

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Save Central Middlesex A&E!

By Vicki Morris

On Saturday 15 September more than 100 people joined a march against NHS cuts through Harlesden to the Central Middlesex Hospital (aka Park Royal Hospital).

Along with Ealing and Hammersmith Hospitals, Central Middlesex is set to lose its A&E department under proposals put forward by NHS North West London (NHSNWL). The deadline of the NHSNWL consultation is 8 October.

Central Middlesex is a busy hospital, in an area with significant industry, close to Wembley Stadium, but already the A&E is closed at night. If the A&E closed permanently, patients from this area of Brent would have to travel to Northwick Park Hospital; patients travelling there at night report there are already long queues.

According to the Health

Jean Lewis (RCN), staff-side chair, Central London Community Healthcare (right) said: "In community healthcare they are downsizing. Hospital services will not be replaced in the community."

Emergency campaign, the current "reconfiguration process" is driven by pressure to cut costs.

NHSNWL faces an estimated £1 billion gap between resources and rising demand for treatment by 2015; it wants to cut £314 million from hospital budgets over three years, and £297 million from health commissioning

budgets.

Cuts could mean 1,750 job losses in the next 12 months and 5,600 job losses by 2015. The closure of A&E units undermines the very viability of a hospital: "history shows that the closure of an A&E is very often the prelude to a process of rundown of other services, and even closure", says Health

Emergency.

The lively demonstration of local trade unionists, Labour councillors, the anti-cuts group Brent Fightback, Navin Shah AM, and residents, finished up in front of the hospital itself, where it was met by a group of cleaners contracted to G4S who are among those who will lose their jobs if the A&E closes.

The march in Brent was smaller than that for Ealing A&E on the same day. While the Labour group on Brent Council (which it runs) are supporting the campaign for Central Middlesex, the Council has not put as many resources into campaigning that Ealing and Hammersmith Councils have done.

The Ealing march had more than two thousand.

- More: bit.ly/U8L1Cr
- Brent Fightback: <http://brentfightback.blogspot.co.uk>

Friern Barnet Library re-occupied and re-opened!

By Dave Ball

Friern Barnet Library in North London has been occupied and re-opened to the public.

Squatters made homeless by new legislation were looking for commercial properties to squat, found windows left open in the library which was closed by Barnet Council in April this year, and occupied it.

The occupation was welcomed cautiously at first by the Save Friern Barnet Library (SFBL) campaign. SFBL and Barnet Alliance for Public Services (BAPS) have been fighting this closure and demanding that Barnet Council re-opens the library as a properly funded and staffed public service.

When the council first closed the library there was a short-lived occupation of about 20 local residents. Protest "pop-up" libraries on the small green space next to the library building and community demonstrations have helped

maintain an active campaign through the spring and summer.

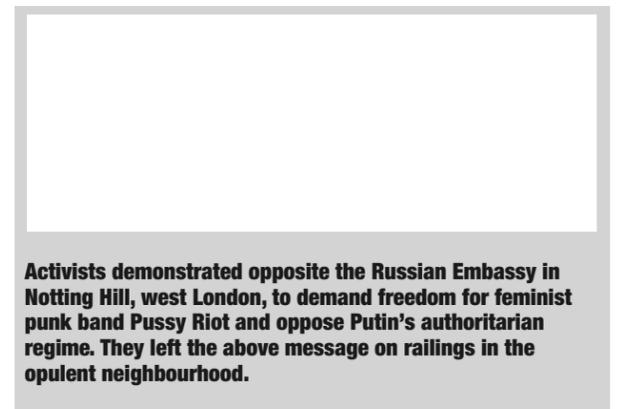
After the occupiers made clear they see themselves as caretakers of the library while SFBL and the council negotiate its future, local campaigners and other volunteers in alliance with the squatters have set about filling the shelves with books, videos, games, leaflets and local information, as well as providing a community centre for a range of leisure and recreational activities. The library has also become a campaign centre.

Barnet Council has been taken aback by the determination of the campaigners and has sent senior representatives to negotiating meetings at the library.

The Council has tried to persuade the SFBL campaign to give up the library building (because it wants to sell the building and the land) and has offered alternative space. This offer has been refused by the campaign — the demand is for a library in the heart of the community run as a public service.

The Council has simultaneously begun eviction proceedings but an initial hearing, scheduled for 18 September, has been delayed for 21 days in order to allow the occupiers to prepare their case.

- Save Friern Barnet Library: <https://sites.google.com/site/savefriernbarnetlibrary>



Activists demonstrated opposite the Russian Embassy in Notting Hill, west London, to demand freedom for feminist punk band Pussy Riot and oppose Putin's authoritarian regime. They left the above message on railings in the opulent neighbourhood.

Don't deport Fernanda Milan!

Fernanda Milan is a 22-year-old transgender woman and activist from Guatemala.

In 2009, Fernanda fled persecution to seek safety and asylum in Denmark. Fernanda has now been told that Danish law does not recognise gender identity as a motive for persecution.

This is despite a 2011 Directive of the European Parliament (2011/95/EU Article 10d), which specifically mentions gender identity as a reason for persecution.

Fernanda has been informed she will be deported back to Guatemala on 17 September.

During her detention in the Sandholmlejren Centre for asylum seekers, Fernanda suffered appalling discrimination and sexual violence because the Danish authorities refused to accommodate her in the women's unit and would only recognise her as a man. Fernanda was raped on more than one occasion. The authorities denied Fernanda the hormone replacement therapy she has taken since the age of fourteen because she didn't fulfil their "criteria" for the

Activists from the LGBT Advisory Committee of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers' union (RMT) held a protest at the Danish embassy, where they handed in a letter supporting Fernanda Milan signed by dozens of union officers and activists.

psychiatric diagnosis "transsexual".

Fernanda's deportation back to Guatemala will place her life in great jeopardy. In Guatemala, transgender people are treated as social outcasts, denied employment and access to healthcare, regularly intimidated and abused by the police, and subject to shocking levels of transphobic violence and hate murders.

Fernanda faces arrest and torture by the Guatemalan authorities.

A clash of two bigotries

By Rosalind Robson

The violence of some of protests outside US and other Embassies against the *Innocence of Muslims* film will have horrified all democrats and socialists.

So dismayed were secular-minded Libyans with the killing of American diplomats in Benghazi they organised counter-demonstrations.

The protests were relatively small in most cities in the Arab world, Africa, and south-east Asia, but larger in some places (like Kabul, Monday 17 September).

The Kabul protest will have been fuelled by resentment against the NATO forces, the corruption of the Afghan government, and much else. But the religious-political leaders behind these demonstrations were only interested in stoking up and exploiting ethnic and religious division.

A demonstration outside the US Embassy in the UK was the work of the ultra-Islamist sect, Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Mainstream Islamists responded in line with whatever they perceived their political advantage to be. Hezbollah and Iran's rulers appealed to "Muslims everywhere", in order to puff up their own position in the Muslim movement.

But in Egypt both the Muslim Brotherhood government and the Salafists who want to be part of the new Egyptian political set-up distanced themselves from the violence of the protests.

In Libya Benghazi-based Islamists with a specific beef against the central government are said to be

behind the attack.

Overall the protests have been manipulated by demagogues, rousing people to fight for their religion... against any threat — or rather, against people or buildings which, by dint of being American or "western", were seen as symbolically associated with a rubbishy, far-distant crank film.

Yet one group on the British left, the International Socialist Group (Scotland), felt able to describe the protests as "anti-imperialist".

They said the protests were symptomatic of a new drive against rampaging western powers, the US first and foremost, and all socialists must back them.

RIDICULOUS

This was both mind-numbingly ridiculous and very toxic (see page 10).

Can there be any worse kind of "ideology" than that we saw in the protests?

In fact the ultra-right wing, politicised Christian fundamentalism of the people behind this film is about as bad.

In the US, some people enjoy provocations like Qu'ran burning, have long been mobilising to stop "abortionists", and get their kicks by ostentatiously condemning gay people to burn in hell. They too are fringe people.

But short of the radical transformation of American society, they could become more numerous. And probably more so if, as seems likely, Mitt Romney does not get elected as President in November.

Others on the left (Nick Cohen, the *Observer*, 16 September), have argued defending the free speech

of the film-makers is key, even in the face of their ignorance and stupidity.

That's alright. Any attempt by the American or other state to ban e.g. public showings of the film would in the long run harm the possibility of having a rational discussion on religion and politics.

However, the film is a different case from the 2005 case of "Danish cartoons" which satirised the Prophet Mohammed. Those were part of a serious debate on self-censorship (from a viewpoint I would not agree with). I would not want to solidarise to any degree with these film-makers.

No good will come from further intervention by the big powers in Libya or, as is possible, in Yemen because of these protests.

Secular-minded people in the Muslim-majority countries and the west need to join together to fight for societies free of all forms of bigotry and sectarian divisions.

As economic and social inequalities rise and rise, that task is becoming more urgent.

South African miners' strike spreads

New mines join the struggle as the strike at the Lonmin platinum mine continues. See tinyurl.com/saminers2012

New push for QCH dispute

By Gerry Bates

Workers in dispute at the Queensland Children's Hospital construction site in Brisbane, Australia, are looking to industrial action at other sites and workplaces to add the final extra squeeze to the pressure on the main contractor, Abigroup, and force it to settle.

Delegations from the site will be going out to talk with workers elsewhere and make the case for solidarity.

In dispute since 6 August, the workers are standing firm despite receiving no strike pay and not even being able to collect donations through a bank account. All donations have to be in cash or

in supermarket vouchers.

Unions have been served with court orders to keep away from the site, and the workers have been continuing the dispute as a community protest with the help of Bob Carnegie, a former Builders Labourers Federation organiser called in by the workers after union officials withdrew.

Further pressure will be applied on 21 September, when Bob Carnegie faces a court hearing to order him to keep away from the site. Bob has discussed with the QCH workers and states clearly: "When injustice becomes the law, defiance becomes our duty".

There is huge pressure on Abigroup, too. It is losing \$300,000 a day. Abigroup bosses are stubborn, but they are calculators of

profits and losses, not people willing to defy the odds for a principle as Bob Carnegie and the QCH workers are.

The workers' demand is for a union enterprise bargaining agreement to cover the site, with a clause ensuring that workers employed by different subcontractors are all paid the rate for the job.

After weeks of obstinate refusal, Abigroup started negotiating on 4 September. It is still negotiating. QCH workers want support for the extra push to get Abigroup, and its parent company Lend Lease, to concede.

Please send messages of support to ishmael1819@gmail.com

Palestinian workers strike

By Helen Simpkins

On Monday 10 September taxi, bus and truck drivers, around 24,000, struck throughout the West Bank.

In the cities thousands of protesters filled the streets to support the strike and protest against the economic crisis, the result of unpaid pledges by the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian Finance Ministry recently reported an estimated a shortfall of \$1.2 billion — a quarter of the annual budget. PA employees, almost a sixth of the West Bank population in employment, have not been paid their full salaries since June.

Civil servants have struck before. Unrest has

grown in recent months over the Paris Protocol which linked inflation in the West Bank to that in Israel, preventing more than a 15% difference in prices for fuel and goods.

Israel was also hit with a wave of protests last year about the high cost of living. Tax, food, fuel and housing costs skyrocketed as the Israeli Government attempted to redress the financial balance with austerity measures.

As fuel prices in the West Bank are an all-time high, it is no surprise that it was public transport workers that have led the charge.

This strike and the continuing protests are creating debate among Palestinian activists about whether or not this is a useful expression of the anger

in the region.

Some are suggesting that it is a distraction from the fight against the occupation and that the energy would be better spent fighting Israel than the PA; others that the PA cannot be entirely separated from the Israeli government. The PA is Israel's way of "outsourcing" the occupation, a group of limited power over only 40% of the West Bank and funded largely by foreign donations.

In Nablus the PA police force was sent out to suppress the street actions and numerous protesters were injured in clashes that included batons and tear gas.

Protests continue across the West Bank.

• Full article: workersliberty.org/node/19546

Dutch elections: disappointment for the left

By Martin Thomas

The election in the Netherlands on 12 September produced an increased vote, and victory, for the main right-wing party, VVD.

The Socialist Party, a left social-democratic group originating from Maoism, which had led the polls for large parts of 2012, slumped badly in the last weeks before the election and ended up with the same number of seats, and a smaller vote (9.2%) than in 2010.

Solidarity asked Peter Drucker, a socialist based in the Netherlands, to explain.

On the election result itself, Peter Drucker referred us to an article by Alex de Jong (<http://links.org.au/node/3026>).

The result, wrote de Jong,

"shouldn't come as a surprise.

"The SP is not very similar to Greece's Syriza..." It geared its campaign round getting into a coalition government, and avoiding the disappointment it had in 2006, when it won 25 seats yet was excluded from the government coalition.

"To avoid a repetition of this, the SP leadership decided the party had to... lose its radical image and show it was prepared to govern. This approach seemed successful — for a while. But since people were not asked to vote for the SP's program and its solutions for the crisis, but for a future prime minister, the 'experienced' Labour Party became more and more a logical choice for many of them".

The SP advocated some welfare measures but made

"no proposals to nationalise, for example, parts of the financial sector". It rejected EU demands to get the budget deficit below three per cent in 2013, but in favour of setting that target for 2015. An increase of the pension age from 65 to 67 after 2025 was accepted as inevitable.

"The SP's programme is to the right of what the Dutch Labour Party was saying in the 1970s and is not that different from what one might hear in the circles of France's Parti Socialiste of Hollande".

"There exists a longer-term trend of Labour Party voters, sick of the betrayals of this 'third way', social-liberal party, moving further to the left... Among trade unionists, for example, the SP is now more popular than the Labour Party..."

But "the Labour Party, under pressure from the SP, adopted a much more left-wing discourse than it had used for years, trying and succeeding, to win back many voters". And "the moment the Labour Party won only a nose-length over the SP in opinion polls, voters started massively to leave [the SP] for... Labour [as having] more chance to prevent the return of [VVD leader] Rutte".

Now, and paradoxically, "the most likely scenario is a coalition of Labour and

the VVD, plus at least one more party".

Peter Drucker added: "My sense is that the PvdA [Labour Party] always used the idea of a coalition with the SP to attract left-wing voters, but didn't and doesn't take the possibility seriously. Moreover, since both D66 [a small Lib-Dem-type party] and CDA [Christian Democratic Appeal] have virtually ruled out governing with the SP, that 'centre-left' coalition [advocated by the SP] is an illusion, and one that distracts people from the key task of mobilising the next round of attacks on the horizon.

"I suspect the SP leadership doesn't believe in the possibility itself, but simply wants to make it harder for the PvdA to ... form a coalition with the VVD..."

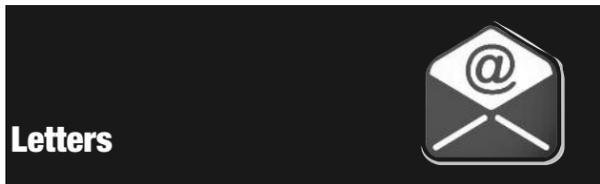
"I'm not aware of any opposition at all in the PvdA

now, though I suppose some could develop if the VVD's terms are too gruesome (which is likely).

"As for the unions, they are very divided, with a deep left-right split on narrow union issues cross-cutting party loyalties. That is, the right is mainly PvdA and to a lesser extent GroenLinks, while the left is mainly SP (with a range of positions) but also with some PvdA'ers. So it's hard for any union or any current in the unions to put forward a clear political position.

"Going into the elections their position was tacitly 'vote PvdA or SP' — with the left wing doing most of the mobilising around that — and that's about the limit of the political intervention unionists are capable of right now".

US socialists are right to shun Democrats



Letters

The questions that Eric Lee raises in his opinion piece (*Solidarity* 255), "Why American unions support Obama..." have been long settled for revolutionary Marxists in the US.

Debate over the viability of a "realignment" strategy like that carried out by Max Shachtman's followers was largely settled by the Vietnam war and the abandonment by Shachtman's formerly third camp socialists of an independent working class perspective.

Since the mid-1970s, as US capital shifted away from accepting the regulated capitalism of the New Deal to driving an aggressive neo-liberalism, lingering hopes on the part of social democrats about prospects for taking over or realigning the Democratic Party have evaporated as corporate control and financing have become increasingly obvious as the party has moved steadily to the right.

Given the experience of the Obama administration, illusions about being the "party of the people," "hope and change," or Obama being a transformative president, have largely collapsed. This is why the social movements and radicalising youth, as expressed by the Occupy movement, are mostly bypassing electoral activity.

However, the labour movement, which has become reliant on relationships with politicians, rather than on an educated, mobilised and militant rank and file, is justifiably in a panic. With the collapse of private sector unionism, labour is extremely vulnerable. The public sector unions are largely paper tigers. Privately, labour leaders think that a Romney victory would be like a shot in the head, while Obama would continue to be a slow bleed.

CORPORATE

For a sense of who owns the two corporate parties, consider that labour is outspent 30 to 1 by the big corporate donors.

Altogether, labour spent at least \$300 million to elect President Obama, and their ground-level mobilisation of members played a decisive role. If we only had the courage and vision to focus those resources on internal organising and education, new organising, and running labour candidates!

At a recent labor rally the AFL-CIO attempted to make some small steps towards political independence by announcing a new political program called the Second Bill of Rights which advocates the right to a job at a living wage, the right to full participation in the electoral system, the right to collectively bargain, the right to a quality education, and the rights to health care, retirement security and unemployment insurance. The AFL-CIO is asking the two corporate-financed parties to adopt this Second Bill of Rights. The only politician to announce their support is Green Party candidate for President, Jill Stein!

Symptomatic of the real relation of the Democratic Party to the working class is former Obama chief of staff and now Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel's speaking about education reform at the Democratic convention. According to the Chicago Teachers' Union "Democratic mayors like Emanuel, have led an unprecedented attack on organised labor and with a prolific focus on teacher unions."

In a decisive test for US labour, the 26,000-member Chicago Teachers Union is striking against Emanuel and his

appointed school board in a faceoff between two conflicting visions of public education. The conflict has its roots in a national corporate reform agenda pushing to privatise schools, and destroy job security for teachers. This was first carried out by Arne Duncan, former Chicago schools chief, and now President Obama's Secretary of Education.

Teacher union-bashing at the Democratic convention included a screening by the Democratic National Committee of the anti-union drama "Won't Back Down," sponsored by Democrats for Education Reform, made up of hedge fund managers seeking investment opportunities in education.

The left we need would be rooted in the organised, and organising, working class with clear ideas about the need for independent politics and working class self-activity that can promote that consciousness and organisation — much as the *Labor Notes* trend is doing.

Leftists need to be organising rank and file movements (like that in the Chicago teachers union) to push our unions to focus our resources on internal organising and member education, organising the unorganised, building strike funds, and beginning to build political alternatives to the Democrats.

While in a few places, like in Vermont, unions are supporting labour candidates running as independents or in progressive third parties, unlike in the late 1990s, there is currently no credible motion towards a labour party.

Social explosions like the Wisconsin uprising, Occupy, and the mass support for the Chicago teachers' strike are the most likely way forward. Mass struggle, not support for the bosses' politicians, holds the hope of real change.

Traven (Supporter of the US socialist group Solidarity and Secretary-Treasurer of the Vermont AFL-CIO)



Labour party is no fantasy

Eric Lee (*Solidarity* 255) creates a straw man when he counterposes a mass revolutionary party as the fantasy alternative to a "realistic" orientation to the US Democrats.

The issue is whether the US working class has an independent political voice — a labour party. He ignores the most recent attempt to create a labour party and the lessons to draw from it.

In 1996 I attended the Founding Convention of the Labor Party in Cleveland. The new party was supported by a number of the smaller US unions — the Oil and Chemical Workers, the United Electrical Workers, the Farm Workers and others — and by its predecessor organisation, Labor Party Advocates, which had campaigned under the slogan "The bosses have two parties. We need one of our own."

It turned out that the party was still-born. The reason was not too much independence from the Democrats. Rather, at the behest of the unions, the Convention adopted a self-denying ordinance that it would undertake no electoral activity on the grounds that it was 'premature'.

Thus there was to be no direct challenge to the Democrats and, with the exception of a few areas such as Vermont, local activity withered almost before it had begun.

It can be argued that the launching of the party was premature in that it should have been preceded by a longer period of campaigning. And whether it would have ultimately been successful is, of course, a historical might-have-been — unlike attempts to "realign" the Democrats which have failed many times.

But the attempt was neither fantasy nor precluded by a supposed active orientation of the US working class to the Democrats.

Bruce Robinson, Manchester

Assange: safeguards and assurances?

The crux of this matter appears to be resting on whether Assange would be safer from extradition to the US in Sweden.

His detractors claim that he would be, and claim that Assange's defence to the contrary is a smokescreen to avoid the rape charges. Several counter arguments have been presented.

The first of these notes Sweden's unblemished human rights record and their ratification of the European Convention of Human Rights (Owen Jones, *The Independent*, 17 August). Jones and others have failed to mention the fierce criticism the Swedish authorities came under when in 2001 they handed over two asylum seekers to the CIA who were later tortured in Egypt under the United States' programme of extraordinary rendition.

In the same article Jones cites David Allen Greene, an "expert" who has been keen to lead the Assange lynch mob. Greene published an article called "Legal myths about the Assange extradition" (*New Statesman*, 20 August) in this which he wrongly repeats the claim of Sweden's foreign minister, who released a statement that the Swedish courts were independent of the Government. This is clearly untrue in extradition cases as is evident from a cursory glance at

the Swedish government website:

"The government can however, refuse extradition even if the Supreme Court has not declared against extradition, as the law states that if certain conditions are fulfilled, a person 'may' be extradited — not 'shall' be extradited." (bit.ly/fWOpYf)

In *Solidarity* 254, Mark Osborn states that: "It is probably the case that he will be safer in Sweden than in the UK (Swedish legal safeguards against unjustified extradition to the US are stronger than Britain's)".

On closer inspection this does not seem so certain, especially given the Swedish governments' ignorance of such safeguards in their capitulation to US rendition requests previously. Elsewhere these "safeguards" include the legal requirement for the British Home Secretary to approve a third-party extradition request, hardly comforting for Assange, given the close alliances of the three nations concerned.

The ECHR in this case is doubtful to offer any solace, as the US is quite unlikely to be naive enough to make an extradition request to Sweden on a charge where the punishment may breach the convention.

If Osborn is correct when he states: "[Assange's] ability to stay out of a US jail will largely rest on the campaign that can be built in his defence..." (*Letters, Solidarity* 256), then it follows that he would actually be better grounded in the UK to avoid ending up in a US prison, where he has a great deal more public support than in Sweden. Accepting this point seems to contradict the idea that Assange would be safer from the US in Sweden, rather than the UK.

It doesn't seem unreasonable that the Swedish (or for that matter the British or American) authorities give Assange assurances of some kind. This could be as simple as publicly reasserting their commitment to the 1957 European Convention on Extradition, specifically the part which explicitly prohibits extradition in the case of political offences, without any specific reference to the case in hand that could prejudice judicial proceedings. This would at least cause great concern amongst their own populations and demonstrate the existence of a fault line between convention and reality if such a statement was contradicted later on.

The right to recourse of justice for his accusers does not trump Assange's right to avoid being exposed to charges that are politically motivated.

It is right therefore to argue that he faces the allegations against him in Sweden, and not contradictory to suggest that he is given assurances to protect him from those forces seeking to punish him for his actions politically.

Andy Forse, London

Galloway on rape: not an aberration

By Sacha Ismail

George Galloway's comments on rape, in connection with the Assange controversy, have outraged many on the left who have not paid much attention to Galloway before.

That is good. They have even sparked criticism, perhaps opportunistic, from some whose general stance over the years has been to defend Galloway and promote him as a leader of the left. But what is important to understand is that Galloway's latest outbursts are not an aberration, but entirely consistent with his broader politics.

In terms of economic policy, Galloway was never better than a middle-of-the-road Labour careerist. His politics on anything to do with religion and international conflicts mark him out as something much worse.

Galloway has often taken reactionary positions on issues connected to women's rights. For instance, he is anti-choice, against a woman's right to have an abortion.

And he has always been willing to subordinate princi-

ples which define any real left — women's liberation, LGBT liberation, democracy, working-class struggle — to his warped version of "anti-imperialism". He has backed pretty much any regime which clashes with the US (particularly in the Middle East — Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Assad's Syria, Iran) not only against the US but against its own people.

Galloway has not suddenly gone off the rails. His political trajectory dates back to at least 1994, when he visited Saddam Hussein and publicly fawned before him. Yet for much of that period big sections of the left have courted and promoted him. Even after his falling out with the SWP in Respect, they hailed his victory in Bradford West this year.

Galloway should never have been accept as part of the left. His star may now be waning, but the role he has played over the last decade highlights the need to put the left's house in order.

Readers who want to have a look the AWL's comments on George Galloway, going back to 1994 can find it all here: tinyurl.com/93cg57h

Cuts deepen the crisis

In the UK, wages accounted for 70.6 per cent of GDP in 1975. Recent figures from a UN agency show that fall to 62.6 per cent by 2010, the largest drop of any advanced economy except the US. The government wants to go further along the same road.

Real wages have been falling since 2009, and are set to carry on falling. Far from doing anything to reverse that trend, the government now (17 September) talks of cancelling the automatic upratings which are supposed to ensure that benefits at least keep up with price rises.

Why? To boost profits at the expense of wages and social provision.

The strange story of Ben Bernanke tells us a lot. Mitt Romney now sees Bernanke, head of the Federal Reserve (the USA's central bank), as the symbol of economic laxity and insufficient capitalist rigour in managing the crisis.

On 13 September Bernanke announced "QE3", a policy under which the Fed will buy bonds and other financial paper, mostly from banks, without limit until a capitalist recovery is well underway in the USA.

This policy is a version of "printing money". A dollar is an IOU from the Fed. Dollars held inside the Fed, therefore, do not function as money. (If you write yourself an IOU, you don't become better off).

When the Fed buys bonds from a commercial bank, it is not like an ordinary buying-and-selling operation. The commercial bank which previously had bonds now has cash. The total amount of hard cash outside the Fed increases.

This is not quite the same as there being generally more money in circulation.

The "monetary base" is defined as notes and coins in circulation outside the central bank, plus commercial banks' balances with the central bank. (Commercial banks have accounts with the central bank in the same way as individuals and firms have accounts with commercial banks). That "monetary base" expands. In the USA, the monetary base is now three times as big as in August 2008. There is three times as much "hard cash" in the USA as there was four years ago, although output and sales have stagnated.

Individuals or firms, however, count how much money they have not just from their purses or petty-cash boxes, but also from their bank balances. To estimate how much money there is sloshing around in all the various marketplaces of a capitalist society, we must add bank balances (and arguably some other balances) to hard cash. Broader money, in that sense, is in the USA at present about four times as much as hard cash.

CASH

Broad money is manufactured out of hard cash by bank lending. If I put \$1000 into my bank account, and the bank then lends that \$1000 to someone else, then the operation has manufactured \$2000 in broad money out of \$1000 in hard cash.

Because credit has been frozen or drastically cooled, broad money has expanded only slowly in the USA since 2008, while hard cash (the monetary base) has been expanded very fast.

Bernanke's view is that if hard cash hadn't been expanded so fast, then broad money would have *shrunk*, leading to a collapse in prices and a deeper slump. In a capitalist economy, when prices and wages fall overall, then individuals and firms become unable to pay off loans or outstanding invoices, and they postpone purchases because everything becomes cheaper if you wait. It's bad news.

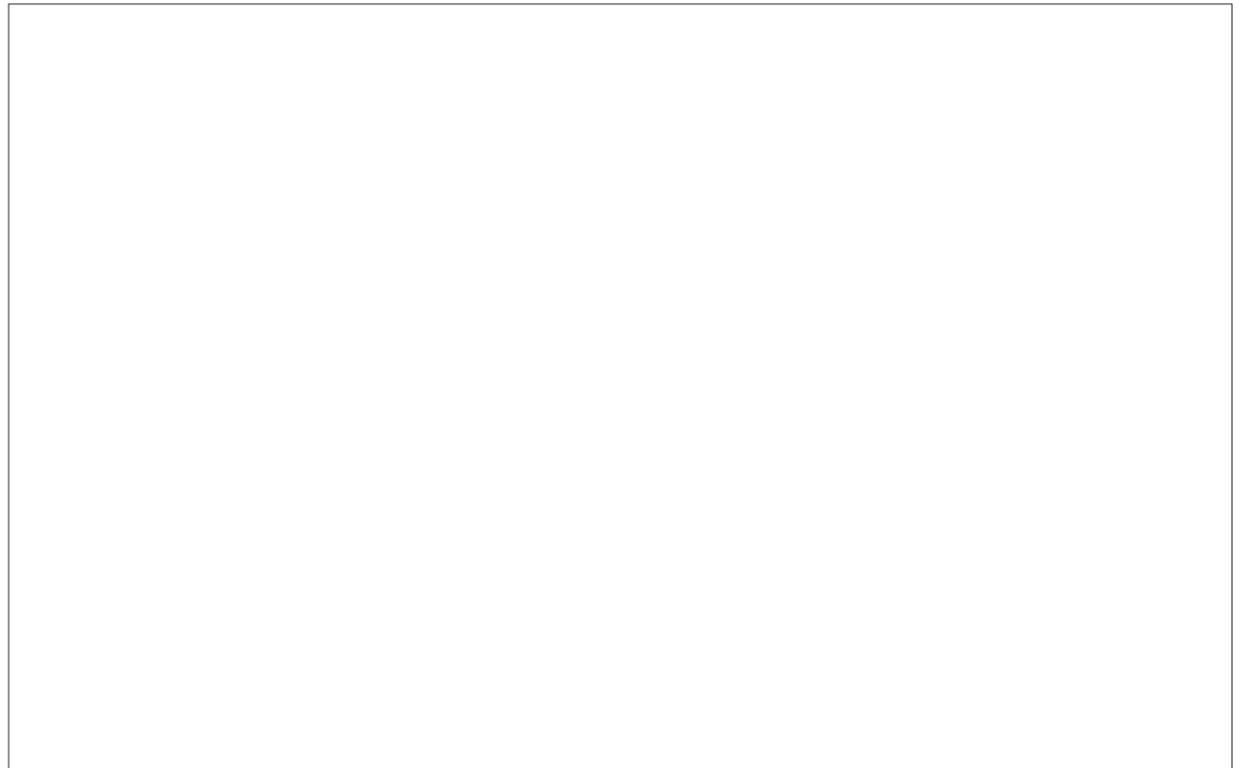
QE3 shows that Bernanke is alarmed. Very alarmed. The expansion of hard cash hasn't gone far enough and fast enough. He is guaranteeing rapid future expansion of hard cash in the hope of unfreezing credit and opening a way out of slump.

Mitt Romney says this is giving the US economy a "sugar high". Jens Weidmann, the German representative on the board of the European Central Bank (which is for the eurozone what the Fed is for the USA) thinks much the same about ECB boss Mario Draghi's 6 September "OMT" plan. OMT is also a bond-buying plan, though very much more limited than Bernanke's QE3.

That central bankers, of all people, have become more expansive and growth-oriented about economic policy than mainstream politicians, and that those bankers are being condemned as soft-hearted spendthrifts by a significant minority of mainstream ideologues, tells us something.

Bernanke's policy is directly and explicitly based on the doctrines of Milton Friedman, who from the 1970s to his death in 2006 was a benchmark for right-wing economic views. Friedman inspired the economic policies of Margaret Thatcher's Tory government in Britain after 1979.

Friedman's "monetarist" principle was that if inflation is



The Greek unions and left are preparing for yet another round of cuts. Aristotelou Square, Thessaloniki, 8 September

high, then the central bank must act to shrink the stock of broad money. Thatcher did that after 1979. Conversely, if there is a risk of deflation (falling prices), then the central bank must act to expand the stock of broad money. Friedman's academic standing among economists depends on a study of the Great Depression of the 1930s in which he argued that the Depression was due to the Fed not acting to expand broad money.

Bernanke has called Friedman's book "the leading and most persuasive explanation of the worst economic disaster in American history". At a birthday celebration for Friedman in 2002, he said: "I would like to say to Milton and Anna [Schwartz, co-author of the study]: Regarding the Great Depression, you're right, we [the Fed] did it. We're very sorry, but thanks to you we won't do it again".

So a man who is following the doctrines of the benchmark right-wing economist of recent decades gets slammed... for being a pinko.

More liberal mainstream economists argue that monetary operations like Bernanke's cannot be enough. At a certain depth of crisis they become like pushing on a string. In slump, governments should also expand public services and public spending, and deliberately run budget deficits.

That more liberal view had a brief triumph in 2008-9. Panicked governments, however right-wing, deliberately ran budget deficits and boosted public spending, for a short time. They did other things that had been anathema to them, like nationalising banks. In the test of acute crisis, they had to admit that the capitalist market system is not self-stabilising, and that economic life with advanced industry needs extensive public regulation.

It was always, however, only a skewed "socialism for the rich" — socialising losses where gains had been privatised. As soon as the immediate panic ebbed, the governments changed tack.

"NOT WASTING CRISIS"

Their motto now was pronounced in early 2009 by Rahm Emanuel, then Barack Obama's chief of staff and now the Chicago mayor who is trying to break the Chicago teachers' strike. "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste. [It] is an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before".

Thus wave after wave of cuts. And not just cuts. Privatisation. Marketisation. In the European Union, a central drive to strip workers' rights and conditions, like the recent EU-ECB-IMF calls on the Greek government to remove the ability of unions to negotiate conditions across whole industries and to increase Greece's standard work week to six days and cut the minimum daily rest to 11 hours.

It is partly that the governments are scared of the global financial markets. Unless governments show themselves "hard" enough, international financiers will refuse to lend to them, or demand over-the-top interest rates. Bernanke is less hidebound because the USA's standing in world capi-

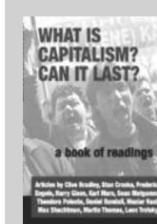
talism means that it is less worried than any other state about the risk of being unable to borrow in global markets.

It is not just that. If they just wanted to reduce deficits, they could tax the rich. Most of all, the governments want the crisis not "to go to waste". Each government wants to use the crisis to shift the balance of class forces in its country decisively and lastingly against the working class, so that an eventual recovery can build high profits on the basis of permanently lowered wages and social costs, and permanently curtailed workers' rights. Each government wants to do that more ruthlessly than others, so that its country will be the favourite destination in future for footloose global capital.

These policies deepen slump and delay recovery. But the governments don't mind. That is secondary to "not wasting" the crisis.

Our fight against government policies is not just, or mainly, an argument about economic doctrines. It is a fight about whether the crisis will be used by the capitalist class to hammer social conditions, or used by us to advance working-class awareness and confidence to tackle the crisis and to overthrow the capitalist system which generated it.

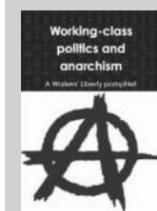
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Make the labour mo

By Ira Berkovic

The 20 October TUC demonstration is a chance to send a spectacular message to the government — a message of opposition, of disaffection, of discontent.

Socialists should fight to make the demonstration a platform to amplify and build solidarity for ongoing industrial disputes, and articulate a positive political message — a radical, working-class socialist alternative to the government's austerity project.

Since the huge demonstration on 26 March 2011, union leaders sold out the public sector pensions dispute, leaving workers facing the prospect of working longer, paying more, and getting less. The Labour Party leaders have missed open goal after open goal; most recently, Ed Balls got the frosty reception he deserved at TUC Congress when he said that Labour would continue the public sector pay freeze.

20 October is an opportunity to send a different message. To make sure it has an impact, and is not just a one-off exercise in letting off steam, we should avoid seeing the demonstration solely — or even primarily — as a "launchpad", the magical key that will unlock future action.

Last year, the left fell into "next-big-thing"-ism in a big way. From December 2010 onwards, a string of one-day events were declared to be *the* big occasion that would set the struggle alight. The lack of strategy, either from the labour movement leadership or the far left, meant that each "big thing" was just a disconnected, one-off protest.

Seeing October 20 as a "launchpad" also elides the fact that significant struggles are already underway. For NUT and NASUWT members, whose action-short-of-a-strike launches on 26 September and will be well underway by the time of the demonstration, October 20 will be a chance for teachers from different schools and different areas to link up and

march together. Unison members in Higher Education, who are in dispute over pay, can profile and galvanise their struggle. The struggle against Remploy factory closures is ongoing. There could be strikes on the way at Birmingham airport. And workers from other local disputes — such as the Tube cleaners, Tyne & Wear Metro cleaners, London Midland and East Coast cleaners, and the cleaners in London organised by the IWW/IWGB — can also have visible contingents. Workers from ongoing strikes and disputes should be given the platform on 20 October. If, as is unfortunately but undeniably likely, the TUC restricts its platform to bureaucratic leaders, the left should organise alternative platforms where striking workers can tell their stories and discuss them with others.

MOBILISATION

Mobilisation for the demo has already begun to reinvigorate anti-cuts committees. Any revivals in local activity — in anti-cuts committees, Trades Councils, or other bodies — must be seized on and maintained.

Revived anti-cuts groups should not spend the next month exclusively discussing who will be doing O20 leafleting and where. If activists are coming together again, they should again discuss and organise around local struggles. Mobilising people in local areas to mobilise for a demonstration in London in a month's time (and after that — what?) is not empowering, consciousness-raising, or sustainable.

Perhaps the most fundamental job for socialists (in the run-up to the demonstration, on the demonstration itself, and beyond) is to fight at every level of the labour movement for the movement as a whole to articulate a positive political alternative to the programme of the government (and the Labour Party leaders).

The TUC has produced a (poorly-distributed) pamphlet

that attempts to articulate a positive political case, under the demonstration's meaningless headline demand: "for a future that works". It relies on quotes from prominent liberal-bourgeois economists such as Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz. The pamphlet cites America under President Obama (where unemployment currently stands at 8.3%, and is increasing, along with inequality) as the model society! "The USA shows the way", says the pamphlet, and ends with a lengthy quote from Obama. The TUC's political strategy is not good enough. Class independence should be the basic principle here; our movement needs a programme for an entirely different way of organising society.

DEMANDS

This is not to say, however, that we should reduce ourselves to "socialism-is-the-answer" propagandists.

We should fight for the labour movement to develop and fight for a workers' plan — a comprehensive set of demands and policies for reorganising society in the here and now, political measures that overturn the existing subordination of social need to the needs of profit (see box).

No Tory, Lib Dem, or likely Labour government would enact any of the workers' plan's component policies. What kind of government would? A workers' government, that rests for its political legitimacy not on the capitalist state and the existing parliament but fundamentally on working-class organisations in workplaces and communities. A government of, by, and for our class which governs in the same partisan spirit as the current government governs for the rich.

We are not going to win our unions to this perspective in the month before 20 October. We are not going to replace the labour movement's existing political representatives with revolutionary socialists in that time.

But socialists can agitate and educate. We can help fellow workers begin to challenge the power of trade union and Labour Party officialdom by building rank-and-file networks within particular industries or unions, such as the new Local Associations Network in the NUT. We can reform labour movement structures where we have influence so they run as models of best practice, grassroots-led and responsive to the needs of members. Where we are in a position to catalyse or influence the direction of industrial disputes, we can run them on the basis of democratic control and militant tactics.

We can begin to build up independent rank-and-file confidence, organisation, and strength to challenge the hegemony of the bureaucracy that was at the root of the pensions defeat.

A workers' plan for the crisis

- **No cuts to jobs and services** — We need a massive campaign of industrial and political action against the cuts, starting now, not after the TUC demo. The unions should fight to win, not just to protest. Build rank-and-file movements across the unions to hold the leaders — including the "left" ones — to account and organise the fight when they won't. For workers' unity across Europe.

- **Expropriate the banks** — place the entire financial sector under public ownership and democratic workers' control and use its wealth to fund jobs and services.

- **Wages that match the cost of living**, and living wages for all workers. Benefits you can live on.

- **Jobs for all** — share out the work by reducing the working week to 35 hours — cut profits, not pay.

- **Free education for all** — scrap fees, living grants for all students. Reconvert Academies to community schools.

- **Decent homes for all** — fight the attacks on council housing and Housing Benefit. Demand a mass council house building program.

- **Free the unions** — a charter of workers' rights in place of anti-union laws. Defy the laws where necessary.

- **Open the books** — workers need access to all company accounts so we can challenge the bosses' version of what is and is not "affordable".

- **Fight racism and the causes of racism** — stop the anti-migrant drive: no one is illegal! End stop-and-search and racist police harassment. Drive the BNP and EDL off the streets! Black and white, British-born and migrant, all religions and none — unite and fight for jobs, homes and services for all.

- **Make Labour fight** — the unions should assert control and accountability over their political representatives, demand that they refuse to implement cuts, and pledge to reverse austerity measures.

From top: Remploy workers fight factory closures; Tyne and Wear Metro workers strike against low pay; cleaners demonstrate at the Société Générale bank. 20 October should be an opportunity to amplify and build solidarity for these, and other, disputes.

ovement fit to fight

Teachers' action should escalate to strikes

By Martin Thomas

On 26 September school teachers, members of the NUT and NASUWT unions, begin non-strike industrial action across England and Wales.

The action is a sort of work-to-rule. According to official union strategy, it is intended as a lever to make education minister Michael Gove agree to talks with the union on working conditions, pay, pensions, and jobs, and will be followed by national strike action if after a while Gove does not do that.

Most immediately, however, the action is a lever to impose liveable working conditions in schools, to enable teachers to get on with teaching with less bureaucratic harassment, and to push back the new breed of bullying head teachers trained by the infamous National College for School Leadership.

The unions have 25 action points. The first ones are about decent conditions for management appraisals of teachers' work and limits on lesson observations done by school management (only three a year, five days' notice of each, written feedback). The unions say that if head teachers refuse to accept union conditions, then teachers should refuse to cooperate at all with appraisal or observations.

REFUSE

Two other high-profile points: teachers should refuse to submit lesson plans to management (a plan should be to help the teacher teach, not to show management that she or he is ticking the right boxes: there is no contractual or statutory obligation to submit lesson plans).

They should also refuse to cover for absent workmates. (Official policy is that teachers should cover only "rarely" and in unforeseen cases, but many head teachers routinely flout it).

As Lewisham NUT secretary Martin Powell Davies points out, to be effective this "non-strike action" must quickly escalate into strikes. "Where schools are imposing unacceptable policies, strike action is the best response".

Some head teachers will agree the union conditions on appraisal and observation. Others will refuse or stonewall. In schools where that happens, some teachers will be confident enough to ask students just to cross their arms and wait silently until the head teacher retreats from an unwanted intrusion in the classroom, and some will be confident enough to refuse to attend appraisal meetings. Some will not.

Unless the action is to be very ragged, the school union groups need to collect evidence of management's failure to keep to union conditions, and — having collected a dossier,

but soon — tell the NUT that its ballot now authorises immediate strikes to impose the union conditions.

Martin Powell Davies says: "Where Local Authorities are ignoring union protocols, we need to be urgently discussing about escalating action to coordinated strike action in line with NUT advice. Alongside this localised action, we also need to call national strike action. That's what really hits the headlines and puts the Government under pressure".

He is right. But another Lewisham teacher told *Solidarity*: "Well-organised regions building for local strike action en masse is a more desirable outcome. There may be a problem about asking London branches to go first, on their own, with no assurance of anything to follow. Many London teachers already feel like sacrificial lambs because of 28 March, when the NUT Executive ignored a big majority in a members' survey for a national strike and instead called a regional strike in London, with the promise, never delivered on, that other regions would follow.

COORDINATED

"My proposal would be that regions, divisions, and associations affiliated to the Local Associations Network (a rank-and-file grouping established in June this year) start the ball rolling with a coordinated wave of local strike action".

This approach would make it easier to carry through policies like refusal to submit lesson plans. There is no contractual obligation on teachers to submit these plans; but the individual teacher, confronted individually by a bullying head teacher, may find it hard to hold the line. A wave of strikes, and the possibility that if they build up a dossier of lesson plans submitted under duress then they can get further strikes, will embolden them.

"Some head teachers are probably confident that they can outsmart the union on this one by carrying on with divisive bully tactics that isolate older workers, and those choosing to observe the mandate of the non-strike action, from less confident younger teachers. The worst academies have a high turnover and a high proportion of newly-qualified teachers and 'Teach First' staff (teachers taken straight from university). Head teachers will try to get round the union by staggering the changes to appraisal policy and terms and conditions, so that by the time all members are affected, union mobilisation will have faded.

"We need rapid local, regional and even national collective action in response to foul play from head teachers".

We need our own strategy

By Todd Hamer

"Now is the time for action", boomed Dave Prentis at the end of his TUC speech, just before scuttling off to reporters to reassure them that he actually meant: "Spring 2013 is the time for action".

This time last year, at his own union's conference, Prentis proclaimed: "[The strike against the pensions reforms] will be the biggest since the general strike [of 1926]... We are going to win." He added: "A one day strike won't change the mind of anyone in government". So why, after a one-day strike on 30 November, did he orchestrate a massive demobilisation?

The failure of the pensions dispute is largely due to Unison's miserable understanding of trade union mobilisation. According to Unison, the strike did not constitute the self-defence of several million workers against a massive attack on our pensions, but rather a protest manoeuvre to strengthen the unions' hand in negotiations.

When David Cameron said that N30 was a "damp squib", Prentis made a public rebuke. But in private, the Unison leadership complained that only a fraction of the membership had responded to "their" strike call. Contrast this to the experience of many rank-and-file activists, who saw the small beginnings of a union revival. Whilst some union members crossed picket lines, a lot of new members joined the pickets and there was potential for organising a new generation of trade unionists. From their ivory towers, the Unison leadership only saw statistics and members failing to march to their orders. On the ground we saw hollowed-out branches coming back to life.

After five months of silence, the union issued a survey to find out what the workers were thinking. Surveys are a notoriously inaccurate way of judging the mood of workers in struggle. Demanding that workers commit to "sustained industrial action" before organising any further action at all changes the mood, and for the worse.

If the Unison leadership want to make Prentis's words a reality, then they need to re-evaluate their understanding of workers' organisation. Any trade unionist who has ever organised a strike understands the hundreds of personalities involved and thousands of conversations and arguments.

This is what Trotsky described as the "molecular processes" of workers' mobilisation. The dynamics are complex, and a lot rests on a general confidence in the chance of success. These dynamics cannot be controlled by a central committee, but strong leadership (democratically proposing thought-through strategies, not just barking orders at the membership) can inspire confidence, maintain momentum, and get people talking.

Prentis's proclamation that the 20 October demonstration will be a "launchpad" for strikes in spring 2013 is ridiculous. The national leadership announces these cautious timetables to frustrate the left, who will now press to make it happen faster. This whole terrain of debate is a distraction. Rank-and-file militants who are tired of the leadership's cowardice and flatfootedness need to concentrate on industrial strategy. How can we prepare the union for national action? What tactics can healthworkers use to win an industrial dispute? What constitutes effective industrial action for local government employees? How can we cause maximum disruption to our employers whilst maintaining the support of our service users? What is the role of selective action?

If the leadership attempted to initiate this conversation then we could draw on the creative and imaginative powers of 1.1 million public sector workers to develop an industrial strategy that would terrify the government.

We need to talk about Kelvin

Press Watch

By Pat Murphy



As is now very well known, the response of the *Sun* newspaper to the Hillsborough disaster was to mount a front page attack on the fans.

Under the fateful headline "The Truth" the paper printed the vilest lies about the victims of the horrific event. The supporters, it was alleged, urinated on police, stole from their own dead, beat up rescue workers, and caused the problems in the first place through widespread drunkenness. The editor of the paper and the man who decided on the headline was Kelvin McKenzie.

On 10 September McKenzie issued the apology he had spent the last 23 years aggressively resisting. "Today" he said "I offer my profuse apologies to the people of Liverpool for that headline." One of the lead representatives of the victims' families was quick to reject this apology out of hand. It was "too little too late" said Trevor Hicks, whose daughter died at Hillsborough, and for sure he spoke for the other families.

Kelvin McKenzie has built his reputation as the "say-it-like-it-is" big bruiser of British tabloid journalism. During a lifetime working in the foulest sections of the press he has cultivated an image as someone who you can disagree with (indeed he invites it with relish) but has to be respected for his fearless and independent-mind.

Another part of his persona is that of "man of the people". Whereas liberal-lefties bleat on about "ordinary people" and the working class, he understands instinctively their concerns and priorities and makes it his mission to let these instincts shape his papers.

The proof that only he has his finger close to the pulse of the masses, he would claim, is the huge and increased sales of the papers he worked on. His view of the typical *Sun* reader: "He's the bloke you see in the pub, a right old fascist, wants to send the wogs back, buy his poxy council house, he's afraid of the unions, afraid of the Russians, hates the queers and the weirdos and drug dealers. He doesn't want to hear about that stuff (serious news)". The content of the *Sun* and *News of the World* has for decades both reflected and reinforced this toxic fusion of pandering to and sneering at

Low-life

their own readers. McKenzie and his ilk get away with this most of the time because the prejudices he talks about are real, even if not as widespread and deep-rooted as he thinks. They have a certain appeal amongst the most exploited and socially disenfranchised sections of (in particular) the white working class. The Hillsborough tragedy has from the start been a powerful reminder of the limits of this take on our class.

This time McKenzie was promoting an essentially middle-class prejudice (football fans are all drunken hooligans) to a largely working-class audience whose lived experience suspected it to be lies.

DEMOGRAPHIC

The vast majority of their demographic follows football keenly. Many *Sun* readers will have experienced huge and dangerous football crowds, brutal policing and shoddy, unsafe stadiums.

In 1989 the paper's editor published the kind of prejudice they routinely print about travellers, immigrants and strikers only this time it was about a demographic their readers know all too well. Prejudice relies for its power on ignorance. *Sun* readers are not by and large ignorant about football supporters or the issues they faced at British grounds before Hillsborough. An attempt to blame fans for an event as grotesque as Hillsborough was always going to be hard to carry off.

So why did McKenzie think he could get away with it?

This was the high point of Thatcherism. The police had been given extensive powers to deal with the 1984-5 miners' strike and after the Tory victory were basking in more than usual licence and political protection. The South Yorkshire Police had been in the forefront of confrontation with strikers. Local government power had been decisively defeated after a poorly-led battle with a few left-Labour councils. By

far the biggest stand-off had been between the Thatcher government and Liverpool City Council.

For people like McKenzie the working class people of Liverpool were no more than feckless, commie-supporting skivers. But the South Yorkshire Police were the very epitome of the upstanding Briton the *Sun* aspired to lead. And just as the tide of history was bringing the upstanding Britons to the surface it was drowning the strike-happy socialists of Liverpool forever. Drunk on Thatcherite hubris McKenzie launched his attack and assumed the "blokes in the pub" would cheer him on.

Kelvin's defence of the Hillsborough story has wavered along the way but never out of any genuine rethink. In 1993 he was forced by Rupert Murdoch [thinking about damage to his business] to appear on BBC Radio to apologise for the front page, calling it "a rather serious error". The same year he appeared in front of a Commons Select Committee and described it as "a fundamental mistake", blaming the chief superintendent of South Yorkshire Police and a Tory MP for providing the information. These were not sincere regrets but cynical attempts to overcome a phenomenally successful boycott of the *Sun* across Merseyside.

Speaking to what he thought was a private audience in 2006 McKenzie revealed that "I only did that (went on 'World at One' to apologise) because Rupert Murdoch told me to. I wasn't sorry then and I'm not sorry now because we told the truth".

In 2007 McKenzie appeared on BBC's 'Question Time' and refused again to apologise. More than that, he repeated the claim that ticketless fans had been responsible for the disaster. And last week his "profuse apology" was a grudging, cowardly affair, concerned more with passing the blame onto his sources than taking responsibility for his own shameful role.

McKenzie doesn't matter anymore. Trevor Hicks of the Families Campaign was right to respond to his apology by describing him as "low-life, clever low-life but low-life". His reputation and ability to promote his poisonous ideas will hopefully never recover. More important is that our class learns the one lesson that could strengthen us long into the future.

What the *Sun* and papers like it print about immigrants, asylum seekers, strikers and benefit claimants is no more reliable or honest than what it printed about the Liverpool fans in 1989. Like the families we will only get justice when we unite in solidarity with each other to fight for it.

State cover-ups and police corruption

By Luke Taverner

Can any of us really believe the protestations of politicians and cops in the last week, that they have been "shocked" by the findings in the Hillsborough report?

If they were genuinely shocked at the changed statements, the catalogue of lies, the obstruction of justice, and so on, this points to a level of incompetence among them that is difficult to comprehend.

If they are just saying it because it's the right thing to say, and in fact knew about or suspected the extent of the cover-up, then we can only conclude that the go-to response of the British ruling class when the integrity of its institutions is questioned is simply to lie, lie, and lie again.

Yet maybe the scale of the cover-up should be surprising. Even political activists, who wearily expect evasion and lies from the police after a demo or a death in custody, may have thought, "But this was just a football match."

Why would the police defend their decision to open an exit gate to the Leppings Lane end of the stadium so avidly?

DUCKENFIELD

After all, David Duckenfield, the officer who made the decision, could have been forgiven for his actions. He was inexperienced at policing football matches, he had an on-the-spot decision to make, and he made the wrong decision.

He could have been forgiven — were it not for the fact that he immediately began to spin the lie of the drunken, ticketless fan, the lie that would make its way, via a string of unsavoury characters, to the front page of the *Sun* and other newspapers a few days after the event.

The lie told by a panicked officer to save his own arse was picked up, embellished, and carefully marketed by a group of people including senior South Yorkshire Police (SYP) officers, Paul Middup, the regional spokesman of the Police Federation, and Tory MP Sir Irvine Patnick.

So why the lie? Various Labour politicians, including for-

mer Home Secretary Jack Straw, have been criticised by Tories for stating the obvious — that the police had played a political role during the Thatcher years. Straw has talked of a "culture of impunity" that existed in a police force which, by the end of the 1980s, felt that the powers-that-be owed it a debt of gratitude for dealing successfully and violently with industrial disputes such as the miners' strike.

Straw is obviously correct, even if we choose to ignore his own role in obstructing the Hillsborough families' campaign for justice while Labour were in office, which is enough in itself to consign him to the bonfire of hypocrites. But there is some danger of this view catching on, that of course the police were "politicised" in the bad old Thatcher days, more so than now, or since.

CORRUPT

Last week, the current SYP Chief Constable David Crompton said there was "a whiff of 'Life on Mars'" about the force in the 1980s. It's a clever turn of phrase. Everyone knows old-time cops were laughably corrupt, isn't it a good job that things are better now?

The excruciating 23 years it has taken for the truth to come out show that things aren't much better. The agents of the state must always be innocent. Ask the families of the Bloody Sunday victims, or of Mark Duggan, or of Ian Tomlinson. What makes Hillsborough so remarkable is not the extent of the cover-up, but the extent to which it has been unmasked, thanks to the tenacity and courage of the victims' families.

Last week too, in the media, the narrative suddenly changed. Now, and only now, there appears in the newspapers the figure of the wronged Liverpool FC fan, keeping dignified in the storm of smears that those very same papers whipped up. Now, and only now, newscasters quiz senior police officers with the same aggression that they usually reserve for union officials or "fringe" political figures.

This is what it takes for most of our media to even start going after the powerful — the deaths of 96 people, a 23 year

long cover-up involving a wide variety of local and national state institutions, and the release of thousands of previously secret documents, under the auspices of an Anglican bishop, which provide incontrovertible proof of said cover-up. Then, when the answers are more or less out, they can start safely asking the questions they should have been asking 23 years earlier.

The press attempt to portray themselves as innocent victims of the lying state. "The man who hid the truth," proclaims the *Sheffield Star's* front page of 13 September, alongside a picture of former SYP Chief Constable Peter Wright. But rewind to the front page of the *Star* immediately after the disaster, and we find "Ticketless thugs staged crush to gain entry." The Wright-Middup-Patnick lie again, word for word. So at best, the press can be said to have suffered from a collective lack of journalistic rigour, a willingness to rely on lazy stereotypes and the uncorroborated words of powerful people.

We now have the unprecedented spectacle of senior politicians and police officers calling for criminal prosecutions against those responsible for the cover-up. This in itself is progress.

There are all sorts of questions that even the release of the Hillsborough papers has not answered. Why was Duckenfield put in charge in the first place? Why exactly did the coroner chose 3.15pm as the cut-off for his investigation, when we know now that victims were alive beyond that point? Did West Midlands Police, who investigated SYP (and whose own Serious Crime Squad was disbanded in 1989 because of corruption), make a concerted effort to change the statements of SYP officers?

The Hillsborough Families Support Group is seeking new inquests, and criminal prosecutions, which will hopefully lead to answers. We will see if, and how, the state decides to close ranks again.

State cover-ups are not a thing of the past. Anyone who has any interest in telling truth to power will forever owe the Hillsborough campaigners a debt of gratitude.

The history of school exams

The government plans to replace GCSEs with a new qualification, the English baccalaureate, which will put the focus on end-of-year examinations. Pat Yarker discusses the history of school exams, and how they have been used.

End-of-school exams for all, like mass compulsory education, arrived fairly recently in England.

The situation before 1945 was different, but for two decades or so after that date most working-class pupils were prevented from sitting public exams. Denied access not only to fee-paying schools but also to the grammar schools Labour had established, they could not take the O-Level courses (established in 1951 to replace the previous system of School Certificates) initially only taught there. A situation in which perhaps 80% of each cohort of school students left without taking exams seems extraordinary in our age of over-testing and intensified credentialism.

As exam grades became increasingly read (and necessary) as indicators of labour capacity, teachers took the lead in reforming the assessment and qualification system. They did so principally to provide courses and qualifications (notably varieties of CSE, and then the GCSE) which would go some way towards validating what the great majority of pupils knew, understood and could do, and in order to better equip them for success in the labour market.

At the same time, theoretical investigations continued into how public exams help reproduce and legitimise existing social hierarchies of class, and make individuals available for particular kinds of social definition and control.

In the wake of the 1968 events, two French social theorists, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, put forward a detailed account of the role played in capitalist reproduction by contemporary (French) schooling.

RULING CLASS

Bourdieu and Passeron were interested in how the ideas of the ruling class did indeed come to be the ruling ideas of the age, and why despite securing mass education into the teenage years the education system had failed as a force for social liberation. Instead, school reprised and consecrated social inequality.

Bourdieu and Passeron argued that part of the explanation lay in the way the education system appeared as meritocratic and hence neutral while in fact it ensured that those already advantaged would make the most progress and secure the highest attainment. Teachers who lament the home backgrounds of some pupils unconsciously bear witness to the salience of Bourdieu and Passeron's insight: social origin tends to predetermine educational destiny under capitalism.

Bourdieu and Passeron noted how those who lose out educationally locate the cause of their failure not in pre-existing social conditions and the biases constructed in the educational system, but in themselves. Such school leavers explain their low attainment in terms of personal inadequacy: they were not clever enough, interested enough, or hard-working enough to do better at school.

Public exams play a key role here, since they ratify the system as meritocratic and so contribute to what Bourdieu and Passeron call its misrecognition: "Nothing is better designed than the examination to inspire universal recognition of the legitimacy of academic verdicts and of the social hierarchies they legitimate, since it leads the self-eliminated to count themselves among those who fail... The examination [has] the function of concealing the elimination which takes place without examination." (Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*.)

The rise of the exam

1947: 107,000 students take School Certificate in England; 26,000 students take Higher School Certificate

1951: 134,000 take O Level (about 10% of the relevant age-group)

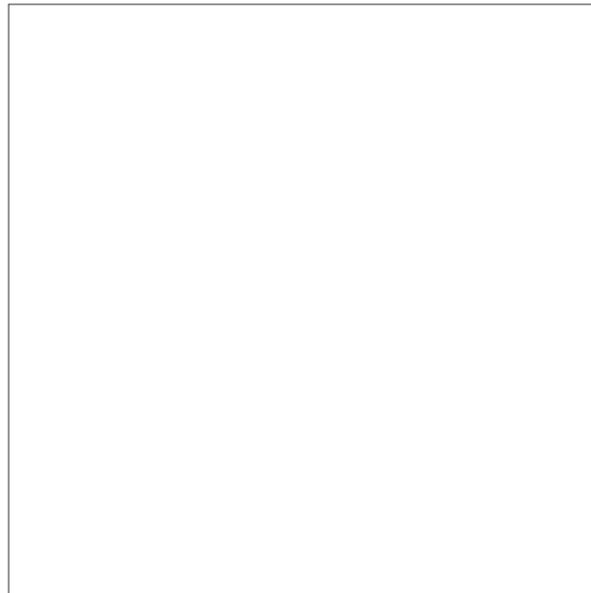
1965: 231,000 take CSE

1969: 983,000 take CSE

As late as 1972, 43% of secondary school pupils left without taking a public exam.

Figures from Tattersall, K. in Newton, P.; Baird, J-A; Goldstein, H.; Patrick, H. and Tymms, P. (eds) *Techniques for monitoring the comparability of examination standards*.

• <http://bit.ly/NzsPPU>



Exams: all about social classification and control

When schools are seen as neutral institutions, and examinations trusted as both formally equal for all and as a publicly-acceptable code for quality (or "standards"), they have wide legitimacy. Students who do well are deemed to do so by dint of their inherent merits, revealed (rather than constructed) by the examination system. But in a crisis such as the current GCSE marking debacle the social role of the examination as a key discriminator for assigning futures becomes more visible. The exam's status as a neutral mechanism becomes more available for questioning since it is apparent that possibilities for candidates, particularly those at the socially-crucial C/D borderline, have been foreclosed by external pressure motivated arbitrarily (that is, politically) rather than by factors to be found in a candidate's performance.

For Glen Rikowski, educational activist and theorist, "formal" education is a form of production, and its product is that unique commodity, labour-power: "...the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description." (Marx, *Capital volume 1*).

For at least a century employers have regularly accused schools of failing to provide students with "the basics". We might understand this as pressure exerted by capital on the state to pick up the cost of increasing the capacity or quality of labour-power. Exams become pivotal here as the disciplining element in producing the child as the commodity-labour-power required by capital.

DISCIPLINE

Michel Foucault, picking up on some aspects of the work of Bourdieu and Passeron, explored this "disciplining element" in depth.

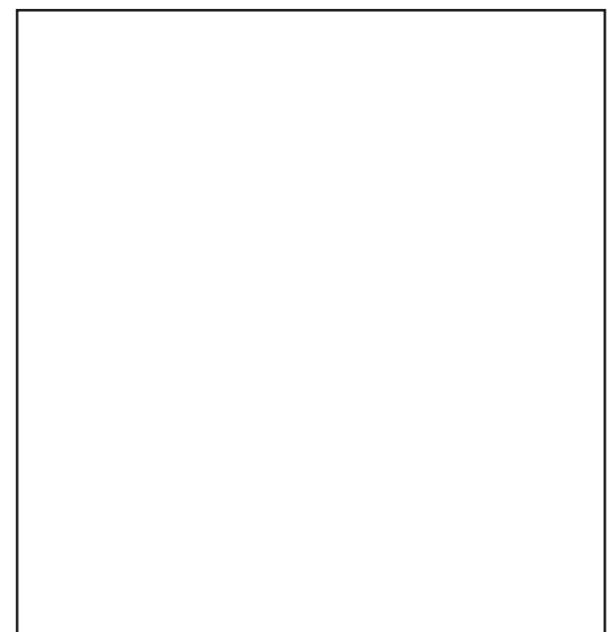
He saw the examination as a key part of the historical process which produced the individual in modernity, and made each of us visible for what he called governmentality, or how conduct is shaped. The examination is one of the ways we are each made a subject available for the inscriptions of power.

For Foucault: "The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalising judgement. It is a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them... The examination is at the centre of the procedures that constitute the individual as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge." (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*). Foucault's understanding might resonate with those of us who, in conversation with teachers, have had our children talked about as "being", rather than as working at, a given test level or exam grade.

Exams, then, have been seen as a means of social classification and control, a stamp of labour-power accreditation, and a way to produce individuals as subjects of power.

More mundanely, they also strongly determine what is taught, and how it is taught. That which is excluded from formal summative assessment is much less likely to find a place on a syllabus or be deemed worth spending class time on systematically. This has always been so, but in the strongly-centralised education system neoliberalism has constructed since 1989 to replace the weakly-centralised version put in place after 1945, the implications are graver.

For example, Michael Gove has directed that primary schools must teach reading only through the use of systematic synthetic phonics programmes, and has instituted an exam for five years olds predicated on such a programme. Gove's directive and test negates the teacher's informed



professional judgement about how best to help a child become a reader (and about what might constitute reading). It renders that teacher merely an operative.

Gove's instruction about the teaching of reading also boosts the sale of products designed to underpin the required phonics programme, signalling the increasing, and increasingly-profitable, symbiosis between public exams and edu-business. Public money continues to fund, via fees paid to the privatised exam board Edexcel, dividends for shareholders in its parent company Pearson, and the salaries of its executives. The market in exam-related materials of all kinds is burgeoning.

As well as distorting the work of teaching, exams tend also to distort the learning process, replacing an intrinsic desire to find out, understand, know and do, with the narrower remit of pleasing the examiner.

For the student the risk entailed by an exam system is that education becomes a kind of charade, or is regarded as merely instrumental.

NARROWING

For the teacher, the need for students to achieve given target grades may compel not only a narrowing of classroom experiences but a decision to game the system, perhaps in quasi-approved ways such as exam-question-spotting or the use of class time to teach exam techniques rather than the subject, or in entirely illegitimate ways such as the various forms of cheating which have come to light.

Is it misguided, then, to work constantly to reform, rather than straightforwardly to abolish, exams?

There have been significant positive reforms to the content and format of public exams, and to the proportion of the student cohort included. The time-limited one-shot sit-and-deliver unseen written test remains the most common sort of examination, and that's a big part of Gove's new exam plan. But it is not the only sort.

Alternative forms of assessment using pre-released questions, open-book papers, tasks carried out over extended periods, spoken rather than written responses, and varieties of coursework offer ways around the obvious drawbacks of the traditional format and legitimise other ways of learning and studying and other forms of knowledge arguably more necessary for living and working in 21st century society.

A socialist society would, one imagines, need exams neither to differentiate between students for the purpose of creating a hierarchy, nor to motivate students to aspire to rationed social goods. Without a class structure schools would actually fulfil their declared social function and foster educational growth and development in untrammelled ways. (That is, if schools still exist: there are none in the socialist society envisioned for example by William Morris in his novel *News From Nowhere*.)

Assessing students' progress and development would of course remain central to the educational enterprise. But that would be assessment's sole justification, and techniques for enabling it would be developed accordingly, free of the constraints and agendas capitalism imposes. Testing, which is only a sub-set of assessment, might still have a place. Certifying skill and competence at high-value, high-risk activities (say, flying planes and cutting brains) would, presumably, continue to be necessary.

The big question as always is how to get there from here? As Seamus Heaney has his poetic fisherman put it: "Now you're supposed to be/An educated man.../Puzzle me/The right answer to that one." We welcome readers' thoughts.

Support the independent left in Venezuela

By Pablo Velasco

The Venezuelan elections on 7 October are an important turning point for the Chavista movement in the country and for the international left.

Hugo Chávez faces not only a resurgent right wing candidate Henrique Capriles, but also a socialist challenge in the shape of Orlando Chirino. Chávez, despite being hampered by his treatment for cancer, has over 40% in most reliable polls and is well ahead of Capriles. But it is around Chirino that the genuine working class forces can coalesce.

The traditional forces of the right have united around Henrique Capriles of the centre-right Justice First party, part of the Democratic Unity Coalition (Mesa de la Unidad Democrática, MUD). Capriles represents the bourgeois fraction that has been in opposition since Chávez came to power in 1998, having administered the state for forty years before that. These forces sought to overthrow Chávez in a coup in 2002 and by a lock-out in 2002-03. They boycotted the political process for several years as Chávez consolidated his power.

NEO-LIBERAL

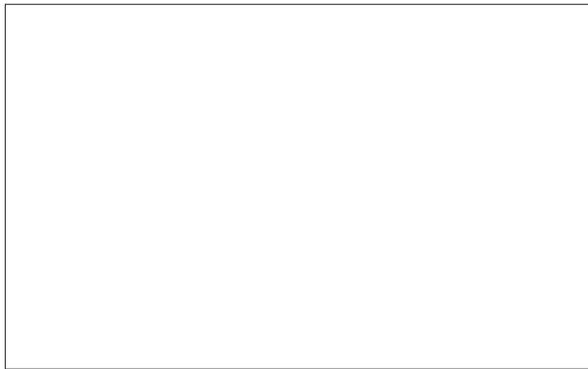
Capriles and the old pro-US Venezuelan bourgeoisie stand on a neo-liberal political programme with an orientation towards the United States.

Capriles supports the privatisation of publicly owned firms and social programmes. He and other right-wing governors of regional states have used repression against workers' struggles. There is absolutely no reason for Venezuelan workers to support or vote for Capriles.

Hugo Chávez represents the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV), part of the Gran Polo Patriótico (GPP) coalition.

Chávez thunders against capitalism and claims to be "building socialism", but the bulk of the economy remains in private hands, while the state sector engages in joint ventures with multinational capital. After more than a decade of Chávez in power, the Venezuelan bourgeoisie continues with their property, business and profits.

Chávez rants against "US imperialism", but has made agreements with the multinational oil companies and with dictatorial, imperialist and sub-imperialist regimes. The Venezuelan government has agreements with Chevron, Mitsubishi, Total, Repsol, Petrobras, as well as other Norwegian, Russian and Chinese companies. It even has relations with Swiss multinational Glencore and Chinese multinationals in the aluminium and steel business.



Orlando Chirino

The Chávez government proclaims itself to be a leftist government, but refuses to support Arab revolutions against dictatorships. Chávez defended homicidal dictators like Qaddafi in Libya and Bashar Al Assad in Syria, calling them "anti-imperialist governments". He famously told Iranian car workers that Ahmadinejad was their friend, while at the same time covering for assorted despots across the globe.

Chávez tries to portray himself as a friend of the Venezuelan workers, but the independent trade union movement Union Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT) has stalled because his supporters sought to bind it close to the government.

Chávez introduced a new Labour Law in May, which reduces the working week to 40 hours (from 44), bans outsourcing for ongoing jobs and increases maternity leave. The government does not respect the collective agreements of unionised workers and often ignores the right to strike. It does not respect trade union autonomy, criminalises social protest and accuses striking public sector workers of being "counterrevolutionaries".

Rubén González, general secretary of the Sintraferrominera ironworkers' union, spent more than a year in jail for leading a strike.

Chávez has threatened to use the National Guard against Mitsubishi workers. He supported the dismissal of nearly all trade unionists in that struggle. He has backed repression of workers in mining and petroleum working for Russian and Chinese joint ventures.

Although Chávez's government has spent money on social programmes, it has also implemented harsh austerity measures since 2008, including increasing VAT by a third, freezing collective agreements by public sector employees

and for steel and aluminium workers.

Orlando Chirino, running as the Partido Socialismo y Libertad (Socialism and Freedom Party, PSL) candidate, has a long track record of support for working class political independence.

He has led the rank and file union grouping CCURA (Corriente Clasista, Unitaria, Revolucionaria, Autónoma) since before the rise of Chávez. During the formation of the UNT, he supported trade union autonomy in the face of Bonapartist attempts to co-opt the unions.

Chirino opposed Chávez's constitutional changes, including extending his possible terms in office. He was illegally laid off from PDVSA state oil firm as a political reprisal. He has spoken out against the Venezuelan government's austerity measures, using the slogan: "Let the capitalists pay the crisis, not the workers".

INDEPENDENT

Chirino has supported the Arab spring and denounced the massacres perpetrated by Assad in Syria. Voting for Chirino and supporting his campaign will strengthen the building of a politically independent labour movement in Venezuela as well as the revolutionary socialist left.

Chavistas have accused Chirino of being divisive and serving Capriles, warning of the danger of a comeback of the right to power. But it is Chávez's fault that the old right has come back, after 13 years of making big promises without delivering for Venezuelan workers.

Orlando Chirino is backed by small groups of socialists inside Venezuela, as well as a wide range of trade unions and activists across Latin America. He is a credible and serious candidate for working class political representation and deserves the solidarity and support of Marxists across the globe.

Sadly, much of the international left calls for a vote for Chávez. Predictably, the most high profile apologists have been *Green Left Weekly* in Australia and the International Marxist Tendency, which includes Socialist Appeal in Britain. The election has not so far been worthy of comment by the British SWP, no doubt dithering between lesser evilism and Chávez's anti-imperialist credentials.

The Socialist Party's international, the CWI, and its supporters in Venezuela call for a vote for Chavez, adding that "this is not sufficient".

Instead they make a long list of demands on Chávez, including the demand that he introduce socialism. Such incoherence gives Marxism a bad name, and provides no guide for workers anywhere.

Film protests: any "struggle" will do?



Like many others, I watched *The Innocence of Muslims* thinking it must be some kind of satirist's joke — that this couldn't possibly be what all the fuss was about. It was too ludicrous, too obviously amateurish and awful, for anyone to take seriously.

I had precisely the same experience reading articles by the International Socialist Group (Scotland) (which is linked to the English splinter from the SWP led by John Rees). Someone, I thought, has written a parody of playschool "anti-imperialism".

But no. David Jamieson, a student at Glasgow Caledonian University, writes: "Another day, another racist provocation from the west directed at Muslims [and] another opportunity for western politicians [etc.] to portray Muslims as irrational and intolerant when they choose to protest."

He means, as "provocation from the West", this film made by an Egyptian Copt (presumably he's not studying geography). He means, by "choosing to protest", obviously, the protests outside US and other embassies.

Muslims are a single, homogenous, one-voiced mass, which "chooses" collectively to "protest", targeting people who had nothing whatsoever to do with the thing they're "protesting" about. Oh, but it's those in "the west" Jamieson is attacking who are racist. (It's unclear what he thinks of the vastly greater number of Muslims in, say, Libya or Egypt who have not attacked US embassies and have, indeed, demonstrated against the attacks. I guess they must be racists, too.)

Next Jamieson provides lessons in history and literature.

The "most memorable example" of attacks on Muslims is the "Salman Rushdie affair". Rushdie, he explains, "wrote a semi-literate anti-Muslim polemic, *The Satanic Verses*, which portrayed Muslim men as sexual predators and Muslim women as inviting of sexual violence." He celebrates the burnings of Rushdie's novel, comparing it to "a book which perpetrates the blood libel" (against Jews).

I suppose whether or not Salman Rushdie is "semi-literate" is a matter of judgement, though it's an eccentric one; but since Jamieson plainly has either not read the novel, or not understood a word of it, "semi" literate in his case would seem generous.

Another member of the ISG, though, is quick to outdo Jamieson in self-parodying idiocy. Chris Walsh, in an article entitled "Anti US protests are legitimate", confidently assures us: "It matters not one iota that this particular piece of islamophobic filth is not being directly peddled by the US state; it conforms to the prescribed dominant ideology of said state... and as such [the US state] is not only a legitimate target, but a strategically prudent one."

Leave aside whether it's true that *The Innocence of Muslims* can reasonably be said to represent the "dominant ideology" of the US. By this logic, if literally anyone, anywhere, does anything you or "Muslims" don't like — well, it's dominant ideology, innit! Kill Americans! What difference does it make that there even was a film, or what it says, or anything else? "Protests" about quite literally anything, real or imagined, would be "legitimate".

Ah, but you see, it doesn't actually make any difference. Walsh has that covered. "Those... who see this wave of protests as a massive over-reaction of Islamic extremists are predictably blinkered," he tells us, because "struggle often comes from quarters that are not necessarily of our choosing... How struggle begins is of little interest to revolutionaries; how it concludes is everything." Any "struggle", about anything is "legitimate" if its enemy is "the West", meaning America. Surely not any struggle, you think...

(Was, for instance, the Nazis' "struggle" against British and then American imperialism "legitimate"?)

Well, no: any struggle by Muslims, obviously.

Once again the only thing which makes sense of the argument is a view of "Muslims" as an elemental knee-jerking mass with a single reaction, a single opinion, a single voice. What it really means is: we clever people in Europe, we have political movements with aims and objectives and strategies which divide us; those Muslims, they all sound (and let's face it, look) alike.

But to confound the mind-numbing cretinousness of the argument, Walsh — bless him — notices that this isn't quite true. He quotes a member of the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists, a group linked to the SWP: "Almost everyone I know was against the protest from the start. Who supports any of this?" Undeterred, Walsh comments sagely that "socialists on the ground are capable of making mistakes." Things of course are clearer from Glasgow.

All right, that's a cheap shot. A socialist in Glasgow might, in principle, be right against a socialist from Egypt. But that would presuppose some effort to understand what is actually happening — in Egypt and elsewhere in the "Muslim world" — rather than deduce it from unexamined prejudices about "imperialism" and "Muslims".

In fact it is not "Muslims" who are protesting but actual political forces, with ideas, objectives, aims. Other Muslims — not to mention secular, democratic and working-class forces in the region — disagree with them. This is because, contrary to the utterly racist basic assumptions of Jamieson, Walsh and the like, the Middle East consists of actual human beings with brains.

And they disagree with them for very good reason: because whatever their demagoguery about America, these groups — the Salafists — are deeply reactionary anti-working-class movements which, in power, would not thank the likes of Jamieson and Walsh for their fawning, pitiful apologetics, but would slit their throats.

TUC: considering a general strike?

By a Congress delegate

The motion that caused the most controversy at this year's TUC Congress (9-12 September) was from the Prison Officers' Association, calling on the TUC at "the consideration and practicalities of a general strike".

It resulted in a lively debate and debate.

Unite, the largest voting bloc at Congress, agreed to support the resolution. Unite's Steve Turner argued that it would be a "political strike" (rather than an industrial one). Unison also supported the motion. The union was opposed by more historically conservative unions such as the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, civil service managers' union Prospect, shopworkers' union USDAW and pilots' union BALPA.

The passing of the motion represented the pressure that exists for the trade union movement to oppose the Tories. However, the motion seemed to mean different things to different people — for some, it expressed the need to properly build and co-ordinate industrial militancy; for others, it meant a one-day political protest strike.

LEADERSHIPS

The motion allowed the leaderships of the big unions to sound left-wing, despite their sell out of the pensions dispute.

The debate provided an important opportunity for trade unionists to discuss the need for coordinated action and the possibilities for organising it.

The TUC General Council also issued a statement of solidarity following the

massacre of mine workers at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana, South Africa. Although there was consensus around condemnation of the killings from a human-rights perspective, there was disagreement about the politics. The statement didn't support the demands of the workers and their right strike, and outrageously expressed solidarity with the National Union of Mineworkers (the official union from which the Lonmin miners broke, and which was complicit in the state's actions) and South African union federation COSATU "in their work to resolve the issues facing the mining industry and restore peace with justice in the platinum fields."

The influence of the Communist Party of Britain (linked to the South African Communist Party, which is part of the gov-

ernment and also complicit in the massacre) in drafting the initial statement is clear. However slight amendments were made, and discussions in the delegations showed that the position of full support for the NUM could only be maintained if people were ignorant of the facts.

EUROPE

In another international debate, a motion from rail workers' union RMT called for a referendum on EU membership and support for Britain's withdrawal.

The debate was important because the working class across Europe is being made to pay the price for the crisis of capitalism, and the attitude the trade union movement takes to European unity will shape our ability to build a movement that can

stop it. Elaine Jones from Unite argued against withdrawal from the EU. She said: "Our enemies are not the institutions of Europe, but the political representatives of the rich across Europe and in Britain". She added that we need European-wide working-class answers to austerity and more links between workers. A campaign for withdrawal from Europe now would cut against that, and would only increase nationalism. The approach Syriza has taken in Greece was given as a positive example — a refusal to make any cuts or sacrifices to remain in the Eurozone or the EU, but a firm commitment to European unity.

The RMT motion was overwhelmingly defeated, and the debate was dominated by a discussion of what sort of movement trade unionists need across Europe.



Sparks hold mass picket

By Darren Bedford

Activists have been staging daily mass pickets at a Crossrail construction site in West London, following the dismissal of 28 electricians from the site.

The workers lost their jobs when their employer, EIS, had its contract at the site terminated by Bam Ferrovial Kier (BFK), the consortium responsible for building Crossrail tunnels. It is widely suspected that BFK took EIS off the job because its workers — including Unite reps Rodney Valentine and Frank Morris — raised concerns about health and safety conditions in the tunnels. Crossrail deny the allegation, claiming that EIS's contract was terminated because its work was completed early. But Rodney and Frank were removed or banned from the site before the termination of the contract (in Rodney's case, immediately after his election as health and safety rep).

The Unite union has been demanding direct employment on Crossrail sites, under a national, collectively-bargained agreement, since 2011. The sub-contracting now ubiquitous in the construction industry makes it much easier for bosses to get rid of workers and shift the blame to some other link in the contracting chain. These sackings also take place against the backdrop of ongoing union campaigns against blacklisting, and construction worker activists argue that the dismissal of the EIS electricians are further evidence of systematic victimisation of union reps in the industry.

Workers called emergency pickets of the site following the dismissals, and succeeded in blocking roads into the site.

● More info — <http://jibelectrician.blogspot.co.uk>

Hospital workers spread their fight

By Ira Berkovic

Workers involved in a long-running battle with contractor Carillion at Swindon's Great Western Hospital (operated under a Private Finance Initiative) took the fight to Portsmouth's Queen Alexandra Hospital (QAH) on Tuesday 18 September.

Carillion managers at QAH have been accused of the same bullying and harassment practises against which the Swindon workers have taken 21 days of strike action. One Carillion manager from Swindon also works one day a week at QAH.

GMB Regional Secretary Paul Moloney said: "We are not anywhere near resolving this dispute at Swindon. The company has yet to meet GMB to resolve the dispute. However trade unions know

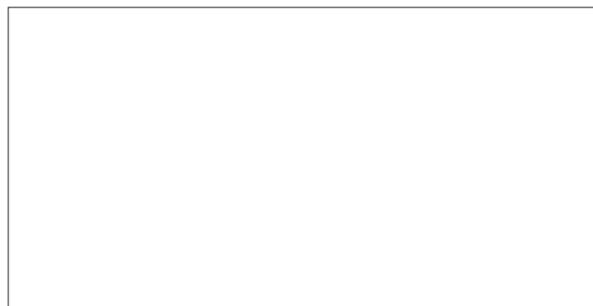
that standing up to bullies works. That is the message that we want to share with Carillion's staff at the Portsmouth hospital.

"We know that Carillion's own investigation, forced on it by GMB members taking strike action, found that there was evidence of shakedowns and corruptions by their managers in Swindon.

"Carillion has failed to deal with managers who covered this up for years." Carillion are also implicated in the blacklisting of construction workers, with evidence suggesting that they blacklisted over 200 workers over a period of four years.

The GMB is calling for the public sector contracts it holds, including through PFI schemes such as the one at Great Western Hospital, to be withdrawn and for the work to be taken back in-house.

Discussing autism at work



Artwork Landon Bryce thAutcast.com

By Janine Booth, RMT Executive (pc)

In October and November, trade unionists from a variety of different unions will attend a one-day seminar on "Autism in the Workplace", hosted by the Workers' Educational Association London Region.

Working with the WEA, and with RMT's sponsorship, I have put together this seminar to enable trade unionists to mobilise around this issue, effectively representing autistic workers and those who care for autistic dependants, tackling discrimination, and engaging with political debates about autism and disability.

When the first seminar was advertised, it was fully booked within a couple of days; so we set a repeat date, which booked up just as quickly.

We are now organising a third event, and working on extending it into a three-or-four-day course with full accreditation.

There are several reasons for the high level of interest in this subject. Over recent years, there has been a big increase in diagnosis of both children and adults as

having autism. Some suggest that this is just a modern fad ("everyone's got a syndrome these days"), and others that there is some kind of "epidemic" that should panic us all. Neither of these is accurate or helpful.

The truth is that understanding of the autistic spectrum has increased over recent years, the internet has increased access to knowledge, and self-organisation of autistic people has given a more positive view of life on the spectrum.

SCHOOLS

Also, as schools become better at identifying pupils with autism, many of those kids' parents come to the realisation that they may also have autism and seek assessment.

It may also be the case that increasing pressure to conform socially has put people with autism under increasing stress, so more of us seek out answers which may lead to an autism diagnosis.

Add to this the last Labour government's introduction of some progressive but weak laws. New legal rights to request flexible working, to time

off for domestic emergencies, and to protection from disability discrimination have some value, but mean very little in practice unless trade unions fight for them.

These are some of the issues we will be looking at during the seminar. John McDonnell MP will lead a discussion on autism, politics and the labour movement, and we will also discuss fighting to make workplaces — and our own trade unions — more autism-friendly.

APPALLING

There are some appalling cases of employers' mistreatment of workers and carers.

These include persistent bullying, paying less than the minimum wage because of a worker's autism, and even on-the-spot sacking of a worker who told his manager that he might have Asperger syndrome.

A better understanding of the autism spectrum and of the neurological diversity of humanity (and therefore of the working class) will enable trade unions to better defend their members. It will also enable them to involve and mobilise more members by ensuring that union culture and procedures and not unnecessarily geared towards a narrowly-defined neurotypicality.

I hope that these seminars — together with the policy development and handbook for trade unionists that will follow in their wake — will be a useful contribution to that process.

Ferry workers vote to strike

By Ollie Moore

Workers on the state-owned Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac) ferry services have voted to strike, after the Scottish government failed to give them assurances that their terms and conditions would be protected in the event of services being put out to tender.

First Minister Alex Salmond said that the ten-

dering was necessary to protect the services' future, but has given the workers' union, the RMT, a commitment that CalMac services would not be "unbundled".

A union statement said: "[We are] still waiting for further confirmation on the pensions and workplace rights issues at the heart of the on-going dispute."

The workers voted by 89% to strike.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Aristotelou Square in Thessaloniki, 8 September. (Picture from piazadelpopulo.blogspot.com)

Greek strikes build to 26 September

By Martin Thomas

On 26 September the Greek government, led by the right-wing New Democracy party with the support of Pasok (similar to Labour) and the Democratic Left (soft-left), will take its latest round of cuts to parliament.

Some Democratic Left MPs, such as former Pasok rebel Odysseas Voudouris, have denounced the cuts.

On 14 September, Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, said that giving Greece two more years to do its cuts "needs to be considered as an option".

Austria's finance minister Maria Fekter concurred: "We will give Greece the time they need for that. There will probably be no more money though".

Lagarde and Fekter say, in effect, that if the Greek government pushes through these huge cuts now, then in the coming

years the EU may demand only what is devastating and pauperising, not what is impossible.

German chancellor Angela Merkel, whose government has previously suggested that Greece should either step up its cuts or get out of the eurozone, told a press conference on 17 September that Greece could surely stay in the eurozone. She claimed that her "heart bleeds" for the people of Greece. All that was soft soap for a basic message that the cuts must go through.

The €12.5 billion of new cuts first have to confront the resistance of the Greek working class and the Greek people. On 17 September, criminal and civil judges, prosecutors and court officials started a two-week strike.

Workers on the Athens metro, trams and city trains will strike for 24 hours on 20 September, in protest against both wage cuts and fare increases.

More than 22,000 doctors at state-run hospitals started an "indefinite" strike over unpaid overtime pay. State clinics across Greece will only treat emergency cases.

PROFESSORS
University professors began a strike until the end of the month against wage cuts.

On 26 September others will join them in yet another general strike.

Over the summer the fascist Golden Dawn party has gained support, and racist attacks have increased.

A lot depends on the outcome of the attempts by Syriza, the left-wing coalition which came close to winning the 17 June election, to transform itself through district-by-district "people's assemblies" into a single party with rights for minority views and a mass working-class membership.

DEA, one of the revolutionary socialist groups within Syriza, has called for Syriza to "confirm its commitment to the project of setting up the necessary Radical Left rather than going for a 'big' — but ideologically and politically vague — camp of democracy".

TSIPRAS
It criticises a recent speech by Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras in which he called on "any Greek, every Greek" to ally with Syriza, but failed even to mention the word "socialism".

Syriza, says DEA, must make it clear that it "seeks the overthrow of the memorandum [imposed by the EU, ECB, and IMF], but from the standpoint of the interests of workers and from the perspective of socialism".

Syriza's slogan of "no sacrifice for the euro", it says, should be based on building resistance at national and European level

The task is to "build a mass radical Left, rejecting all pressure to shift toward the political centre".

**Housing for the Counihans!
Housing for all!
Demonstration:**

**Saturday 6 October,
2.30pm, Kilburn Square (London)
More: tinyurl.com/counihandemo**

Rescue the NHS from demolition

By Todd Hamer

The size and scale of the NHS demolition project is slowly coming into view.

Every Primary Care Trust is now putting three services out to tender. In April 2013, the National Commissioning Board will sell off 912 specialist services (or "products" as they are referred to in government reports). By October 2013 a further three chunks of the NHS will go to the private sector.

In total the *Financial Times* estimates contracts worth a staggering £20 billion (or 20% of the NHS) will be in the hands of private contractors in the next few years.

The Tories have decreed that PCTs must have completed the privatisation of three services each by the end of September. They have been selected by the government as the easiest services to privatise. They include:

- Musculo-skeletal services for back and neck pain
- Adult hearing
- Continence services
- Diagnostic tests
- Wheelchair services for children
- Podiatry services
- Venous leg ulcers and wound healing
- Primary Care Psychological Therapies for adults

In 13 months time, Clinical Commissioning Groups (the replacement of PCTs) will have to sell off a further three services. They must choose from the following list:

- Maternity services
- Speech and Language Therapy
- Long Term Conditions
- Community Chemotherapy
- Primary Care Psychological Therapies for children and adolescents
- Wheelchair services for adults

Clinical Commissioning Groups will decide who gets which contracts. Private health firms that have managed to infiltrate the boards of CCGs, like Virgin Care, are likely to win many contracts.

But perhaps the most shocking news is that from April 2013 the National Commissioning Board will be selling off specialist services for rare and uncommon conditions. These services involve just a fraction of the population and are based at national or regional centres. There are 88 services in total that have been identified and including:

- Radiotherapy services
- Blood and Marrow Transplant services
- Fetal Medicine Services
- Gender Identity Disorder Services
- Adult Secure Mental Health Services

These 88 services are the elite core of the NHS.

Sixty-six years of the National Health Service has produced these highly specialised units which have evolved to ensure that the promise of comprehensive care extended to people with the most complex needs. Losing these services from the NHS will mean losing the brightest minds and most skilled clinicians.

At the same time as this is happening the NHS is facing long-term cuts of £50 billion. The private sector will not only be moving in to provide core clinical services on the NHS but will also be poised to capitalise on a booming private health insurance market.

As waiting lists for NHS services increase and standards fall, more and more middle class people will start to pay for better quality care.

The NHS is being reduced to a rump service. We must mobilise to keep the NHS public.

Lobby Labour Party Conference to demand they rebuild the NHS!

**Sunday 30 September,
2.30pm, Peter Street,
Manchester**

**More: labournhslobby.wordpress.com
Transport from London: nhsliasion@yahoo.co.uk**

**Sponsors include: Unite the Union,
Merseyside Association of Trades Councils,
Liverpool Wavertree CLP, Wirral South CLP,
Broxtowe CLP, London KONP, LRC**

Capitalism: a murderous system

By Joan Trevor

At least 314 garment workers burned or suffocated to death in two factory fires in Pakistan on 12 September.

Twenty-five people died in a shoe factory in the city of Lahore, when chemicals caught alight; 289 died in a garment factory in Karachi.

In the Karachi fire, workers were trapped in-

side the burning building because exits had been locked and they could not open security grilles at the windows.

Factory bosses and government officials, who have turned a blind eye to the flouting of health and safety regulations, are being prosecuted in the wake of this national scandal. But, equally, as the tragedy fades from the headlines, Pakistan's sweatshop bosses will be

prosecuting their normal business of squeezing profits from workers slaving in unsafe conditions.

LabourStart have launched an international appeal, addressed to the Pakistani authorities: "Make textile factories safe" — alturl.com/smci6

To support the work of Pakistani trade unions, we can also put pressure on clothing retailers who source from Pakistan.