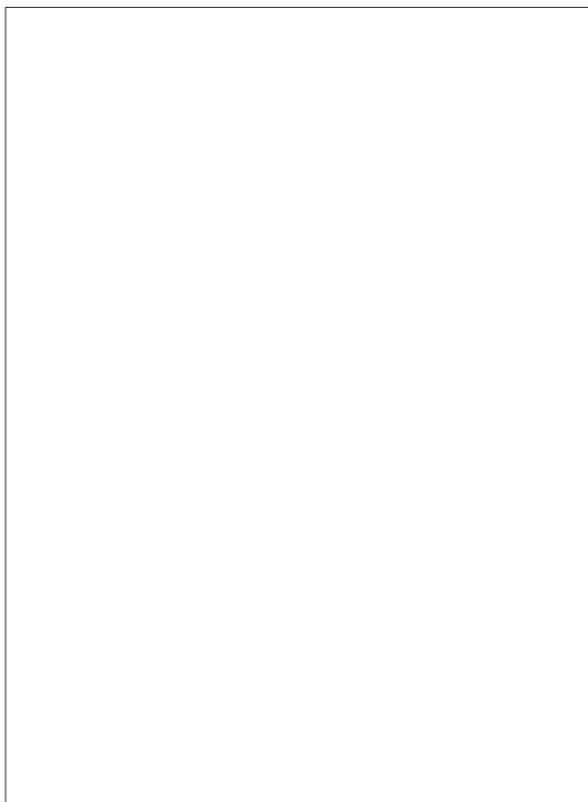
OPPOSITION

There are two significant opposition fronts. The largest front, the Syrian National Council (SNC), includes the increasingly influential Syrian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as secular oppositionists and Kurds.

The SNC is based in Turkey. It has been given recognition by states including the US and France. The SNC's formal position is to oppose sectarianism and favour a democratic transition.

The other anti-Assad alliance is more secular and leftist. The National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change is based inside the country and includes Kurdish nationalist parties.

After the summer of 2011 significant numbers from the armed forces began to mutiny or desert. At first many escaped to Lebanon or Turkey, or went into hiding. Later they



Fighting the Syrian army

became better organised. The Free Syrian Army (FSA), also based in Turkey, now claims 40,000 organised fighters. The FSA is, in fact, a loose banner behind which many local militias organise often without any outside control. The FSA is only lightly armed and is out-gunned by the army.

The FSA also says it is against sectarianism and that the Alawites will not face reprisals after Assad is deposed.

The political opposition is currently seen by the US and others as too divided, and the military opposition too weak relative to the state, to provide an immediate threat to Assad's rule.

TOWNS

But in the last two months the opposition has begun to take control of whole towns.

In late 2011 some towns and villages in Idlib province in north west Syria were taken by the opposition; Zabadani fell in January following fierce fighting; suburbs of Damascus such as Saqba, and the satellite town of Douma were under opposition control in late January.

The bloody fight in Homs is an attempt by the state to take back two thirds of the city.

However, short of some spectacular loss of nerve at the centre of the regime, or new political shift, the state will not collapse. Although its army, with over 200,000 troops, looks more formidable than it actually is (many troops are badly armed and unreliable) key units and the officer corps back the regime. Aleppo, the commercial hub, is still firmly in regime hands.

Democracy in Syria might be a long way off. There are signs that Assad's stubborn defence of his dictatorship is leading to a communal polarisation. In towns like Homs Alawites and Sunnis find it dangerous to leave their own areas as society breaks down along communal lines. It may be the case that the uprising for liberty degenerates. One possibility is inter-ethnic civil war, another — and not necessarily opposed possibility — is the coming to power of the Syrian Muslim Brothers.

The British "Marxists" (SWP, Counterfire and others) who obsess about (western) imperialism at the expense of any consideration of *why* they oppose imperialism and *what they are positively in favour of* allow themselves to be conscripted into the defence of a disgusting regime.

These organisations even oppose criticism of Bashar Assad's brutality (see last week's *Solidarity*). Although Stop the War raves about the remote possibility of full-scale western war against Syria, they do nothing to oppose the imperialist powers that are actually standing in the way of Syrian

democracy (Iran and Russia), or to stop the actual war currently taking place (that of the Ba'athist state against the Syrian people).

Russia has used its diplomatic weight to shield Assad, much to the delight of Counterfire/Stop the War's Lindsey German who celebrates their "right" to do so.

And Iran is very active inside Syria. In January Qasim Suleimani, commander of Iran's Quds Force, visited Damascus. Iran probably has some hundreds of "advisors" in the country, advocating the brutal tactics they have tested back at home.

The *New York Times* reports three recent instances of Iranians being abducted in Syria. Most recently the FSA kidnapped five Iranians claiming they were military advisors.

Clerical-fascist Iran, with its malign, regional-imperialist influence in Lebanon, western Afghanistan, Gaza, and Iraq, is seeking to maintain Assad in power for its own foreign policy reasons. The replacement of Assad with a Syrian democracy would also be a blow against theocratic rule in Iran itself.

The US and EU have actually done relatively little to force Assad out. They consider themselves caught between a rock and a hard place: disliking the present, but fearing the future.

That may change — increased turmoil inside Syria may force them to move. The Gulf states, led by the Saudis (who have their own Sunni-sectarian motivation and a desire to see their regional competitor, Iran, defeated), may start seriously arming the opposition. Canvassing has begun for a northern Iraq-style "safe haven" in the north of Syria, policed by Turkey (which seems willing) and backed by the US and EU (who are not yet convinced).

THE REAL LEFT

Workers' Liberty supports the brave uprising against Assad's state and advocates democracy, free speech and association, secularism, workers' and women's rights. We oppose Islamism.

Workers' Liberty opposes the break-up of Syria through sectarian strife. We recognise the right, however, of the oppressed Kurdish minority in the north east of Syria to self-determination.

We oppose those powers — Iran and others — which are backing the Syrian regime. We condemn the idiot "left" in Britain which is effectively doing the same.

We radically distrust the motives and calculations of the US and other western powers, and do not make naive calls on them to sort out the situation in Syria.

But the internal opponents of the Syrian state have a right to ask for help from outside. Only "leftists" who have utterly lost sight of what they started out to do in politics would try to prevent US, British or other outside support for the Syrian rebels. We will not oppose moves by outside powers to provide military aid or a "safe haven" for the uprising.

For liberty and democracy!

Even clerical-fascists deserve a fair trial

Islamist cleric Abu Qatada has been placed under effective house arrest following his release from prison. He will wear a tag, be prevented from using mobile phones and the internet, and only be allowed outside during a one-hour period twice a day.

He has spent six years in detention without charge, and the house arrest is the government's fallback after its preferred option — deporting him to Jordan — fell through (because, reasonably, the courts decided he was at risk of torture in Jordan).

Abu Qatada is a dangerous reactionary. But laws that allow individuals — however monstrous their views — to be detained for six years without charge or trial are also reactionary and dangerous.

Laws used to detain a clerical-fascist today will be used against others tomorrow.

Help AWL raise £20,000

Solidarity recently hired top fundraising firm Grasper, Spiv & Cringe Ltd. to take our fund drive to the next level.

They've been working round the clock to target top bankers, city tradesmen, media magnates, property developers, landed aristocrats and high-ranking members of the clerical orders of all major world religions.

Our thinking was simple; these people have lots of money, we need money, let's ask them.

Unfortunately, early indications are not good. It appears that members of these groups are rather reluctant to hand over very much of their hard-earned (or hard-inherited) cash to a newspaper dedicated to the global overthrow of their entire class. It's disheartening, to say the least, that such narrow self-interest persists in a post-Live Aid, post-Comic Relief world.

It is with regret, therefore, that we are forced to turn to you — trade unionists, community campaigners, students, and other working-class activists to appeal for funds. We know you don't have a lot of money. But we think the work we do as a newspaper is important enough to deserve the financial support you are able to give.

We need money to continue publishing *Solidarity* as a weekly, improve our website, organise events such as our New Unionism dayschool and our Ideas for Freedom summer school, and for a host of other costs.

Please consider:

- Taking out a monthly standing order to the AWL. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and on this page. (Even a few pounds a month really does help.)

- Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL") or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

- Organising a fundraising event.

- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.

- Getting in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

For more information on any of the above, contact us:

tel. 07796 690 874 /

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



Total raised so far:
£7,643

We raised £307 this week from a book sales in Sheffield, a new standing order, and an increased standing order (thanks to Gemma, Kas, Tim and Dora).

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

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Account name:

Account no.

Sort code:

Please make payments to the debit of my account:

Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no.

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Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ to be paid on the

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..... (year) and thereafter monthly until this

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cels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

Strikers unit

By Theodora Polenta

Last week started with a 24 hour strike on 7 February called by the two union federations GSEE and ADEDY, and ended with a 48-hour general strike on Friday-Saturday 10-11 February and the re-emergence of last summer's "Indignant Citizens" movement in the city square on Sunday 12th.

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered outside the Greek parliament in Athens and in the squares of every Greek city to call for the overthrow of the Papademos coalition government and the cuts.

The massive participation signalled the start of a political meeting-up and coordination between the ongoing strike movement in the private sector and the community and neighbourhood movements.

The government, although safely protected by police, panicked and ordered the police to use gas against the protesters long before the black block started provocations. The police did not hesitate to use gas even against 89 year old Manolis Glezos, a famous veteran of the Greek national liberation struggle against Nazi occupation, and against Mikis Theodorakis, the most famous Greek composer. Glezos and 58 other protesters were hospitalised with breathing problems.

Not even that was enough to make the protesters abandon Syntagma square, so organised groups of police infiltrators, alongside political idiots and self-proclaimed saviours of the Greek working class, started throwing Molotov cocktails and burning buildings in the centre of Athens, untouched by the police, who were focusing their attacks against unarmed peaceful protesters. The end result of the provocations was the dispersal of the protesters.

Images of looting and historic buildings in fire were instantly transmitted by the media, propagating a picture of Greece beset by looting and chaos and downplaying the hundreds of thousands of Syntagma Square protesters.

SAFEGUARD

Papademos, and the politicians who voted through the new cuts for him, say they want to safeguard our wages and pensions.

But they have reduced our pensions by 20% and they have slashed our wages by 40% via their first memorandum.

They are further attacking private sector wages and pensions with their second memorandum.

The poorer one is, the bigger is the reduction in income. The minimum wage will be reduced by 22%, and the minimum wage for under-25s, by 32%. The government is abolishing collective bargaining agreements and legislation that protects workers' conditions.

They say they want to safeguard fuel supplies for us.

But they have handed over the energy sector to private mo-

nopolies. They have doubled the price of fuel, in Greece's coldest ever winter, and made it unaffordable for a lot of pensioners, unemployed, and working-class people.

They say they care about the provision of health care.

But from the first memorandum, they have reduced social spending on health. They have placed numerous restrictions on prescriptions. They have deprived pensioners of free prescriptions. They are slashing the wages and dismantling the working conditions of all health workers. With the second memorandum they are cutting healthcare spending by a further 1.5%.

They say they do not want to see a Greece with empty shelves.

But their policies have led to 400,000 small shopkeepers closing down within the last two years; millions of people relegated to unemployment and social exclusion; more than 20,000 people homeless in Athens; 150,000 public sector workers pushed into unemployment by 2015. 27.2% of Greeks (three million) are living below the poverty line.

They say they want to safeguard food supplies.

But their policies have led to young children fainting at school because of lack of adequate food.

Their policies have led to a dramatic increase of people living in absolute poverty and to queues for charity meals.

They say they want to get €130 billion for Greece from the second bailout fund.

But in the single year 2012 they will be handing over €190 billion to the bondholders in interest payments and settlement of expired bonds.

The second memorandum, the conditions demanded by the EU, European Central Bank, and IMF for a further "bail-out", was handed to MPs on Saturday only hours before they would vote on it, on Sunday 12th. As in *Alice Through The Looking Glass*: voting on the second memorandum first; reading of the second memorandum later or never! Economics minister Venizelos said: "the second memorandum package must be ratified in parliament by Sunday night so that Greece will send a positive message to the markets on Monday morning".

In the birthplace of ancient Greece's direct participatory democracy, even the restricted limited parliamentary democracy has been subordinated to the wills of the speculators and bond holders.

PARTIES

Polls show the political parties in deep trouble. Pasok, the governing party until recently, is down to 8%. New Democracy, the conservative party, is doing better, but only at 31%. The far-right Laos is at 5%.

The left parties score 18% (Democratic Left, a split from Synaspismos), 12.5% (KKE, the diehard-Stalinist Greek Communist Party), and 12% (Syriza).

Many MPs hesitated to back the second memorandum, not because of their social sensitivities but from fear for their po-

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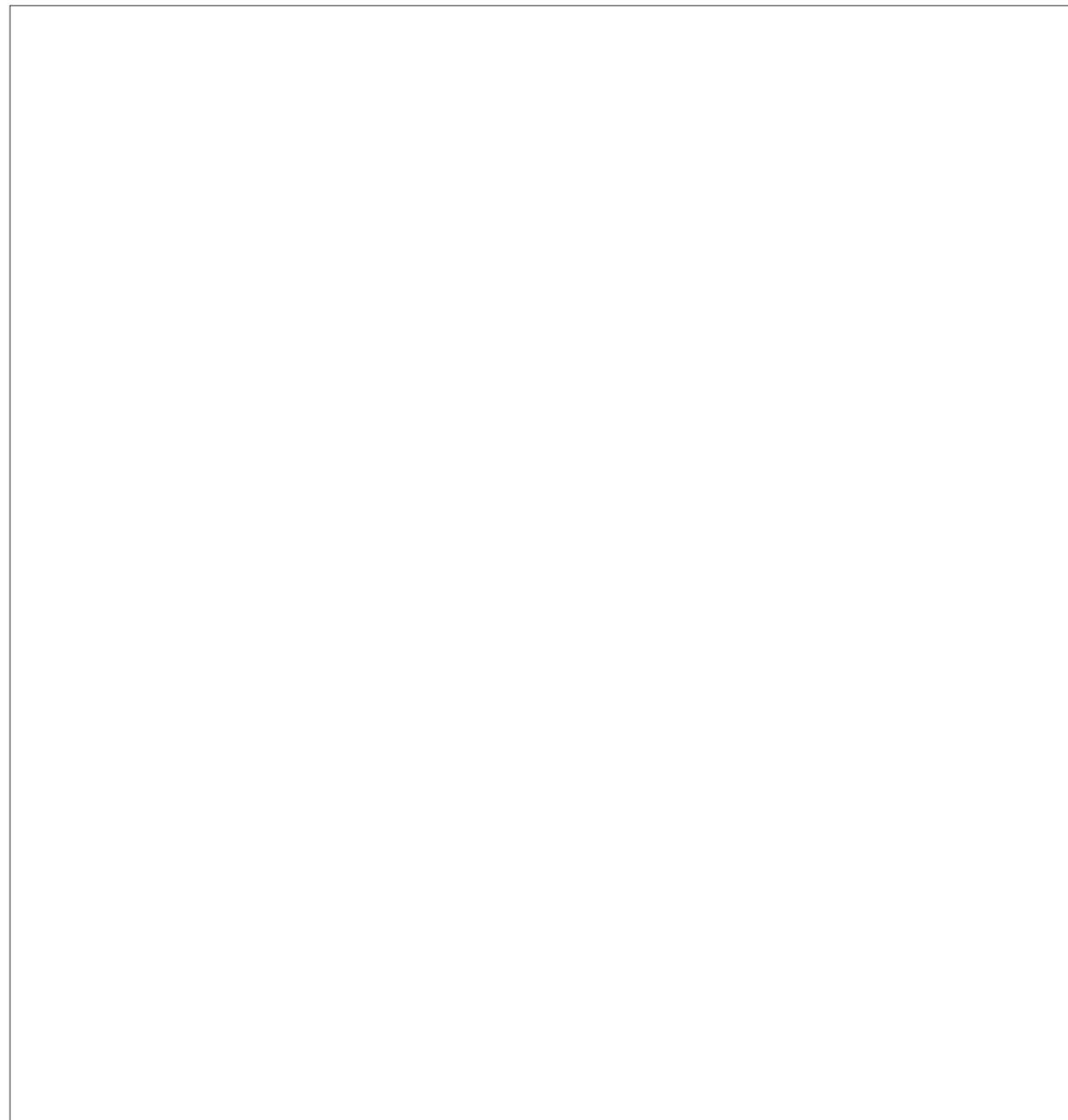
As massive workers' struggles and revolts rock Greece, Israel, Egypt and other countries, we ask: how does the system we're fighting work, and what can we replace it with?

The Occupy movement and the global fightbacks against austerity put anti-capitalism back into political discourse, but "capitalism" for us is more than just "the bankers" or a few greedy corporations. Our annual Ideas for Freedom will explore analyses of capitalism and understandings of anti-capitalism, and discuss how we can reinvigorate an independent, self-organised, democratic working-class anti-capitalism for the struggles ahead.

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te with the streets



litical careers.

Laos leader Karatzaferis made a u-turn and decided to abandon the Papademos government and vote against the second memorandum. His four cabinet MPs were withdrawn from the government and all Laos MPs were threatened with disciplinary action if they were to vote in favour of the Memorandum.

Yet Karatzaferis was one of the most adamant supporters of the first memorandum and accused political parties that opposed it of being traitors. He was the most adamant supporter of Papademos, and prominent in the formation of the Papademos government.

He made a statement demanding Papademos "cleanse the cabinet of the Pasok social democrats" and replace them with technocrats. He called for the armed forces to intervene against the protesters, and claimed that he will lead the fight against the prospect of Greece becoming the Cuba of the Balkans and against the Bolshevisation of Europe.

The two remaining party leaders of the coalition government, Pasok and New Democracy, threatened their MPs with expulsion if they refused to vote in favour of the second memorandum anti working class package. ND expelled 21 of its MPs, and Pasok expelled from its parliamentary group the 22 Pasok MPs that voted against the memorandum and nine Pasok MPs that voted against sections of it.

All three left parties (KKE, Syriza, Democratic Left) voted unequivocally against the second memorandum. In Sunday's parliamentary debate, they exposed the government's repeated violations of the Greek constitution and parliamentary democracy and the illusions of the second bailout fund.

All the money supposedly handed over to Greece by the EU/ ECB/ IMF Troika in fact goes straight to the bondholders.

The ultra-memorandum, ultra-neo-liberal section of the political establishment now wants the Papademos government to continue to the end of 2013. More realistic political forces, fearing a further shrinkage of the two main political parties and a further alienation of the Greek population from the mainstream political establishment, are calling for elections by April.

The new memorandum may have been voted in Parliament but it can be blocked by working-class action. The left has a duty not only to participate as an organic part of that movement but to push forward an alternative radical solution towards a people's default from the debt and another society, which has our needs as its priority, a socialist, radically democratic society.

It is imperative to escalate our struggle with continuous strikes, massive civil disobedience movement, open meetings in every neighbourhood, every day protests and sit-ins and occupations of workplaces and public buildings. Now is the time for a united front and revolutionary action of the left and all the vanguard of the working in order to overthrow this government and the whole of the political establishment.

It is important to form in every workplace a workers' committees to organise and direct the struggles. A central organ that supports, organizes, coordinates and organises self-defence for every struggle should be formed.

The workers' committees must establish ways of communications with the newly formed neighbourhood committees,

with the aim of moving on to the election of a Constituent Assembly, organising the struggles to come, and opening the door to the power of the working people and socialism.

Against the continuous crisis and destruction of our lives brought by the decaying Greek capitalist system we should aggressively state our anti-capitalist manifesto and our program of transitional demands, linked to our strategic struggle for revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.

- Overthrow the coalition government and any newly-emerging bourgeois government
- Down with everyone responsible for the crisis: Troika, financial speculators, capitalists both productive and unproductive, asset-strippers, and predators
- Refuse to pay for the crisis, in euros or in drachmas. No sacrifice for the euro
- Abolish the debt. Not a penny to the creditors
- Freeze and abolish workers' debts
- Abolish VAT on all basic necessities (food, drink, etc.)
- Civil disobedience and refusal to pay the new imposed taxes
- Increase taxes on capital
- Nationalisation under workers' control of the banks and the big business with no compensation

WEALTH

• **Abolish the political and legal protection of companies that are declared bankrupt. Demand that the workers are paid all the wages that are owned to them.**

- Expropriate the employers' wealth (both personal and in other companies) in every company that is declared "bankrupt", in order to compensate all workers and pay off their unemployment benefits.
- Workers' control of prices, wage increases, reduction in working hours, work for all
- Pension increases in line with wages, reduction in the age of retirement
- Ban redundancies. Unemployment benefit in line with wages
- For a public sector in the service of the people and society's needs, against today's public sector and its ties to corporations, contractors and corruption
- For an extension of education, health, transport, and welfare provision.

The revolutionary left should take bold initiatives and contribute to the restructuring and resynthesising of the workers' movement, striving to build up a new revolutionary party which will attract to its ranks both KKE and Syriza members, the most advanced of the Pasok workers, and the most militant workers and youth from the anti-austerity movements.

It has been customary for the Greek left to define the current tasks as those of national liberation, anti-imperialism, or anti-monopoly struggle, placing the fight against capitalism in the distant future.

Today the revolutionary left must be clear that a victorious struggle against the austerity measures must be placed within the context of the struggle against capitalism. The austerity measures are the answers of the Greek capitalist class to the economic and political crisis of Greek capitalism, not just acts by French and German capitalism against the dependent and subservient Greek capitalist class.

Entry into the European Union and the eurozone were in the strategic interests of the Greek capitalist class. The prioritisation of the Greek bondholders and creditors at the expense of the majority of the Greek population express the collective interest of the Greek capitalist class.

The role of the working class (as the main revolutionary subject and not submerged within the vague concept of "the people" or "the progressive sections of the population") is central for every small and big economic and political struggle as well as for the strategic goal of the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system.

The revolutionary left should be immune to political opinions and strategies that try to find substitute agents of change in charismatic leaders or in self-defined heroic minorities in the anarcho-autonomist movement that act on behalf of the working class.

A witless version

Sean Matgamna reviews Roland Emmerich's film *Anonymous*.

Though it markets itself as having something fresh and startling to say, Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous* is only a crude sensationalist rendition of a century-old dispute: who was William Shakespeare, "really"?

In this rendition an actor, Will Shakespeare, lends his name to Edward De Vere, Earl of Oxford. De Vere's social standing forbids him to appear in public as an author of popular plays but he is the "real" author of what we know as "Shakespeare". In this crude and vicious "alternative history" the actor Will Shakespeare is a dim-wit, blackmailing cockney fly-boy who murders at least two of his literary rivals, Marlowe and Kid. But that's not the half of it.

This De Vere is an illegitimate son of Queen Elizabeth I. Ignorant of that fact, he fathers a child with her. Their son is the Earl of Southampton. Southampton is himself believed by one "who-was-Shakespeare-really" school of thought to have been "the real Shakespeare". The Earl of Essex is another of Elizabeth's secret sons. He too is her lover. She has him beheaded.

Essex probably was her lover; and he was beheaded after a feeble attempt at rebellion. Adding the detail that he was also her son is typical of this film's witless sensationalism.

At the time of the Essex "rebellion", in 1601, a play by Shakespeare was performed for some of the conspirators, and taken to bear a contemporary political message, that the Queen should abdicate. It was *Richard II*, in which the king is forced to abdicate, and then murdered. Elizabeth herself is supposed to have said of it: "Know you that I am Richard?"

In *Anonymous*, the play performed is *Richard III*, and it carries a political message. What message? Richard III is depicted as a hunchback; Elizabeth's chief minister, Robert Cecil, is depicted as also a hunchback. This is another measure of the crude witlessness of the makers of this film.

But they take themselves seriously. To go with the film Sony Pictures has distributed study notes to teachers in the USA proclaiming that *Anonymous* "presents a compelling portrait of Edward de Vere as the true author of Shakespeare's plays". It does nothing of the sort.

On one level, of course, it doesn't matter. Shakespeare was the author of Shakespeare's plays; the plays are what defines Shakespeare, of whom little else is known. The rest is waffle and speculation. Unprovable speculation. Poisonous waffle.

As many came to believe in the alternative history of early Christianity in *The Da Vinci Code*, so this awful film will win believers for its vicious fantasies.

The snob theories about Shakespeare

By Sean Matgamna

Many years ago I read with riveted fascination a big book on the history of the "who wrote Shakespeare" controversy: *Shakespeare's Lives*, by S Schoenbaum.

The controversy has more than a little interest for citizens of a socialist movement that has reduced itself to a sprawling archipelago of self-sealing, self-intoxicating, self-blinding sects.

The dispute about "Who wrote Shakespeare?" has raged for well over 100 years now and rages still.

Very little is known about William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon. What little is known about "the Stratford man" deepens the mystery that must attach to "Shakespeare", whoever he was. How could anybody be so universal, know so much about so many different sorts of human beings and human situations?

Those who believe that William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon did not write the works of "Shakespeare" are called the "anti-Stratfordians".

How, they ask, could the small town petty-bourgeois, with at best a grammar-school education, have known courts and palaces and the secrets of the princely exercise of state power? How could he have known the things which the author of "Shakespeare" knew, and knew so amazingly well that plays he wrote about the politics of a different world can still talk to us — *Richard III*, or *Hamlet*, or *Macbeth*, or *Coriolanus*, for example — about the essentials of our own political world, 400 years later?

However you look at it, there is, as well as a dearth of hard fact about the man, an awe-inspiring mystery about the genius of Shakespeare. It is the same sort of mystery as you confront in Mozart, but far greater and with no obvious solution.

From early childhood Mozart produced a wonderful profusion of musical patterns, as if he were a medium for some force outside himself. But Shakespeare dealt with character, situations, history.

Where Mozart can, perhaps, be explained by the qualities of a unique but more or less self-sufficient musical-mathematical mind trained from infancy by his musician father, Shakespeare did not deal with patterns in his own mind, or only with patterns of sound, but with patterns in society, psychology and history. How did he know? How could he know? Where did he learn what he knew? What experiences shaped and instructed, honed and stocked that wonderful mind about the world and its inhabitants?

For now, the mystery of Shakespeare is irresoluble, and maybe it always will be. We simply do not know. And that not knowing is very unsatisfying.

Enter the anti-Stratfordians. Their game is to find the most likely "alternative Shakespeare" from among public figures who were Shakespeare's contemporaries, men about whom, unlike "the Stratford man", much is known, and who had a background that might explain Shakespeare's knowledge of power, people, kings and cabals.

Was "Shakespeare" the Jacobean pioneering philosopher of science and one-time Lord Chancellor of England, Francis Bacon? Or Christopher Marlowe? Marlowe died more than 20 years before Shakespeare — but can you prove that he really died in a tavern brawl in Deptford? Maybe he, a sometime government spy involved in plots and political intrigue, went into hiding on the continent and there wrote "Shakespeare"?

Or was it, perhaps, the Earl of Oxford? Or of Southampton? There are other "alternative Shakespeares", among them Queen Elizabeth I. Shakespeare outlived her by a dozen years. But if you know, with burning conviction that "Shakespeare" couldn't have been Will Shakespeare, you won't let petty details like that clutter up your theory. They are easy to explain away.

Sects have formed around favoured candidates — Marlovians, Oxfordians, Baconians. All of them try to prove the unprovable, sometimes by way of sifting through texts for secret encrypted messages from the "real Shakespeare".

Rejecting chaste scientific restraint, and the unsatisfying, "I don't know", all of them have gone on from the paucity of information to passionate conviction, even to certainty taken to the point of obsession. But they have only subjective grounds of intuition, inclination, sympathy and antipathy on which to mount their conclusions. It is probably no accident that one of the founders of the first, Baconian, school of anti-Stratfordians was named... Delia Bacon.

The anti-Stratfordians, inevitably, depend on the suppression and arbitrary selection of evidence, and on an impatient dismissal of what science tells them or, to the point here, what it can't tell them, and on special pleading for their own candidate. They fill the void in what we know and can hope to know with fantasies and projections, thrown up arbitrarily and subjectively.

And thus, over more than 100 years, the anti-Stratfordians have created a paranoid sub-culture of warring sects that parallels and overlaps with both religious and political sectarian formations, of which they are, I suppose, a hybrid specimen.

One of the beauties of the game is that anybody can play. All you need to "know" is that "Shakespeare" could not possibly have been the man fools have called "the Bard of Stratford-on-Avon". After that, your opinion is as good as that of anyone else. Sigmund Freud was an anti-Stratfordian; so was the arch-Tory, Enoch Powell. Anybody can play!

One man, a once-prominent Tory, Duff Cooper, wrote a whole book about it — he was an Oxfordian — after it came to him in a flash of intuitive knowledge, one day in a World War I trench, that that yokel Shakespeare couldn't possibly have written those plays. Class snobbery, rampant class conceit, seems to be a prime component of all the anti-Stratfordian schools — the gut conviction that "Shakespeare" couldn't have been that pleb from the hick village in Warwickshire.

In his own time, Shakespeare was sneered at by some of his university-educated rivals — whose denunciation survives — as a mere grammar-school upstart crow trying to steal the plumage of his betters. The anti-Stratfordians are their still-snobby descendants.

Unlike kitsch-Trotskyist groups, which begin, or whose political ancestors began, as rational political formations, the anti-Stratfordians are not subject to the brutal but health-regenerating blows of experience. They start by discounting the only available "experience" — the evidence, such as it is — and take off from there.

Impervious to criticism, riding their intuitions, sympathies, antipathies, narcissisms, obsessions, as witches in Shakespeare's time were said to ride their broomsticks, they can go on forever, for as long as Shakespeare is read and performed. And they probably will — "stretching out to the crack of doom"!

As we were saying: "Bloody Sunday"

On 30 January 1972 British Army soldiers in Derry, Northern Ireland fired on Catholics demonstrating for civil rights.

They killed 14 men, seven of them teenagers, in the event that came to be known as Bloody Sunday. The Army maintained that they had been shot at, and an early government inquiry into the event, the Widgery Report, took their side. Not until 2010 did the Saville Inquiry find that those who had been killed were unarmed, calling the killings "unjustified and unjustifiable".

At the time, the *Workers' Fight* newspaper, forerunner of *Solidarity*, produced this front page, and commented:

"The 13 dead men [a 14th died later] shot down in cold blood on January 30th in Derry City will have as powerful a posthumous effect on Irish politics as did the '16 dead men' killed in cold blood after the 1916 Rising."

The Provisional IRA's armed campaign had begun two years before, but the Bloody Sunday murders gave it a big boost in membership.

New unionism in the 1880s

On Saturday 18 February Workers' Liberty will host "New Unionism: how workers can fight back", a dayschool to discuss militant, class-struggle trade unionism, past and present, with a particular focus on the struggles that reshaped the British labour movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Cathy Nugent outlines some of the important features of historical "New Unionism".

Beginning in the late 1880s, a great unionising drive among unskilled and semi-skilled workers began. This period of "new unionism" lasted — with setbacks and shifts in character along the way — right up to the 1920s.

1887 marked the beginning of a trade boom — short-lived, like most capitalist booms and slumps at the time. And, as in the past, a unionising drive followed. It was more extensive than before. From the beginning of 1888 there was an upsurge in strike action, much of it in the basic industries around the UK — mines, cotton mills, iron and steel works. In 1889 a summer-long strike wave around east London included the most famous "new unionist" action of all — the London docks strike.

The foundations for new unionism had already been laid. In 1871 the population of Great Britain was 31.5 million people. Of these, 8.2 million men and 3.2 million women were waged workers. One estimate for the number of trade union members among them put it at just 143,000. By 1881, the population had grown to 35 million and trade unions had expanded to 266,000 members.

Trade unions in the 1850s and 60s had very much been craft societies and confined to the skilled workers. But by the 1870s mining unions and mill workers' unions were organising all grades of workers. New sections of workers were now organising; gasworkers formed an East End Union in 1872. Some of these unions survived, others did not.

The leaders of Victorian craft-based unions tried to meet the expectations of Victorian employers, and took care to present themselves as skilled, responsible, steady workmen. In contrast, the bosses hated and feared unskilled, itinerant and casual workers.

Socialist Harry Quelch described the attitudes of the skilled artisan worker with contempt: "Can there be anything more exasperating than to hear a skilled artisan, who ought to know that the whole of society is living on the labour of himself and his mates, skilled and unskilled, talking of his home as 'not bad for a working man', his set of books as 'quite creditable for a working man', his children as 'a good-looking set of kids for a working man' and so on?"

Some of the most ambitious union leaders got themselves elected to Parliament. Alexander MacDonald and Thomas Burt of the Miners' Union became MPs in 1874. But they were Liberals. The performance of "Lib-Lab" trade union-sponsored MPs — 12 were elected in 1885 — helped turn trade unionists away from both the toadying policy of the old unions and a reliance on the Liberal Party to deliver for the workers.

The first high-profile confrontation of the period came in July 1888 when matchworkers at Bryant and May's east London factory struck in solidarity with a sacked colleague. Conditions at the firm had been exposed by the socialist H H Champion in the *Labour Elector*, by Tom Mann in an 1886 pamphlet arguing for the eight-hour day, and by Annie Besant in *The Link*.

The young, mostly casual, mostly women workers (some as young as 13) worked very long hours and were paid just four shillings an hour. They were subject to all kinds of humiliations including arbitrary fines for trivial misdemeanours. Because they ate at their benches, they ingested white phosphorus, causing a debilitating disease of the jaw ("Phossy Jaw").

Annie Besant, a Fabian socialist, has been given most of the credit for the matchworkers strike. But as Louise Raw's 2011 book, *Striking a Light*, convincingly tells us, they were a self-organised workforce with a history of struggle. And they went on to found a "new union", the Matchmakers Union.

The matchworkers were the sisters, mothers, daughters, wives and inspiration for other East End workers who would strike a year later. Many were from Irish immigrant families. They could not have been more different — in temperament and in outlook — to the craft unionists of the earlier period.

WILL THORNE

The writing of the history's next chapter was led by Will Thorne, a Birmingham-born gasworker who had been agitating for a gasworkers' union at the Beckton works in east London from as early as 1884.

The story of how the gasworkers' union (the ancestor of the modern GMB union) was founded is the clearest example of how socialists influenced the formation of the new

Soap factory workers organised in the Gasworkers' Union

trade unions.

Who were the socialists? The Democratic Federation, later the Social Democratic Federation, was for many years the largest and most influential socialist organisation of this period. It was set up in 1881 by a well-to-do man, H M Hyndman, who had an idiosyncratic reading of socialist theory and an autocratic manner, and who denied the importance of trade union struggle.

Neither the SDF, nor its split off, the Socialist League of William Morris, had much idea about how to prepare the ground for political working-class struggles or how to develop workers' organisation. Their role was simply to make propaganda, to prepare for "the crisis". Morris explained his resolve at the time of the SDF-SL split: "To teach ourselves and others what the due social claims of labour are... with the view to dealing with the crisis if it should come in our day, or handing on the tradition of our hope to others if we should die before it comes."

But the SDF was not a homogenous organisation. Leading trade unionists Tom Mann, Will Thorne and Ben Tillett were all members at one time or another. As socialists began to throw themselves into the class struggle they had to think about how to address the issues thrown up — union recognition, the employers' offensive, strike-breaking...

Will Thorne and his workmates had been powerfully affected by general socialist agitation for an eight-hour day (Tom Mann had set up an Eight Hours League in 1886). Their job of stoking the monster furnaces was made more hellish by the fact that they had to work 12-hour shifts.

Thorne made a new attempt to organise a union in spring 1889, spurred on by the introduction of "The Iron Man" into the Beckton works. This new machine was constantly breaking down causing extra time to be worked making the repairs. Some men on the Sunday shift were asked, with no notice, to work 18 hours. Thorne, talking many years later about that time, said: "This was the psychological moment for forming the union." Like the matchworkers, the gasworkers had simply had enough.

Following a mass meeting a union was formed. By mid-April 1889, the union had 3,000 members. It was to be a general union for unskilled workers.

It grew incredibly quickly, and by the middle of July 1889 both of London's major gas companies had acceded to the new union's eight-hour day demand.

THE DOCK STRIKE

In 1889 the main docks in the port of London were in the control of five companies.

Alongside the docks was a complex of wharves spread out along the river, which by the mid-1800s handled the bulk of trade.

This complex and busy industry created a highly differentiated workforce with many separate and specialised trades and jobs. A multitude of other workers serviced the port trade. But the biggest segment was made up of relatively unskilled, very casually employed (often surplus) workers. Their lives were grim — a daily struggle against starvation, homelessness.

The rise of the wharf business had resulted in huge competition within the port. There had also been a tailing off of the rate of overall increase of trade in the port. A squeeze on profits followed, and that led to a squeeze on an already

deeply impoverished and underemployed workforce.

The hourly rate of wages (usually 5d) was supplemented by an extra payment called "the plus". This was calculated on a tonnage basis but the company never disclosed the scales on which the plus was based. In the late 1880s the scales were revised downwards.

At some docks the work was let out to small contractors who would employ as few dockers as possible and worked them as hard as possible. These abuses came on top of daily humiliation at the "call on" — the practice at some docks of choosing the casual workers. A contemporary report in the *Times* said:

"There is a chain put up right across the entrance to the docks, and the contractors are on one side of the chain and the men the other... 1,500 to 2,000 men crowded together, the front men forced up against the chain: the back men are climbing over the heads of those in front, and the contractor behind the chain is picking out the men, generally his own favourites or somebody recommended by his own favourites.

"I myself had had eight or 10 men upon my shoulders and my head, and I have been hurt several times in a struggle for employment like that."

There had been earlier attempts to organise. Socialists involved in the Land and Labour League (an early socialist organisation) built a dock workers' union and led a strike in 1872.

In 1887 Ben Tillett, who became the leader of the 1889 strike, set up a new port workers' union, the Tea Operatives and General Labourers' Union. It was very hard going.

But on 12 August 1889 a dispute broke out at the South West India Dock over the distribution of the "plus" on the "Lady Armstrong". The strike quickly spread and demands were shaped. These included 6d an hour (forever known as the "dockers' tanner"), a minimum shift of four hours work, a reduction in the number of "call ons", and an overtime rate of 8d an hour.

The solidarity of the stronger, more "craft"-oriented stevedores union was crucial. They encouraged other port workers to join the strike, they already knew how to organise a strike committee, and they were a powerful group of workers whose action could bring work at the docks to a halt.

Tillett called on other socialist organisers such as Tom Mann and John Burns to help in the dispute. Burns was already well-known as a socialist "stump orator" around the docks. Eleanor Marx acted as the unpaid secretary for the dispute. Funds were very short and only grew when big donations came through from Australia (where over £30,000 was raised). The women of the docks organised a rent strike.

At the end of August, in the face of continued intransigence by the dock companies, a plan was hatched to call a London-wide general strike. Tom Mann was probably the main architect of the plan.

The plan was quickly abandoned, but it was based on a real and continued general unrest in London. Groups of workers on strike during 1889 included: printers, export iron mongers, millers, Pickfords workers, jam factory workers, young women rope makers, iron workers, Bryant and May workers (again), coal depot workers, brewery workers, sea-going engineers, carpenters, shipwrights, Peak Frean biscuit

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As we were saying: “Anti-Zionism”

By Rhodri Evans

AWL member Daniel Lemberger Cooper's victory in the recent elections at the University of London Union (2-9 February) was won in the teeth of a large campaign, orchestrated by the SWP, branding Cooper a “racist” on the grounds that he is “a Zionist”, i.e. he defends Israel's right to exist and to defend itself, while also supporting the right of the Palestinians to an independent state of their own alongside Israel.

This recent flurry is an echo of an old argument. In the student movement in Britain, it started in 1974. In April that year, the National Union of Students (NUS) voted for “no platform for racists and fascists”.

There was a large Establishment outcry against the vote. *Solidarity's* forerunner *Workers' Fight* defended the right of students to use force against fascist rallies; but it also criticised the “vague open-endedness” of the NUS formula.

In 1975 the United Nations General Assembly resolved that “Zionism is racism”. Picking up on that, in 1977 a few university student unions banned Zionist meetings.

At that time AWL's forerunners still accepted the then-common left view that Israel was an illegitimate state and could and should be replaced by a democratic secular state in all Palestine, merging Jews and Arabs. That (as we would later come to see) was nonsensical. Two nations in long conflict must first each have the right to self-determination before democratic merger is possible; and it is wrong, implicitly anti-semitic, to denounce the Israeli Jews for failing to fold into an impossible scenario.

However, even in 1977, we demurred from the too-rapid equation which said “Zionists” were ipso facto “racist”.

The issue blew up more in 1985-6. In March 1985, the student union of Sunderland Polytechnic banned the student Jewish society. Several other broadly “left-wing” student unions would follow Sunderland's example.

Solidarity's forerunner *Socialist Organiser*, by then far more influential among students than we had been in 1974-7, campaigned against the bans. *Socialist Organiser*, 28 March 1985, declared:

“Israel is a racist state, and Israeli atrocities such as its savage reprisals against Arab men, women and children in Lebanon are crimes against humanity. Should anti-racists therefore treat Zionists — or all those who support the right of the Israeli state to exist — as racists?”

BAN

“Almost all Jews — apart from revolutionary socialists and some religious zealots — are Zionists (at least in a broad sense), and therefore what is at issue here is whether or not socialists, and anti-racists, should politically persecute Jews.

“The Sunderland student union ban was not the work of an unrepresentative minority. Over 1000 students attended its General Meeting which endorsed the ban on the Union of Jewish Students on the grounds that the UJS is racist because it is avowedly Zionist. Nor is the majority attitude at Sunderland untypical of the Left.

“Lenin and Trotsky never dreamed of ‘banning Zionists’ — though such a ban would have been a much less drastic matter in their day, when only an ideological minority of Jews were Zionists. They opposed Zionism politically; but, for example, the Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) movement continued to publish its paper in the USSR until 1927, the year the Left Opposition was outlawed. Yet many today who consider themselves Leninists or Trotskyists support a ban on Zionists.

“The intention of the Sunderland Poly students is to show the sharpest possible intolerance and hostility towards what they consider to be racism — and that is good. What they have done, however, looks more like racism than the anti-racism they intend...”

“Whatever the good intentions, there is no way that a ban like that at Sunderland Poly can avoid being anti-semitic... Jewish identification with Israel has its roots and motives not in anti-Arab racism, not even in a thought-out commitment to displace the Palestinian Arabs, but in the Jews' experience of racist persecution, culminating in the Nazi slaughter...”

“Even many who, for tactical or better reasons, would not ban Jewish student societies, share the notion that Zionists should, more or less, be treated as racist. Translated, that means that most Jews — those who cannot be persuaded to stop believing that Israel, or some version of Israel, has a right to exist — should be persecuted.”

The arguments over Sunderland Poly helped prepare the way for the AWL's forerunners, a few years later, to become convinced that “two nations, two states” was the only viable democratic policy in Israel-Palestine.

Strike at Pinks jam factory, Bermondsey, south London, 1911

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factory workers, Billingsgate cutlery workers, ordinary engineers, builders at Woolwich Arsenal, laundry workers. At the beginning of September, Jewish tailors, cigar and cigarette makers and book finishers went out on strike.

The docks strike came to a successful end when the ship owners put pressure on the dock companies and a section of the wharf owners moved to settle. 6d an hour and negotiations on an end to the “plus” and contract system of employment were granted.

The great London docks strike was an enormously important turning point in the history of the British labour movement. The new union which emerged — the Dock Wharf Riverside and General Workers Union (with 18,000 members by the end of 1889) — set a pattern for other “new unions” in and outside London.

The innovations of this period were:

- The organisation of workers deemed to be “unskilled”.
- The recruitment of members from a wide range of industries and occupations. The establishment of general unions such as the Gasworkers' Union.
- The commitment to being “fighting unions”, charging low membership subscriptions, and using what funds they did have for strike pay.
- Militancy. In a pamphlet on new unionism, Tom Mann and Ben Tillet described new unions as centres for educating workers in collective class consciousness.
- Political radicalism, questioning the adherence to the Liberal Party.
- Making space for the organisation of women workers.

By 1891 there were 274 unions with 1,500,000 members. Other important unions organising semi-skilled and unskilled workers were the National Union of Dock Labour (Glasgow and Liverpool), the National Amalgamated Union of Sailors and Firemen, the National Amalgamated Labourers' Union (Cardiff), the National Amalgamated Union of Labour (Tyneside), the Metropolitan Cab Drivers' Trade Union, the London County Tramway and Omnibus Employees' Trade Union. There were some 2,400 strikes and 11 million work-days lost between 1889 and 1890.

SETBACK AND LABOUR POLITICS

By 1893, one third of the new membership had been lost. Entire unions collapsed and died. Some of the unions which became extinct were small and local, and others disappeared through merger, but nonetheless there was a big slump in organisation. Why?

The short answer is that by 1892 economic slump and rising unemployment had re-emerged, lasting until the second half of the 1890s. And new technology — such as the introduction of steamships — was putting many out of work.

In these years, the employers went on the offensive. They set up explicitly anti-union, bosses' combat organisations. The Shipping Federation, for example, organised armies of strike-breakers with military precision. It would be 20 years before the unions felt strong enough to put up a really serious defence.

In the meantime, and increasingly, the surviving new unions built stronger links with each other. In 1896 the International Federation of Ship, Dock and River Workers was set up (the employers' offensive was not confined to the UK).

The century ended with a lock-out of engineers by a newly formed employers' organisation. It was a test of strength in which the engineers lost. In this context Tom Mann worked on the formation of the Workers' Union (in 1898) — a union for the unskilled and semi-skilled workers which unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers simply were not organising (despite rule book changes to facilitate it).

The Workers' Union was not an industrial union (that was

the “big idea” whose time would come later). It was a general union. In Mann's words, it was “open to any section of workers of either sex for whom no proper union already existed”.

Despite the setback, the experiences of “new unionism” laid the basis for two other developments. These were a parallel development of growing independent “labour” politics and a future wave of industrial militancy, beginning around 1910: the Great Unrest.

In late 1889, the Gasworkers' Union had stood for, and won, two seats on the Barking School Board (an important arena for working-class political representation). West Ham Council had four “new unionists” as councillors.

The founding conference of the Independent Labour Party, held in Bradford in 1893, was, according to Henry Pelling, visibly the product of “new unionism”.

Here was “a new type of political delegate — the intelligent, respectable, working trade unionist of the new labour clubs. Men [mostly men, though many women joined the ILP] of this type, young and friendly, their countenances gleaming with good humour above their loose red ties, dominated the scene. They were not politicians for politics' sake; they were the working class in earnest, the product of the new education and the widening franchise. Their enthusiasm and discipline impressed the observers in the gallery and the reporters who crowded at the press table. They were the tangible evidence of a new factor in British politics”. The ILP and its founder Keir Hardie (elected MP for West Ham South in 1892) were sure that Parliament was a useful arena for working class politics.

Although held back by declining union strength and the anti-union climate (the Taff Vale judgement of 1901 undermined the legality of strike action), the class struggle did begin, incrementally, to rise.

Union membership grew from 1.5 million in 1895 to 2 million in 1900. A rise of real wages between 1900 to 1910 began to tail off; this was a crucial factor behind growing unrest.

The “Great Unrest” (1910-14), as it became known, was preceded and inspired by several precursor struggles — Penrhyn Quarry strikes (1901), the Belfast Dock Strike (1907), the Plebs strike (1909), the Durham and Northumberland miners strike (1910), and the Cambrian Combine strike (1910).

Revolutionary industrial attitudes, methods and ideas became an influential force within the renewed movement. The extent and exact nature of the influence of explicitly revolutionary ideas is a matter of debate, but they were certainly key parts of big movements internationally — in parts of Europe, the USA, Latin America and Australia. Groups of like-minded individuals and organisations were known variously as “industrial syndicalists”, “revolutionary syndicalists” or “anarcho-syndicalists”. The different labels reflected slightly different strategic goals.

The profile of the syndicalists in Britain was raised by the involvement of Tom Mann — his organising flair helped galvanise struggles like the Liverpool Transport Workers' strike (1911). Mann had been “converted” to syndicalism while living and working in Australia.

As the trade unions became increasingly concerned with the formulation of state policy directed at working-class lives and protecting their interests more consistently, the capitalist class was looking for ways to defuse class struggle by incorporating trade union representatives into bargaining institutions. One of the features of the Great Unrest was local and particular unions testing and challenging the functioning and basis of those institutions.

Increasingly, trade unionists were dismayed at the resistance of union officials to any kind of direct action at a time when direct action was desperately needed. That is both the story of then, and of our own times.

● For details of the “New Unionism” school, 18 February, London, see: <http://alturl.com/uami5>

Eurostar cleaners strike for living wage

By Stewart Ward

Eurostar cleaners at the company's flagship St. Pancras terminal will strike for two days on Thursday 16 February.

The workers, who are employed by cleaning contractor Initial, have not received a pay rise for four years. Their bosses' most recent offer, an increase of just 13p, has been described by their union, RMT, as "insulting".

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "It is a shocking indictment of London as a city that the luxurious Eurostar terminal is cleaned by an exploited workforce on poverty wages and that Network Rail have done nothing to stop Initial from

treating their staff like dirt. "Last week another contractor on the Eurostar system, OCS, pulled back from strike action and raised the basic rate to a minimum of £8 an hour and improved conditions

such as sick pay. "Initial staff on the stations deserve similar recognition, not a kick in the teeth and a pathetic £6.76 an hour. RMT is determined to fight for justice for the Initial cleaners

and action from Network Rail on this stain on the fabric of St Pancras. "Pickets and supporters of this brave group of workers will be out in force on Thursday morning demanding a living

wage."

The 48-hour strike on 16 February will be followed by a further two-day walk-out on 1 March if bosses refuse to meet workers' demands.

The strike is the latest in a series of significant struggles by cleaning workers in the railway industry. Workers employed by Carlisle Cleaning and Support Services on Virgin West Coast Mainline won a 10% pay increase after a 24-hour strike in October and the threat of a further 48 hours of action in November.

Cleaning workers in Newcastle have also launched a fight to win free travel passes (which all other workers are entitled to) for the Tyne and Wear Metro.

Sparks sweat on court ruling

By Stewart Ward

As *Solidarity* went to press, electricians working for Balfour Beatty Engineering Services were still awaiting the outcome of a High Court ruling as to whether their latest strike ballot – which returned a 66% majority for action – is legal.

If the Court rules in favour of the workers' union, Unite, the earliest conceivable date for an official strike would be 21 February. A strike committee elected from BBES

stewards agreed that any walkout would be followed by rolling and selective action as well as action short of a strike, including an overtime ban.

The sparks' rank-and-file committee have called for mass protests at prominent BBES sites including Sellafield, Grangemouth and the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station.

The committee has said it will "prepare for action and continue the campaign" regardless of the outcome of the court decision.

Council workers strike against cuts

By Darren Bedford
Workers at Cheshire West and Chester Council staged a three-hour stoppage on Tuesday 14 February to mark the beginning of a campaign of industrial action that will involve selective strikes in coming weeks.

The workers – members of Unite, Unison and GMB – are attempting to force management to abandon a plan to introduce new terms and conditions, which unions say will re-

duce overtime pay and weekend allowance, by dismissing and re-engaging staff.

GMB organiser Graham McDermott said: "The aim of this industrial action is to oppose the council's decision to impose changes to terms and conditions by means of dismissal and reengagement.

"The cuts include the loss of enhancement for weekend working, removal of some shift premiums and the removal of the majority of Bank Holi-

day premiums. These cuts will impact on many of the lower paid council employees.

"GMB and the other trade unions have tried to engage the council in meaningful discussions to reach a sensible compromise on the cuts but the council have refused to listen.

"This has left over 3,000 members of the three unions with no alternative but to take industrial action in order to have their voices heard."

Leeds Labour debates cuts

By Ken Davis

On Tuesday 7 February East Leeds and Elmet and Rothwell Labour Party held a public meeting with Owen Jones. They got an impressive 70 people on a very cold Tuesday night.

The speakers from the floor included local trade unionists, old Labour lefties and a few younger people who had joined Labour recently. Many of the contributions were on the money in blaming union leaders for supporting New Labour and not forcing Miliband and not forcing Miliband to support the strikes.

There was talk about reshaping the Labour Party and the union movement with rank-and-file control, and even from one contributor the need to re-assert the internationalism of the socialist movement against left little Englandism.

East Leeds Labour Party

are doing some of the things a CLP should consider central but very few do. They have held large public meetings about the cuts, linked up closely with local trade union branches (particularly the GMB) and have leafleted in support of the 30 November strikes.

Despite this decent work, the Labour council is going to pass on £55 million of cuts this year on top of £90 million the year before. This included a cuts to social care, meals on wheels and rent rises as well as 400 jobs going. East Leeds radicalism does not extend to opposing the imposition of these cuts.

Contributions from left-wingers demanding a refusal to implement the cuts, even if it means a direct confrontation with the government, were well-received, albeit not by the councillors present.

Sacked NTT Communications cleaners on a demonstration to defend IWW rep Alberto Durango, also victimised for his union activity. See article below. Photo: Peter Marshall

Cleaners fight for their jobs

By Ira Berkovic

Trade unionists will demonstrate outside the offices of NTT Communications Ltd. in London, where cleaning contractor Dynamiq Cleaning and Program Management Ltd. recently sacked its entire workforce for attempting to organise a union.

The workers' union, the Industrial Workers of the World (Cleaners' Section) is also involved in a rein-

statement battle at the landmark Heron Tower in Liverpool Street, where prominent rep Alberto Durango was sacked when a new contractor, Incentive FM Group Ltd., took over the running of the work.

The protest will take place from 5pm on Friday 17 February at Devon House, 58-60 St. Katharine's Way, London E1W 1LB.

Cleaning contractors like Dynamiq, Incentive and others are becoming more belligerent in sacking

workers who attempt to fight back. After some victories for cleaning workers, such as the cleaners at Guildhall in the City of London, contractors and agencies are clearly worried about a wave of struggle across the industry and are making moves to nip it in the bud.

All trade unionists should support Alberto Durango and the NTT Communications cleaners in their fights for reinstatement.

Pay cuts for care workers

By Clarke Benitez

Care workers formerly employed by Southern Cross are facing a month without pay as their new employer, Four Seasons, unilaterally announced that it would withhold wages for March 2012.

Four Seasons took over the management of 140 homes in autumn 2011 after Southern Cross went bust, but were themselves already running debts of nearly £800 million. Despite assurances from Four Seasons head Dr. Pete Claveley that the takeover would not lead to any changes in pay or conditions for workers, the company has told workers they will not receive any wages in March 2012 and will be paid on 17 April. Pay for bank holiday working has also been slashed. Outrageously, Four Seasons bosses have blamed the cutbacks on the increase in the minimum wage.

The GMB's Justin Bowden said: "GMB members who transferred from Southern Cross face a month with no income as the company unilaterally withholds their wages. This is contrary to their terms and conditions of employment which are supposed to be protected by TUPE and contrary to the promises made to them in writing by Dr Claveley personally. No arrangements are in place to help these low paid workers cope during this month without income."

Claveley has branded the union "mischievous" for its response to the issue.

Southern Cross care workers already faced difficult conditions before the company went bust and Four Seasons took over.

A GMB organiser told *Solidarity* in June 2011: "Workers are very low-paid and shifts can last up to 12 hours. Conditions in the homes themselves vary but some are very run down and quite depressing places to work. Homes are often very short staffed, so the quality of care goes down."

"Care work is very hard; people don't realise how manual it is, but when you're having to physically lift people in and out of bed or help them go to the toilet, it's a very manual job."

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Pensions: strike on 28 March, plan next action!

By Martin Thomas

The Executives of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and of the civil service union PCS, meeting on 9 February, decided to call for a new strike to defend public sector pensions on 28 March.

The unions will survey all members, asking them to endorse rejecting the Government's so-called "final offer" from December and to support further action "beginning with" a strike on 28 March.

The Exec of the lecturers' union on Friday 10th "unanimously agreed to join with our sister trade unions the NUT and the PCS in co-ordinated strike

action on 28 March". The Exec rejected a call from UCU general secretary Sally Hunt for a further formal ballot, but will have a "survey" like NUT and PCS.

The Scottish teachers' union EIS, the Welsh teachers' union UCAC, the Northern Ireland public service union NIPSA, and healthworkers in Unite may also join the strike on 28 March.

Workers' Liberty activists in the unions will:

- advocate a perspective for rolling action after 28 March.

(All the unions involved officially and generically favour "further action"; the issue is whether this means a high-tempo, self-controlling surge of action,

realistically focused on winning concessions from the Government, or a recommendation to workers to go home on 28 March and wait for the general secretaries to hand down a further protest-strike date some weeks or months in the future).

- argue for proper strike meetings (not just rallies) and proper picket lines on 28 March.

- win the "surveys" and "consultations" on action.

The December "final offer" included only sideways adjustments from the "work longer, pay more, get less pension" package pushed by the Government since 2010. Most workers know that. In April the Government will start taking extra contribu-

tions out of workers' pay-packets.

Despite that, and because of the two months' delay since December while even those union leaders who reject the Government's terms have done nothing except mumble almost inaudibly about maybe having some further action of some sort, some time, it may take effort and energy to win majorities for action in the "surveys".

Activist meetings to discuss and make plans for rolling and selective action after 28 March may be important for that effort, giving workers the conviction that 28 March need not be just a limp final gesture.

Socialists win London student elections

AWL member Daniel Cooper has been elected Vice President of the University of London Union.

By Sacha Ismail

The activist left has won the elections for the leadership of University of London Union — the federation of student unions at the old London universities.

Until a few years ago, ULU functioned almost purely as a building with bars and other facilities, with zero political campaigning. This has begun to change more recently, with the revival of student activism from 2010, and this result should consolidate that shift.

The winning candidates are all members of left-wing organisations. Sean Rillo Raczk, previously Vice President and a member of Socialist Workers' Party split Counterfire, was elected President unopposed (but with a strikingly large number of Re-Open Nominations votes). SWP member Jen Izaakson won a heavily contested election for Editor of the London Student newspaper, fairly narrowly. Stef Newton, also a Counterfire member, and Craig Gent, of the Anarchist Federation, were elected as Trustees. Workers' Liberty member Daniel Cooper (who is currently president of Royal Holloway students' union) was elected Vice President.

Daniel's victory was particularly significant because his main opponent was an SWP member, Ross Speer. Speer nominated at the last minute, after a number of SWP student activists offered support to Daniel's campaign, obviously causing the SWP student organisers to take fright. Their campaign focused heavily on the issues of Israel-Palestine and Islamophobia; this emphasis was, sadly but predictably, supplemented by a torrent of accusations that the AWL is anti-Palestinian, Islamophobic and so on.

The smears didn't stick. Daniel won support from large numbers of independent left activists and SU officers across London, including many who disagree with Workers' Liberty on, for instance, Palestine — but who rejected the slur that we are anti-Palestinian, and supported the general thrust of the campaign. (Many of these activists are involved in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.) He was also backed by an extremely wide range of activists at Royal Holloway — from the Anti-Cuts Alliance, Feminist Society, Afro-Caribbean Society, Islamic Society and many others.

The result reflected that wide base of support. In a three-way election, Daniel received 49.5 percent of the vote in the first round, and 61 percent in the second round. He won more votes than any other ULU candidate, including the uncontested Presidential candidate.

The fact the smear campaign failed is why this was a good result for political honesty, non-sectarianism and more generally reasonable behaviour on the left, as well as for a radical, campaigning student movement.

OPEN UP

One reason so few students vote in the ULU elections, or have anything to do with ULU, is its historical lack of activity.

Another, however, is that the left has focused narrowly on a few favoured causes to the exclusion of serious campaigning on the many issues facing students in London. Even international solidarity has been reduced pretty much to the single issue of Palestine! Ross Speer's campaign was a clear example of this. (This is not an argument against supporting the Palestinians.)

ULU needs to mobilise students to win on issues such as fees, cuts, privatisation, housing, liberation and rights at work (as well as international solidarity).

One of the key planks of Daniel's campaign was opening up ULU membership to student unions in universities and colleges across London — so it is no longer an exclusive club for the posh universities.

That will be essential if ULU is to fulfil its potential as an organising centre for the student movement in London.

Class struggle explodes in Israel

By Ira Berkovic

A general strike which paralysed the Israeli economy for nearly a week is over — for now.

The strike, called by Histadrut (the main Israeli trade union centre), followed a similar action in November 2011 and focused on the issue of the increasing use of agency labour by public sector employees. It demanded the levelling up of pay and conditions for the 250,000 contract workers, who Histadrut says are paid an average of 30% less than directly-hired staff. Unions ultimately want the government to end the use of agency labour and hire workers directly.

Government sources claim conditions for con-

tract workers will be "significantly improved". The deal is estimated to cost around NIS 800 million (£136 million), and will see contract workers have their monthly wages increased to match minimums for directly-hired workers (NIS 4,500 per month). The government will also hire 120 inspectors to ensure that contract workers are being paid equivalent wages. Histadrut had previously said that it would only end the strike if the government agreed to ensure an across-the-board levelling-up of pay and conditions for contract workers.

While some improvements in conditions are expected, it is feared that the terms of the deal will fall short of that aim, and the deal is made worse by

the inclusion of a no-strike clause that prevents Histadrut from organising national general strikes for economic demands for the next three years.

However, many Israeli workers have already demonstrated their preparedness to defy the law in order to take on their bosses.

RAIL

Just one day after the general strike was called off, railworkers announced further action in their long-running battle against privatisation.

Despite a court injunction which declared their strike illegal, they took action on Monday 13 February and are refusing to put into service four new engines recently arrived

from Spain.

Also in Israel, the Workers' Advice Centre (Ma'an), a radical labour movement NGO organising outside Histadrut, has won substantial compensation for its members in the trucking industry after several tribunals against haulage firms.

With Netanyahu's government continuing to pursue an aggressively neo-liberal agenda including privatisation and austerity cuts, it is likely that struggles like these will continue and expand.

The Israeli courts have already shown their readiness to attempt to stop them; other Israeli workers should follow the railworkers' example in demonstrating their refusal to be stopped.