

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 260 10 October 2012 30p/80p

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For a workers' government

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## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

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

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● Printed by Trinity Mirror

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# Make Labour act on its NHS policy!

Pat Smith, the Hull North Constituency Labour Party delegate who moved the NHS motion at Labour Party conference, spoke to *Solidarity*.

### What's your assessment of the debate on the NHS?

The presence of protesters on the NHS Liaison Committee lobby was very effective, and must have been a factor in a majority of delegates prioritising the NHS for discussion. It also put pressure on the party officials and right-wingers who tried to water down the motion in composing. We got everything we wanted apart from text against the internal market.

I think the leadership realised they couldn't bully or stonewall us completely, given the balance of forces and also what a sensitive issue the NHS is.

During the composite, party official Jamie Reed

said that the next election would be "fought on the economy, not the NHS", and that "PFI is good because it builds hospitals". Three days later Burnham said in a speech, that PFI is "wrong" and that the next election will be a referendum on the NHS!

I think they didn't want a fight which would draw more attention to the issue.

### What was your general assessment of conference?

Much of the conference was neither here nor there. Some of the fringe meetings were useful, particularly, the CLPD, LRC, and

"Winning Labour" (organised by the GMB).

I heard the Vice President of ASLEF, Tosh McDonald, say something like "Why, when young people speak at Labour Party conference, are they always wearing a suit? Why are they always standing as an MP somewhere? Where are the rebels: the kids from estates with piercings, tattoos, and coloured hair?"

That sums it up for me.

### In general the left isn't very effective in Labour Party structures. Why?

The left is timid when it comes to fighting the centre and right of the party. But a fight is what people respond to. When I was aggressive in the composite, I was afraid it would alienate people. In fact, the other delegates unanimously suggested me to propose the motion, so I think it paid off.

Conference erupted

when I denounced PFI. Even in that bureaucratized environment people are looking for a lead. It's not just about radical policies, but about cutting through the bullshit of the policy wonks to put forward socialist ideas in clear, accessible language. But there's relatively little of that from either the unions or the organised left.

I think the lobby was a good example of what the left should do a lot more of.

### What can we do to fight for the NHS motion, and other left-wing policy, to be implemented?

According to Labour rules, the NHS policy should be in the next manifesto [since it was passed by more than two thirds], but we know it won't be unless we build pressure using every channel we can in our unions, CLPs and the broader labour movement.

## Tories' new anti-choice offensive

By Rosalind Robson

The new Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt thinks the legal time limit on abortion should be halved to 12 weeks.

Maria Miller, the so-called Women's Minister, thinks it should be 20 weeks. Any more for anyone?

For Tory politicians to pitch their own personal preferences for time limits like this is vile. They do it without reference to scientific or political argument, and without any understanding about what it is like to face an unwanted pregnancy.

Cameron was quick to say the government had no

organised religious bigots and other anti-abortionists.

Anti-abortion alliances like 40 Days for Life are now stepping up their so-called vigils outside abortion clinics where they intimidate women seeking counselling and treatment. We cannot let them get away with it.

**Defend a woman's right to choose!**

**Protest against "40 Days for Life"**

**Monday 15 October, 7pm, St James's Church, 22 George Street, London, W1U 3QY**

**Organised by Bloomsbury Pro-Choice Alliance**

plans to change the law on abortion. Probably he does not want to fight another battle with the Lib-Dems, or the medical establishment, or even people in his own party who favour the status quo. But that is no reason for complacency.

The effect of Tory musing on abortion time limits may be to soften up public opinion. It may also help justify cuts in abortion services. And it gives succour to the

## Niche or abcess?

By Gerry Bates

Throwing a sop to the Tory right, chancellor George Osborne has said (8 October) that he will legislate to let bosses "buy out" workers' rights.

By giving you £2000 in shares in the company, your boss will be able to cancel your right to sue for unfair dismissal, your right

to redundancy pay, your right to ask for flexible hours or time off for training, and some of your maternity-leave rights.

Paul Kenny, GMB general secretary, said: "Slashing people's employment rights under the guise of ownership schemes won't create jobs and it won't create growth".

Even bosses were sceptical. John Cridland, director of the bosses' federation

CBI, said: "this is a niche idea". Lawyer Anthony Sakrouge pointed out: "Giving up the right not to be unfairly dismissed for £2,000 worth of shares will not be a very attractive proposition..."

**The labour movement must make sure that a "niche" does not become an abcess, poisoning workers' rights through-out industry.**

## Unions' anti-cuts stand

By Padraig O'Brien

The three trade unions at Glasgow City Council have written to councillors demanding that they refuse to make any further cuts and set a "needs budget".

Unions are also demanding the council reclaim money cut from previous budget settlements.

Unison branch secretary Brian Smith said: "Over 2,500 jobs have already been cut since 2010 ... more than 10% of the workforce."

"Elected members have a choice — make the cuts or demand an end to the slash and burn austerity policies of the ConDems and fight for a return of the tens of millions stolen from Glasgow in the last few years."

**Unions around the country should follow the Glasgow unions' lead and demand that councillors — especially Labour councillors supported and funded by unions — act in the interests of local workers and communities, not in the interests of the Tories' austerity agenda.**

# Iran: currency crash sparks protests

By Morad Shirin

**Further sanctions imposed by US imperialism and its allies on Iran in December 2011 and July 2012 have aggravated the economic and social problems faced by workers and other exploited layers.**

After July's "chicken crisis" the plummeting currency is now set to cause many other crises as the regime struggles to provide working families with imported food products and many other basic necessities at prices that they can afford.

The sanctions are not the only cause of the plunging currency and the worsening situation in Iranian society. They are merely exacerbating deep-rooted structural problems of Iran's stunted capitalism dating back to the Shah's regime. But the current dictatorship has taken endemic corruption, mismanagement, nepotism and incompetence to a new level.

The trigger for the latest

protests (3 October) at Tehran's Grand Bazaar — one of the traditional bastions of the regime — has been the massive fall in the currency. The rial lost 40 percent of its value in a week!

On 1 October alone the regime's currency fell by 18 percent!

The rial now stands at a record low against the US dollar and, despite the official rate of 12,260, it has been exchanged for around 36,100 to the dollar on the "free market".

The rial's fall has cut the merchants' profit rates and

they have taken to the streets in protests targeting Ahmadinejad and his allies. Although the regime sent in the riot police and arrested many "speculators" and other protesters, this can be seen as yet another move against Ahmadinejad and his conservative faction.

Following the crushing defeat of the "reformists" in 2009, the infighting of the regime has been between two conservative factions. The battle has been building up in anticipation of the June 2013 presidential "election".

Although Ahmadinejad is barred from running, he is trying to help someone from his faction get elected. His faction, however, has fallen out of favour with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the "Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution", who is promoting other conservatives.

In April 2011 the regime's faction fights burst into the public domain when Ahmadinejad sacked the Intelligence Minister, Heydar Moslehi, and Khamenei forced the "President" to reinstate him!

## ALLIES

**Since then many allies of Ahmadinejad have been accused of or tried for corruption and other abuses of power.**

The latest is Ali-Akbar Javanfekr, the head of IRNA (the state news agency), who is also Ahmadinejad's press adviser and unofficial spokesman.

Javanfekr has been jailed for six months for "insulting Islamic and traditional values"!

Khamenei seems to have given the green light to the

media to rough up Ahmadinejad and for the judiciary to arrest his allies. During a TV interview on 4 September Ahmadinejad was asked what his government had done with \$700 billion of oil revenue during his seven years as President. This amount has been widely publicised to be equal to Iran's total revenue since the first wells began pumping oil!

The regime's "parliament", dominated by conservatives opposed to Ahmadinejad, has now voted to consider suspending plans for the second phase of food and fuel subsidy cuts. This is a clear blow against Ahmadinejad's faction which introduced the first phase of subsidy cuts in late 2010.

While the various factions of the Iranian bourgeoisie are slugging it out, the workers and their families are getting closer to the brink of starvation.

**Only a resurgence in workers' struggles can stop hunger and re-build the workers' movement for the bigger fights ahead.**

## Victims of British torture win right to seek damages

By Sacha Ismail

**The High Court has ruled that Kenyans tortured by the British empire in the 1950s can seek damages from the British government.**

During and after the Mau Mau uprising which began in 1952, the British empire interned, tortured and murdered many tens of thousands of activists fighting for Kenyan independence. Rape, maiming including castration, and severe beatings were common; in some cases prisoners were simply beaten to death.

There is now so much evidence of what happened that the Coalition government is in no position to deny it. Instead, it argued that since the Kenyan government is the legitimate successor to the British administration, Britain is no

longer responsible. The government is appealing against the High Court ruling.

In the 1950s and 60s, the UK combined a gradual and targeted withdrawal from most of its colonies with severe repression in those it maintained. The ruling that Kenyan survivors can sue for damages is likely to spark many other similar cases from around the globe — and a good thing too.

Britain no longer has a colonial empire, but British forces have been involved in similar repression on a smaller scale much more recently.

**A decision which might make British imperialism more cautious, in addition to bringing justice for some of its victims, is to be welcomed.**

## Turkish state vs. Kurdish workers

By Turkish socialists in UID-DER

**The first hearing of the case against 15 women trade-unionists of the Turkish Confederation of Public Employees Unions (KESK) was held in Ankara on 4 October. Nine of the 15 have been in prison, awaiting a court hearing, for eight months.**

Thousands of people — many KESK members — came from around Turkey to protest outside the court and show their support for the women trade-unionists. TKESK chairman Lami Özgen made a speech emphasising the hardships of being a woman, a Kurd and member of a fighting union like KESK in Turkey.

Many representatives came from abroad to show their support and demand the trade-unionists be freed.

At 9pm we heard that six of the nine jailed women had been released.

Since 2009 many trade-

unionists have faced police repression and harassment after a police operation under the name of "KCK operation" started. Koma Civakên Kurdistan (KCK) is the new umbrella organisation of the Kurdish national liberation movement.

Since then hundreds of KESK members and officials have been taken into detention and 76 of them arrested, including chairman Lami Özgen (though later released). Police raids targeting the union premises and homes of trade-unionists are still going on. No union officials are allowed to be present during these raids; they break in the offices, confiscate the computers etc.

That all of the trade-unionists arrested are Kurds clearly shows that

the attack is aimed at repressing Kurdish people's democratic demands. KESK members and officials are accused of "terrorism". But the AKP government also wants to crush the trade-union movement and social opposition.

The current detainees were questioned about their involvement in International Women's Day demonstrations. Why did they join the demonstrations? Under whose orders? Participating in rallies demanding peace and democracy is treated as a crime.

**KESK calls on all public employees, unions and democratic mass organisations to support KESK members.**

• [www.uidder.org](http://www.uidder.org)

## In brief

**iPhone mass strike**  
Three thousand workers at a Foxconn plant in Zhengzhou, China, struck on Friday 5 October. Foxconn is an electronics manufacturer which produces Apple iPhones and iPods.

**The immediate catalyst for the strike was an increase in quality control inspections and increasing demands from management for higher-quality production without any additional training. Foxconn have also been forcing workers to work through holidays.**

## Walmart strikes

**Workers in Walmart stores in California struck on 4 October, marking the first shop-floor strike in the company's 50-year history.**

Grievances include unilateral shift changes and management victimisation of workers who complain about workplace conditions.

Strikers attended a conference organised by the UNI global union to launch the Walmart Global Union Alliance. The store strikes follow strikes by Walmart warehouse and distribution workers in September.

## Taranto clean up

**On 25 September 4,000 workers of the IIVA steelworks in the Italian city of Taranto struck against a court decision to close the plant due to dangerous levels of pollution.**

**For years the plants' present owners — the Riva family dynasty — have avoided their legal duty to clean up the technologically decrepit plant.**

**The strike — in support of the owners — did not involve all workers. The majority demurred or took other forms of protest. Official statistics say 12,000 have been killed, and tens of thousands affected by a variety of malignant cancers, over 50 years.**

• **More:**  
[www.workersliberty.org/node/19684](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/19684)

## ANTONIO GRAMSCI: WORKING-CLASS REVOLUTIONARY

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

This booklet discusses a major recent study on the *Notebooks* —

Peter Thomas's *The Gramscian Moment* — and argues that the *Notebooks* were in fact a powerful contribution to the working-out of revolutionary working-class strategy in developed capitalist societies.

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

### Book launch

Speakers: Martin Thomas in discussion with Peter Thomas, author of *The Gramscian Moment*.  
7pm, Wednesday 31 October, at University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY

## Books from Workers' Liberty

### What is capitalism? Can it last?

With articles from Leon Trotsky, Max Shachtman, Maziar Razi and many more. Edited by Cathy Nugent. £5 — buy online from [tinyurl.com/wiccil](http://tinyurl.com/wiccil)

### Working-class politics and anarchism

Debates between members of Workers' Liberty and comrades from various anarchist traditions. £5 — [tinyurl.com/wcpanarchism](http://tinyurl.com/wcpanarchism)

### Treason of the Intellectuals

Political verse by Sean Matgamna. £9.99 — [tinyurl.com/treasonofintellectuals](http://tinyurl.com/treasonofintellectuals)

# Sexual abuse and racism

## Letters

**The English Defence League (EDL) has declared its intention to march in Rotherham on Saturday 13 October.**

The march (few details of which are currently unavailable) is described as a response to the failings of police and social workers/child protection agencies in a series of cases of sexual abuse of young women in the area. The EDL are exploiting this to attack the Asian community.

They claim that these incidents would have received greater attention if those accused had not been Asian and Muslim.

Sexual abuse is not determined by what race you are, and affects all in an equally distressing way.

Quite apart from the obvious and abhorrent racism, this shows a complete lack of understanding of the case. The victims were failed by the same process that currently affects all vulnerable individuals in this society: savage cuts in funding and staffing which made it all too easy for them to "slip through the net".

Other reports have cited misogynistic police attitudes towards the victims as a major contributory factor; there is a suggestion that some officers may have seen the victims as willing participants, largely due to their background and class.

The UAF and Trades Council have organised a counter rally, described as a "multicultural celebration" but, in many ways, this response is inadequate; it says nothing to working-class people in Rotherham about why scapegoating Asian men is not the response we should have to these sexual abuse cases. Workers' Liberty comrades will be taking part in this event but we think more needs to be said about the politics of the issue.

If investigations weren't hampered by oppressive attitudes, this situation would never have arisen; as it is, it represents another sign of the marginalisation of the working class. A set of assumptions were formed, that the victims were consensual, albeit under-age, sex workers; the fact that this was not seen as a cause for action is indicative of much wider problems than the simplistic nonsense of the EDL.

**Sexual abuse occurs throughout society, and to formulate a response on the grounds of religion or ethnicity is offensive, demeaning and hopelessly inadequate. As in all our activity, we have a responsibility to educate against this, and to combat the prejudices and political failings which failed the victims in the first place.**

*AWL members and teachers in South Yorkshire*

### EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

One recent Wednesday, a planned lesson in which my year 9 class would have been spotting the persuasive techniques in a past editorial of *Solidarity* had to be postponed when I was told at very short notice that I had to attend a meeting of a group called PiXL.

PiXL is a so-called not-for-profit educational consultancy organisation based around its guru-type leader, Sir John Rowling, a former headteacher with links to the Emmanuel Schools Foundation, whose academies got into trouble a few years ago for teaching creationism in science lessons. PiXL is dedicated to helping the schools in its "club" (members of which pay it thousands of pounds a year) improve their GCSE results.

Rowling opened the meeting, which was for secondary school heads of maths and English, by asking us to think of what one thing we would want our schools to achieve if we were feeling really ambitious. My colleague and I came up with something like "our school should be an environment where every child can reach their potential". This was the wrong answer, but Rowling assured the meeting that whatever percentage figure of A-C passes we had come up with, it was achievable!

The PiXL approach to improving results was revealed as the meeting went on. Far from being the advised opportunity to share ideas, we got a long lecture-cum-rally from Rowling and one of his protégés, a young headteacher from Sutton.

PiXL believe in a focus on C/D borderline students, via excessive data management techniques to see the "progress" students are making toward passing the exam; overworking teachers by endless lunchtime and after-school sessions targeting a very small number of pupils (what about all the others?); and stressing out students by re-entering them over and over again, at every possible opportunity, during year 10 and 11 in the hope that their results will improve. This is supposed to be all about the students and their best interests, but their learning needs are never discussed, only the need to "diagnose" the reason they can't pass the exam and then offer them the "therapy" they need — not the most helpful language!

What PiXL really represent is the pathetic if understandable desire in schools to carve out an extra 1% of the available "pie" of GCSE passes as individual institutions.

At one point Rowling said that his view was that as 60% appeared to be the figure "allowed" to pass this year, we should be assuming that only 59% will be allowed to pass next year and we should be guessing grade boundaries, etc, on that basis. It was both frustrating and depressing to see ranks and ranks of qualified teachers sitting in the hall listening to this without questioning the horrendous assumptions behind it: that it is OK for the government to set a quota of children allowed not to fail each year and the best way we can deal with this is to pump money into groups like PiXL, and personally work ourselves and our students into the ground to ensure that more of the kids at our school rather than the school down the road get into the "not a failure" category each year.

Teacher trade unions and the labour movement in general are a long way from leading a proper public discussion of these issues and it is vital that we fight for them to do so. I feel that an immediately winnable demand to campaign around would be the abolition of exams at 16; especially as not all students are expected to remain in full time education until 18, writing 40% of them off as failures at 16 should be obviously unjustifiable to almost everybody in society.

**PiXL's slogan is "whatever it takes"; socialists in schools should do whatever it takes to break the hold of the vile set of ideas they represent, and present an alternative based on caring about the development of students as learners and human beings.**

*Jack Frost, south London*

(More contributions to the debate about exams and education can be found on the Workers' Liberty website: <http://alturl.com/2ctqb>)

### SALTY BUT SECTARIAN

While Martin Thomas (*Solidarity* 259) spells out the benefits of the "propaganda routine" doggedly pursued by the Australian group Socialist Alternative (SAIt), I think he is too soft on its downside in SAIt's case, e.g., their overall neglect until recently of working-class struggle in the unions, etc.

This tendency to cut themselves off as a self-sustaining sect (or cult at times), has always been my central critique of their activity (not just their political problems in terms of communal and democratic struggles, anti-imperialism, etc).

Until recently, they have not been able to maintain their members when they stop being students and become workers. For some reason they have managed that with the most recent cohort of students. Why?

I don't know, but it may be influenced by the the changing nature of university education. Perhaps they have changed their approach to that transition period. I know that in the past they gave very little support or recognition to their members who did organise in unions. This seems to have changed, and they are now organising fractions in a number of unions.

It would be useful perhaps to restate our overall approach to revolutionary regroupment of being for building multi-tendency parties, open debate, etc.

**Also, to argue more strongly that recent developments show how SAIt have shifted towards an implicitly "soft-stalinist" anti-imperialism — they can forget their old programmatic differences on the basis of a shared approach to opposing the US, etc.**

*Riki Lane, Melbourne*

# Yes, we can balance the budget on the wallets of the rich!

**“It’s an economic delusion to think you can balance the budget only on the wallets of the rich”, claimed Chancellor George Osborne as he spoke to the Tory party conference (8 October).**

He was trying to justify another £10 billion cuts in benefits for the worse-off, on top of all the cuts already in train.

Yes, you can balance the budget on the wallets of the rich! Or, rather, we could balance the budget that way. The Tories never would, and the New Labour types never would, but a government based on and accountable to the labour movement, a workers’ government, could and would.

Osborne’s claim is even more contemptible because his cuts aren’t even balancing the budget. They are worsening, not improving, the government budget deficit. Cuts, especially those that hit the worse-off and public service workers, also mean cuts in consumer demand, shops and businesses shut, reduced tax revenues — and a bigger deficit.

The *Guardian* reports: “Britain’s government deficit is at a record high. Public sector net borrowing excluding financial sector interventions — the government’s preferred measure — widened to £14.41bn [in August 2012]... and is now the largest it has been since monthly records began in 1993.

“The official release shows that the deficit for the tax year to date to £31bn. But, stripping out the transfer of Royal Mail pension assets, the deficit has actually widened 22% to £59bn so far this year”.

The same thing on a larger scale is happening in Greece, where the huge cuts imposed by the European Union, the European Central Bank, and the IMF are plunging the Greek government worse into debt rather than rescuing it.

*The aim of the cuts is not to ease the debt, but to use the crisis to beat down workers’ standards and social provision so that profits can be higher in an eventual recovery.*

## DEFICIT

**Look at the figures. The British government’s budget deficit is around £120 billion a year. A workers’ government would not try to reduce it to zero straight off. No competent administration, capitalist or socialist, would do that.**

Good arguments can be made for increasing the deficit in the short term — through increased social spending, rather than through Osborne’s method of depressing economic activity across the board by cuts — in order to boost output and then boost government revenue, and so balance the budget in the longer term.

But take Osborne’s challenge at face value. Gross domestic household disposable income (after income tax) for the UK is about £1000 billion. Before tax it must total about £1200 billion. The top 10 per cent pocket 31% of it, or about £370 billion.

A 32% super-tax on that top 10 per cent would balance the budget and still leave them all very well-off indeed.

The top 1% have about 20% of total income, or about £240 billion: a 50% super-tax on them would balance the budget without touching the other 99%. The top 0.1% have about 7%, so taxing them alone heavily would almost balance the budget, even if all the other 99.9% paid no extra.

Remember that these figures understate the luxuries of the top-paid, because they often get paid in tricky ways that make their loot appear as “capital gains” rather than income, and they get much more “on expenses” and as “perks of the job” than others do. In early 2008, as the capitalist crisis got under way, John Thain, the boss of Merrill Lynch, got his com-

pany to spend \$1.2 million on doing up his personal office.

The top 10 per cent own about half all household wealth in Britain, or about £5,000 billion. A government could balance the budget by leaving their income untouched and instead taxing their wealth at just 2.4%.

If the wealth tax were restricted to just the top 1000 individuals, whose wealth totals £414 billion, it could abolish the deficit for the next three years and still leave those top thousand with personal wealth of £54 million each. That’s with no income-tax increase at all.

Osborne will do nothing like that. At the Tory conference he claimed, in vague and general terms, that he would find ways to get more tax revenue from the rich. But he rejected even the mild gestures proposed by the Lib Dems, a mansion tax or an annual levy on wealth.

He also ruled out introducing new council tax bands on high-value houses. Council tax hits the poor harder than the rich, because it is a flat rate on every house worth above £320,000 (which in London and some other areas is not huge).

He didn’t rule in anything specific, and he has already cut the top income tax rate from 50% to 45%. A business tax specialist quoted recently in the *Financial Times* reports that: “the UK business tax regime [is] now ‘fully competitive’ when benchmarked against other countries, as a result of a planned cut in the corporate tax rate to 22 per cent in two years’ time, a new tax break for patent income, new rules on foreign profits and tax-deductible interest costs”. That is New Labour’s work as well as Osborne’s.

Business profits, as well as top pay, are taxed more and more lightly, at the same time as cuts multiply.

Because of council tax, and other taxes which hit the poor harder, like VAT, the worse-off pay a higher tax rate than the rich. The bottom 20% pay an average of 35.5% of their income in tax, and the top 20% pay 33.7%. The middle 60% pay a slightly lower rate, 31.5% on average.

We must teach the Tories that it is a *social delusion* to think that they can balance the budget on the sufferings of the poor.

The rich would, of course, respond to high taxes by “strikes” — by taking, or trying to take, their money out of the country. Some forms of wealth they can move easily. Basic productive wealth they can’t. The *Communist Manifesto* had it right when it put near the top of its list of demands one borrowed from the great French Revolution of 1789-99: “Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels”.

**We can break the tyranny of the budget deficit, and we will do it through reshaping the labour movement to fight for a workers’ government which takes into public ownership the whole of high finance and the giant capitalist corporations.**

## A new fund drive for the AWL

**Looking at the explosive struggles in Greece and Spain, or mass strike victories like the Chicago teachers or Queensland Children’s Hospital construction workers, or at inspiring incipient labour movements like that of the Chinese workers, you could get gloomy about the relatively low levels of struggle in Britain and the lack of strategy from the capitulatory trade union leaders.**

But lulls never last. We are only living through a quiet period in very noisy times, and struggles on the scale of Greece and Spain — a scale not seen in Britain since the 1980s — will return again to this country.

What socialists do now, in the relative “lull”, can make a huge difference to how quickly they return, and how they fare when they do.

We believe that our organisation, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, has an irreplaceable role to play in ensuring that struggle revives and succeeds.

AWL members in workplaces are integral to catalysing and helping shape workers’ struggles on a democratic, rank-and-file basis. Our publications combine activist news, historical and theoretical education, and debate and discussion between socialists with different views in a way that is sadly all too rare on the contemporary left. The AWL attempts to be a force for agitating, educating and organising for revolutionary-democratic socialist ideas within the labour movement.

To help us do this, we have redesigned our paper to make it more readable and accessible. We must replace the very old computers in our office.

We have published three new books — *What Is Capitalism? Can It Last?*; *Working-Class Politics and Anarchism*; and *Antonio Gramsci: Working-Class Revolutionary* — which contain discussion, polemics, and debates to equip revolutionaries with the ideas to change the world. We are organising more public activity, with a dayschool in London on 24 November on the prospects for revolution in Europe.

To do all of this, we need funds. If you think that this paper is a useful resource, if you think that our ideas matter, if you think that any aspect of our work is valuable, you should support us both financially and through getting involved in our activity.

**We are launching a new drive to raise £15,000 by May Day 2013 to help continue and develop this work. Please support us by donating.**

### You can help us by:

- Taking out a monthly standing order. There is a form at [www.workersliberty.org/resources](http://www.workersliberty.org/resources). Please post to us at the AWL address below.

- Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to “AWL”) or donate online at [www.workersliberty.org/donate](http://www.workersliberty.org/donate)

- Organising a fundraising event.

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

- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

More information: 07796 690 874 / [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

# Lessons of the Queensland Children's Hospital strike

By Bob Carnegie

**Construction workers recently won an eight-week strike at the Queensland Children's Hospital in Brisbane.**

There's a greater spirit of militancy in the industry now than for some years. The current Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) campaign has been met with strong employer resistance [EBAs are the main form of collective agreement in Australian industry].

The renewal of some of the four-year agreements have been met with a much stronger resistance from employers than there ever has been in the history of the EBA system.

At Laing O'Rourke, workers had a 21-day protected action [legal strike] to get a result. Thiess was an 18-day protected action dispute. Lend Lease was two weeks. So in response to the strong resistance from employers there's been a lot of worker determination to secure agreements, particularly ones which include a subcontractor clause and job security benefits.

## ORGANISATION

**At QCH, after the union officials had been injunctioned and prevented from accessing the site, and I got involved in the dispute, we had to go through the process of trying to develop organisation that hadn't existed previously.**

The more we increased the democracy of the organisation, the more determined the workers became. It was an interesting study in the importance of democracy in a dispute.

We had full site meetings at least once a week in the Serbian Hall in South Brisbane. We ran those meetings as democratically as possible and made sure everyone was given a say. It created the feeling that people were actually part of something, instead of being hectored, which is what can happen at certain union meetings.

One of the weaker points was around keeping other workers and the wider labour movement informed. The work that Workers' Liberty did in raising awareness of the dispute, and producing leaflets to inform people about what was going on, was very important.

No leaflets were coming out of the dispute until Workers' Liberty produced some, so that was hugely important.

We made sure the dispute didn't become static by keeping everyone informed about what was going on. We'd have at least one meeting every day on the protest line at

Graham Street where we'd give a run-down of what was going on, and we'd have guest speakers in, like Brian Boyd from the Trades and Labour Council in Victoria. We had guys in from the Transport Workers Union and the Maritime Union, and other working-class organisations. It helped the guys feel like they weren't completely alone.

We also found the international messages very helpful. A lot of the men and women were gobsmacked and really impressed that workers in Turkey, Iran, and elsewhere had heard about and were supporting their struggle.

We worked to make links with workers on other construction sites. We protested against attacks on Grocon workers, and marched to the big Grocon site at Elizabeth Street in Brisbane, and helped organise a community protest there which shut down the site twice. There was also action by CFMEU members on Baulderstone sites.

Like Abigroup, Baulderstone is owned by Lend Lease, and the workers' action got the attention of Lend Lease management. We had delegates from other sites and other workplaces coming to us and offering their solidarity.

We found it more difficult to get delegations from our site out to other workplaces. That was another weakness, partly due to obstructions, and partly because around week seven of the dispute, poverty had become a real issue and people were finding it difficult to keep petrol in cars.

## CONFIDENCE

**Since the return to work, the workers are feeling strong and they're determined that things will work better than they did before.**

There are some divisions, for example, between workers who stuck out the dispute 100% and some who went and found work elsewhere, but all in all things are going OK there.

There is an ongoing political campaign we have to organise. I'm facing a major contempt of court charge because I was injunctioned during the dispute but continued to visit the site anyway. I defied that injunction quite deliberately; bad laws have to be disobeyed.

We have to build a political campaign around the court case, because it represents a big corporation attacking an individual in order to deter other people from helping workers to organise and fight back. The court case is a threat to all socialists and union activists.

There's been a definite politicisation of many workers in this dispute. Before, they certainly knew which side the bosses were on and which side the workers were on, but now there's a bigger *political* understanding.

The word "socialism" was raised by myself and other comrades on numerous occasions, and it was never howled down, and often applauded.

**Construction workers can be pretty tough, cynical people, but once they saw the work that people from the socialist movement were doing they became more open to the idea that society should be organised in a different way.**

● Bob Carnegie is a former Builders Labourers Federation organiser, invited in to help organise the dispute by the Queensland Children's Hospital strikers after courts handed down injunctions banning all union officials from the site. More: [workersliberty.org/qch](http://workersliberty.org/qch)

# Chicago teachers A struggle

Tina Beacock is a socialist long active in Chicago, and now a retired member of the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU). She spoke to *Solidarity* about the recent Chicago teachers' dispute.

**Chicago teachers struck between 10 and 18 September. Their union, the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU), reports that the strike won wage rises, and in addition: "This fight produced many wins — from the right to appeal a rating, to language that gives teachers control over our own lesson plan format. Equally important, we stopped many harmful 'reforms'."**

"The district was forced to give up on merit pay, made to abandon a 7 hour 40 minute teacher day, and gave ground on test-based evaluation."

Chicago's Mayor Rahm Emanuel (who was previously President Barack Obama's chief of staff) made a concession in his plan for a longer school day, which originally would have meant teachers working 20% extra time with no increase in pay. Now, the agreement requires that laid-off teachers will be re-hired to cover the extra time.

"When CORE was elected to office in 2010", Tina said, "it inherited a top-heavy organisation. From being a small activist group of teachers and allies which could call marches of hundreds, it was now faced with running the largest union local in the state — some 26,000 members".

CORE, a rank and file caucus within the CTU formed in 2008, had won control of the union, but as a result many of its leading activists had become full-time union elected officers and staff.

Like many other US unions, the CTU has a higher ratio of full-time officials to members than unions in other countries: about 50 full-time staff for a membership of 26,000 teachers and support staff, serving 400,000 students. Most support staff are in the CTU, but some are in other unions, such as the SEIU, which had settled before the CTU struck. [In England, the National Union of Teachers has about 240 full-time staff, and 120 members on full facility time, for 325,000 members].

"Decisions in the union are made by monthly meetings of delegates from the 600 schools in the system.

"Unlike previous CTU caucuses, the CORE leadership pulled in people from other caucuses into campaigns, com-

# le that could turn the tide

mittee leaderships and union staff jobs. They ran workshops on how to organise a contract campaign. They used PD [teachers' training courses] to invite speakers like Diane Ravitch, a critic of high-stakes testing.

"The CTU leadership carried out a plan to educate and mobilise the ranks of the union. It made sure that every school had union delegates, and they also organised mobilisation committees in every school in addition to the delegates.

"To do this, they set up an organising department, to involve the broadest number of members. They organised actions with community organisations, other unions, and Occupy Chicago against TIFs (tax give-aways to corporations by the city).

"They used a more democratic kind of organising. They used tools from the *Labor Notes* toolbox, launching a contract campaign which included tactics like red t-shirt days".

[*Labor Notes* is a cross-union rank-and-file newsletter published in the USA, which also organises conferences and publishes pamphlets. It has long been supported by the socialist group Solidarity.]

## STRIKE VOTE

**In the face of anti-union laws requiring a vote of 75% of all members to be able to strike, and 90-day waiting periods, the CTU called a strike authorisation vote in May — and got a resounding 98% yes (90% of eligible voters).**

A May 23 rally and march, a week after NATO demonstrations in the city, mobilized over 6,000, almost one union member in four. Mayor Rahm Emanuel was stunned. When a mediator came back with recommendations the teachers get a 15% raise, he ignored the mediator.

"During the strike, there were bulletins and rallies every day. This level of mobilisation had a major impact, raising morale and getting people to work with each other.

"Students mobilised in support of the teachers at the Board of Education, and there were students and parents on all the picket lines. There was visible support for the CTU everywhere in the city. CTU members initiated actions, like picketing aldermen who'd opposed the strike; hundreds of members converged on the Hyde Park site where Penny Pritzker's Hyatt just took a giant TIF grant and robbed our schools of millions of dollars.

"The strike bulletins documented the flowering of solidarity all over the city; a google-map on the union's website showed the national and international support. Travelling around the city in CTU red, you were saluted as part of a popular army.

"For members, the union has become something they do, not someone they call.

"School restructuring, privatisation, and closures are one of the big issues behind the dispute. In the name of 'reform', Chicago has been leading the national attack on teachers and public education since the 1995 law which curtailed basic union rights and handed Mayor Daley control to appoint the School Board.

"One part of this pincer movement was the federal No Child Left Behind law, passed in 2002, which mandated that schools and whole cities lose funding if they did not turn around schools, and reach the goal that all students in each school would test at or above average. [Democrats and Republicans cosponsoring this law were not tested on their knowledge of the word 'average'.]

"The new law passed under Obama's aegis, Race to the Top, is if anything worse — it compels states to compete for

federal funds, based on how thoroughly they implement various measures including 'teacher accountability', paving the way for merit pay. The introduction of standardised testing of students, like statistical control in manufacturing, gives a criterion for whom to fire.

"The Chicago Board of Education has been closing schools for low test scores longer than in other cities, and Chicago has more charter schools [like Michael Gove's free schools] than any other city except New Orleans [where after Hurricane Katrina, teachers at 75% of the city's schools were terminated, and now the majority of students are in charter schools].

"This has resulted in the shrinking of union membership from 35,000 in 2002 to 26,000 today. Schools can vary in size up to 4200 at Lane Tech, but most are smaller, with an average of 1500 students in high schools and 200-500 in elementary schools. Now schools are getting smaller partly because of the insane testing.

"If you don't pass the tests in 8th grade [age 13-14], you just don't get to high school. Every school has an incentive to reject students, in order to keep up its test averages and avoid turnaround. Now you have student push-outs, not drop-outs.

"Since 2002 the city has been closing down schools for bad performance, firing all the staff, making them re-apply for their jobs.

"After I was terminated when the city closed the school I was working at, I had two and a half years working as a substitute teacher. I was never placed in a new regular job. That's not atypical for many veteran teachers.

## RACISM

**"The racist character of this assault is clear, too.**

"As schools with low scores, schools where it is most challenging to teach, have been closed and teachers dismissed, the number of Black teachers has declined from 45% of the workforce in the 90s to 19% today. This occurs in a system where 92% of the students are children of colour. Some displaced teachers became CORE activists".

The previous time the old guard leadership of the Chicago Teachers' Union was ousted by a militant opposition didn't turn out so well. That was PACT, a militant reform movement but not a class-conscious one. It campaigned for union democracy and to be equal partners in reform, not its target.

"Debbie Lynch of PACT won the union presidency in 2001, partly because PACT organised against the 1995 Amendatory Act, which prohibited negotiating over everything from class size to teacher discipline, and eliminated seniority. In 2002 the Board of Education led by CEO Arne Duncan started closing schools for bad performance, not just for falling rolls. Debbie Lynch negotiated a bad contract in 2003. She agreed to classic

black-box bargaining — don't tell the members anything — and accepted the lie that parents and the public couldn't be won to support the teachers. The old guard regained control of the CTU in 2004".

But CORE had a different approach. "CORE organised lots of demonstrations against school closures — demonstrations of maybe 500 or 1,000 people. Its meetings drew in community members and union activists interested in schools as well as teachers, creating some interesting combinations.

"CORE was started by Jackson Potter, who lost his job when his school was closed. When he and Al Ramirez made a video about school closings, they reached out to other class-conscious activists in the CTU and started organising against school closures. This group included newer teachers who'd been hired to give their all to teaching, quickly disillusioned by their treatment at the hands of Chicago Public Schools [CPS], as well as more senior teachers, some with experience in PACT.

"CORE includes activists with a class-struggle perspective. The CTU's actions have been energetically backed by supporters of the socialist group Solidarity, and of the ISO [International Socialist Organisation, a group previously linked to the SWP in Britain but excluded by the SWP from its international network in 2001].

"You have to do 34 and a half years as a teacher to get a full pension, but half of starting teachers quit after five years in the classroom. Teaching can be wonderfully rewarding — and, without the necessary support, incredibly stressful. It's telling that one significant gain of this strike was, a provision to stop bullying of teachers by administrators.

"The CTU victory will have a far-ranging effect, first of all by throwing a wrench into the wheels of the bipartisan neoliberal educational 'reform' agenda. Both Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan were quick to voice support to Emanuel against the greedy teachers' strike.

"Rahm Emanuel's attack on teachers, and the appearance of union-busting Michelle Rhee at the Charlotte Democratic convention, could not make clearer the bipartisan nature of these attacks. While a majority of teachers in Chicago, as elsewhere, are politically mostly Democrats, the clash with Rahm Emanuel has produced some rethinking about labour's political choices.

"At the Saturday rally, the chant 'Karen for Mayor' was heard [Karen Lewis is CTU president]. And others carried signs that said 'Democratic Party, where are you?' and 'Obama, where are you?' Statements from the White House affirmed that Obama was neutral on this strike in his home town."

The strike by itself did not resolve all the issues it raised. First and foremost, the Mayor and CPS CEO Jean-Paul Brizard have continued to declare their intentions to close 100 schools this year. Demands for smaller class-sizes, social services and other supports in the schools, and art, music, and libraries for all, have raised hopes without yet winning concessions.

"Still, the CTU made a dramatic change in the balance of forces in this city — through mobilisation and education. People have been comparing the Chicago struggle with Wisconsin [where a Republican governor slashing union bargaining rights for state workers led to months-long massive protests].

**"The difference is that in Chicago we haven't been defeated. This might be the struggle that begins to turn the tide, that sets the stage for a new momentum of struggle."**

# Greek workers protest against Merkel and the memorandum

By Theodora Polenta

As *Solidarity* goes to press on 9 October, a tsunami of people has gathered in Syntagma Square in Athens.

Tens of thousands of workers, unemployed, pensioners, students, small shopkeepers, peasants, neighbourhood community movement activists are arriving.

They have come to protest against the visit by Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel. The demonstration is organised by the main union federations, GSEE and ADEDY, and supported by Syriza and other left-wing organisations. Another demonstration has been organised for the same day by the KKE (diehard-Stalinist Communist Party) and PAME.

Greece's right-wing prime minister, Antonis Samaras, has stated that Merkel is welcomed by the whole of Greece.

If Merkel were welcomed by the whole of the Greek population, it would certainly not be necessary to deploy more than 6,000 police officers for her security. The conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which reflects the business circles of Germany, told the world on 8 October: "Merkel will promise the Greeks nothing."

"The troika report is expected in November at the earliest. Police prepare for riots", stressed the subtitles of the German newspaper. *FAZ* boasts that only for Clinton's visit in Athens in 1999 have such large numbers of police been allocated.

A cordon will be constructed around the chancellor in order to prevent her from meeting any ordinary Greek citizens. Police snipers will be on alert to spot and "deal with" anyone suspected of threatening the safety of the chancellor. Police helicopters will be deployed to spy on the protesters.

The left alliance Antarsya says that "Merkel represents a Europe united against the workers... The visit is to symbolise the alliance of Greek capital with banks and capitalists of Europe within the EU."

Syriza state that "they strongly support the mobilisations of working class 'welcoming' Merkel" and invites "all the people affected by the unpopular, anti-working-class and disastrous policies of the government and the Troika to take to

the streets and squares so that the austerity measures are cancelled, the politics of the memorandum are overthrown, and this disastrous government is overthrown."

KKE secretary Aleka Papariga declares that "the purpose of this visit is to assist the Government to exercise the greatest possible blackmail and intimidation against the people".

The government decided to shut down in the centre of Athens for the whole day of Merkel's visit, and to halt buses and trams from 11am to 4pm.

From 9am to 10pm, every public outdoor gathering or march in Athens, apart from those planned by PAME, GSEE and ADEDY, is banned. Police will make every effort to block any route towards the German embassy.

The MAT riot police entered the courtyard of the Henry Dunant hospital in order to stop unpaid workers joining the Syntagma Square protests. Five squads of riot police, using chemicals, blocked the hospital entrance. Workers complained that the police used gas inside the hospital building.

## EUROZONE

**Why did Merkel come to Athens? First, to offer EU support to the crumbling three-party coalition government of Samaras so that it can survive and pass its new 13.5 billion euro cuts package.**

Second, to make clear her wish for Greece to stay within the eurozone.

She is expected to express her sympathy with the Greek people and acknowledge that they have suffered badly because of the austerity policies. She will say that there is no alternative; but the chancellor has already decided that it is extremely dangerous to drive Greece out of the eurozone.

Although German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble bullies the Greek government with the prospect of exit from the eurozone, Berlin will make sure the Troika's report is drafted in such a way as to allow the release of the next and long-overdue 31.5 billion euro "bail-out" instalment.

Third, Merkel is representing German capital's interest in getting its claws on Greek public wealth. The coalition gov-

ernment is under pressure to sell off public infrastructure, public lands, and the natural wealth of the country. Merkel is accompanied by representatives of German business groups interested in investing in Greece, using the new anti-labour framework and starvation wages imposed under the memorandum.

Merkel's visit to Greece is also connected with a dispute with the IMF and USA. The IMF insists that it cannot carry on bailing out Greece unless the Greek debt is restructured again, i.e. a new "haircut" is imposed on banks and other institutions which hold Greek government bonds. The German government is opposed to any new haircut of the Greek debt, especially before the German elections.

The USA denounces the continuing extreme austerity in Greece and the eurozone as destructive to the euro and to transatlantic economic stability.

The cry "Merkel out" is filling the streets of Greece with a multitude of protesters of different ideological origins and political beliefs.

Among these protesters will be hiding the fascists who would never confront the capitalists and the powerful, but who on the contrary constitute the dark forces and the capitalist class's last resort if things get out of control.

Only a struggle with working-class, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, internationalist, and revolutionary politics can inspire and lead to victory. The 9 October demonstrations are giving a new impetus to the struggle to overthrow the coalition government and dismantle the memorandum.

## ALTERNATIVE

**The alternative to the Merkel-Samaras alliance and to the fascists can only be a workers' government, based on workers' democracy, workers' and social control, self-organisation and management, and workers' militias. The main axis of struggle should be the following:**

1. Fight for the development and escalation of industrial and social struggles, with rolling strikes, occupations, stoppages, demonstrations, and re-invigoration of the neighbourhood and community movements.
2. Fight for the overthrow of the coalition government.
3. Anti-fascist committees in every square, neighbourhood, and workplace. In every neighbourhood the trade unions, alongside the neighbourhood committees, should form popular defence squads and solidarity squads aiming at solving social problems via solidarity and cooperation.
4. Fight for a united front and cooperation of the left in the industrial and in the political sphere.
5. Fight for a government of the left, and a workers' government.
6. Fight to alert and prepare the working class for the prospect and the consequences of a Greece which rejects the memorandum being forced out of the eurozone.
7. Fight for a programme of transitional demands based on workers' self-management and control and social planning of the economy, nationalisation of the banks and the main pillars of the economy without compensation to the capitalists, and under workers' control.
8. Fight alongside the European working class for the United Socialist States of Europe. No serious anti-cuts or socialist programme in Greece is possible without mobilisation of the working class across the eurozone and EU.

**This does not mean the Greek working class waiting. No cross-Europe mobilisation will happen unless one national working class or another dares to go first. It does mean that the issues are those of class — the working class across Europe against the eurozone and EU leaders — and not of national conflict (Greece vs eurozone, or Greece vs EU, or Greece vs Germany).**

## My City Is A Hard Femme

### Songs of Liberty & Rebellion

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha is a Toronto-based writer and activist.

Much of both her writing and activist work focuses on the struggles of LGBTQ people, particularly queer and trans people of colour.

This piece explores both gender and sexual identities, and their intersection with identities of place (particularly, in this case, urban space). The poem itself is "hard", with the alliterations ("guts of the girl gang") landing like little punches. It's a poem of collision and contrast, of "broken things" which are still "lovely", in spite of (or because of?) their "brokenness".

Human sexual identities are not homogenous or straightforward; they are complex and sometimes contradictory, and here Piepzna-Samarasinha uses the urban space — itself hard, contradictory, often difficult to deal with — to mirror that complexity. The poem contains images of urban decay ("a boarded up warehouse"), but its concluding image — "protecting all that explodes from something so long abandoned" — suggests tenderness and care, but also

a radical renewal and liberation that shatters boundaries.

*The Ruby Kid*

when I left Worcester, I took the cracked sidewalks' smirk with me,  
the sexy guts of the girl gang of wild weed trees that would bust through all the vacant lots like a bank robbery,  
kicking the door down with guns and grin of getting everything for free.  
I'm as hard-assed as every lovely broken thing in this town,  
as every donut shop that'll tell you off in a heartbeat, every Economy Fruits bursting with day-old sweet juice, every pretty dress with just one fucked-up thing dug out of the Auburn TJ Maxxx quadruple markdown clearance rack.

My city is a lovely tough girl asking you what the fuck you're looking at, a boarded up warehouse

hoarding secrets like homeless fire roaring inside, her redbrick and vinyl siding nailed up all over me protecting all that explodes from something so long abandoned.

● Website: brownstargirl.org

# Continuing and renewing the tradition

In *Solidarity* 242 (18 April 2012), we began series of recollections and reflections from activists who had been involved with the “third camp” left in the USA — those “unorthodox” Trotskyists who broke from the SWP USA in 1939/40 to form the Workers Party, and the tradition they built (the Independent Socialist League, and later the Independent Socialists and International Socialists).

Here, we reprint an extract from a speech by Phyllis Jacobson given at the “Oral History of the American Left Conference”, organised by the Tamiment Library in New York from May 6-7, 1983. The conference brought together many of the surviving leading activists of the third camp left to discuss and reflect on their experiences.

Phyllis was a veteran of the US Trotskyist movement. She was a founding member of the Workers Party/ISL, and founded the third-camp journal *Anvil* in 1952 along with Julius Jacobson, who she met in the Workers Party and who became her partner. In this speech, she discusses her reasons for launching *New Politics*, a broadly third camp socialist journal, in 1961, and her views on the important of democracy and debate for socialist publications. Phyllis was co-editor of *New Politics* from 1961 until its first series ended in 1976, and then again from its relaunch in 1986 until her death in 2010.

Phyllis embodied the determination of the best third camp socialists “orphaned” by Max Shachtman’s collapse into Cold War lesser-evilism to continue the anti-Stalinist, democratic-revolutionary socialist tradition as a living political force within the working class.

The text of the speech is reproduced from the New York University Libraries’ transcriptions of the 1983 conference. It has been abridged slightly, and spellings have been altered to match UK style, but it is otherwise unedited.

Daniel Randall

**While most of us who remained left-wingers were opposed to Shachtman’s “realignment” politics, we were in favour of joining the Socialist Party. We wanted a broad socialist organisation, a Debsian party in which all tendencies could function, be represented, speak, and write.**

Since we retained the anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist views of the Workers Party/ISL, we were well aware that we were a minority, that in a sense we had become political orphans. We had not, after all, deserted our political tendency; it had deserted us.

It was for that reason that shortly after we joined the SP, we began to work toward producing a broad socialist publication in which our views — along with those of all other socialist tendencies — would be presented. We met with like-minded comrades and after a good deal of discussion produced a memorandum, a consensus of views, in which we said that there was a vacuum so far as any meaningful socialist literature was concerned, that we felt most keenly the lack of a journal we could read and to which we could contribute articles on such subjects as:

- the changes in American capitalism
- the evolution of the American movements, its history problems and prospects
- the nature of Russian society, the extent and limits of reform the ability of the American working class to emancipate itself
- the relationship between socialism and democracy

We wanted a publication with an international flavour which would carry articles of general interest by European labour and socialist movements. Most important, so far as we were concerned, was that the publication had to be broad in character, not thought of as the political organ of any single political tendency in the socialist movement.

We went on to meet with socialists and radicals outside of the ISL and the SP and, after open and frank discussions, produced a draft statement which was sent out with a covering letter to a large number of people — radicals, socialists, trade unionists, activists and intellectuals, left wingers and social democrats — urging them to become sponsors of the publication. The response was most gratifying. We developed a list of sponsors that covered a wide diversity of views. It included Robert Alexander, Bert Cochran, Erich Fromm,

**Phyllis and other third camp socialists founded *New Politics* to give the anti-Stalinist left a space to debate ideas and strategy, and intervene politically in the growing radicalisation around things such as opposition to the Vietnam War.**

Michael Harrington, Sid Lens, A.J. Muste, and Norman Thomas — to name a few.

*New Politics* went on to become the kind of publication we had envisaged. The editorial board was composed of leftists and social democrats, some affiliated with the SP, others not. The magazine explored controversial questions through debates and symposia. We developed international contacts, who wrote on general, theoretical subjects, and also took part in discussions on the labour and socialist movements of their own countries.

We concentrated heavily on various aspects of Stalinism, exploring the subject in debate and broad discussion. It was, and remains, an area of central concern for socialists raising the central question of the relationship between socialism and democracy. *New Politics* was the first socialist publication to publish a translation of the historic “Open Letter to the Party” by Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski. We covered the uprising in Poland and the Prague Spring in depth.

There was extensive coverage of both the labour and the civil rights movements. In areas where there were disagreements, the material was presented in the form of a debate. Herbert Hill’s long article accusing the ILGWU [International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union] of racism was answered by an equally long article by Gus Tyler, defending the union. Over the years, we carried a great deal of material on rank-and-file revolts inside the unions, articles often written by the dissidents themselves.

As socialists, a majority of our editors supported the struggle of these dissidents to democratise their unions. We had articles by and about rank-and-file reformers in the Mine Workers [UMW], National Maritime Union, the Painters Union, International Longshoremen’s Union, to name just a few. In all cases, we opened our pages to the union leaders under attack, inviting their replies.

Latin America received a great deal of attention. We carried articles as politically disparate as those of Robert Alexander and James Petras. Nor were Marxism and general theoretical problems neglected. One of the most sought-after articles for reprint was Lewis Feuer’s “Alienation: the Career of a Concept.” The war in Vietnam was a central concern and was discussed from every point of view most often in debates and symposia.

Two collections of *New Politics* articles were published by Transaction Books. One was *Soviet Communism and the Socialist Vision*, edited by Julius Jacobson, who also wrote an introduction. The book consisted of the most important articles

on Stalinism that had appeared in *New Politics*. The other was *Autocracy and Insurgency in Organized Labor*, edited by Burton Hall, a collection of the articles on the labour movement and union dissidence that had appeared in *New Politics*.

Clearly, *New Politics* was not a “line” publication in any sense, but rather one in which various left tendencies could and did confront one another. Despite that, despite the fact that our pages were always open to those who were the object of political criticism, there were several sorry episodes over the years resulting in the resignation of groups of sponsors. People might talk about their adherence to democracy and democratic practices, about a multi-tendency journal, but they could not function in a democratic atmosphere. They demanded immunity from political criticism.

*New Politics* published 45 issues from the end of 1961 to 1973. It started in a period of reawakened consciousness that saw the beginning of the civil rights and the peace movements. We grew along with those movements. The war in Vietnam radicalised an entire generation. For a while it appeared that the anti-war movement might develop beyond its single-issue approach and become a broad radical movement. It never did. The war’s end signalled the end of organised opposition and introduced an era characterised by political frustration and apathy.

Despite the success of the New Left in toppling a president and helping to end the most unpopular war in American history, it remained anti-ideological, never developing the broader political understanding essential for the creation of a new radical, socialist force in the United States. Because it was anti-ideological, it never understood much about the history of socialism or the destructive role of Stalinism. To be sure, there was no socialist movement to help educate it. Finally, it was reduced to warring sects, a few of which became enamoured of violence and terror.

## FRUSTRATION

**It was the political frustration and apathy that dealt the final blow to *New Politics*. Never an academic publication, although many academics wrote for us, we depended on writers who were committed, often participants in the political struggles.**

The fact that they grew apathetic meant a loss of articles, financial support, and general interest, all of which are essential ingredients for the maintenance of a lively and meaningful publication. Had there been an organisation to sustain us during the bad times, we would no doubt have continued publication and then would have found ourselves caught up in the political reawakening that occurred just a few years later and continues today.

The New Left did leave a positive legacy. Out of it came the feminist and environmental movements, both responsible for enormous changes in American life, both enjoying wide support. The reaction that set in with the rise of Reaganism has been short lived.

Today, too, there is greater interest in socialism, its history, roots and relevance to contemporary life than there has been in years. For that reason, Julie [Jacobson] and I have edited what we hope will be the first volume of an annual publication called *Socialist Perspectives* which will be out this summer. It contains articles on the anti-nuclear movement, the current economic crisis, the state of the feminist movement, a provocative piece on why black Americans are not socialists, on the New York intellectuals in retreat, a discussion on whether America is modern, on socialist freedom, reflections on fascism and communism, Poland, a comparison between the Prague Spring and the Polish Summer, and a piece on currents within Soviet dissidence. Among the authors are Melvyn Dubofsky, Manning Marable, Alan Wolfe, Julius Jacobson, Daniel Singer, and Jiri Pelikan.

**It’s a new beginning and a continuation.**

- The rest of the symposium is available online at [tinyurl.com/thirdcampsymposium](http://tinyurl.com/thirdcampsymposium)
- *New Politics* is still active and produces two journals a year. Its website is [newpol.org](http://newpol.org)
- For a 2010 tribute to Phyllis Jacobson by *New Politics* editorial board member Barry Finger, see [tinyurl.com/phyllistribute](http://tinyurl.com/phyllistribute)

# The paradox of Hobsbawm's legacy

By Liam McNulty

**The Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm died on 1 October at the age of 95.**

I will personally remember how, when I was a new undergraduate history student, Hobsbawm kindly replied to my precocious letter about the world financial crisis in 2008. That said, Hobsbawm was a political figure and deserves to be appraised politically.

As an historian, Hobsbawm was part of a generation which revolutionised historical writing. He was much influenced by the pioneering journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, co-founded in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, which opened up hitherto unexplored areas of human experience to historical enquiry.

Along with E P Thompson and Christopher Hill, also part of the Communist Party Historians' Group, Hobsbawm produced a series of works which exemplified "history from below". This approach to history is embodied in the journal *Past and Present*; set up in 1952, it has established itself as one of most lively vehicles for social history.

Arguably lacking Thompson's empathy, Hobsbawm's accounts of "primitive" (pre-capitalist) rebellion were unflinchingly unsentimental. One study, *Primitive Rebels*, launched a whole new line of historical research into "social bandits" — figures on the margins of rural societies, deemed to be outlaws by authority yet held up as figures of liberation by peasant communities. This interest in popular protest and resistance is also seen in his collaboration with George Rudé on the 1830s English "Swing Riots" (*Captain Swing*), and his short masterpiece on political shoemakers in *Uncommon History*.

Hobsbawm also distinguished himself tackling the grand sweep of historical development over the course of centuries. His *Age of...* tetralogy is a dazzling historical materialist survey of the world from 1789 to 1991. It is far less likely that such an ambitious feat of historical explanation would emerge from today's highly specialised discipline, suspicious as it is of "grand narratives" and materialist explanations.

Yet it is in Hobsbawm's sweeping surveys that fundamental problems with his political perspectives are revealed. Many of these problems can be encapsulated in his formula of the "short twentieth century", which provides the analytical framework for *The Age of Extremes: 1914-1991*.

## USSR

**Few would quibble with Hobsbawm's view that the collapse of the USSR in 1991 meant that "an era in world history ended and a new one began".**

The problem is with Hobsbawm's understanding of what this passing era represented; and with his failure to understand that the hopeful era inaugurated by the Russian workers in 1917 was terminated in the 1930s and later 1920s, by Stalin, not in 1991.

During an interview on Radio 4 in 1995, Hobsbawm explained: "I still believe in the old values of the 18th Century Enlightenment; in Reason, in education, in the improvement, if not the perfectibility, of human beings, and in the attempts, at any rate, to establish 'liberty, equality, fraternity', or 'life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness' or any of these other marvelous slogans which we owe to the late 18th Century."

Hobsbawm's beliefs are understandable. Born to a middle-class Jewish family in British-occupied Alexandria 1917, the year of the October Revolution, Hobsbawm grew up first in post-Habsburg Vienna, and then in Berlin. The young Eric's Europe was one in which bourgeois liberalism had crumbled during an imperialist epoch, amidst the catastrophic wreckage of the First World War. Locked in antagonism were the forces of extreme nationalism and fascism on the one hand, and world Stalinism on the other.

In his 1993 Creighton Lecture, Hobsbawm explained the impact of his formative years: "Every historian has his or her lifetime, a private perch from which to survey the world. My own perch is constructed, among other materials, of a childhood in the Vienna of the 1920s, the years of Hitler's rise in Berlin, which determined my politics and my interest in history, and the England, and especially the Cambridge, of the 1930s, which confirmed both."

When the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 put paid to any

lingering hopes of resuscitating the pre-1914 *belle époque*, many bourgeois intellectuals turned towards the now Stalinised Soviet Union as a model for the future. As Trotsky wrote in 1938: "A whole generation of the 'left' intelligentsia has... turned its eyes eastward and has tied... its fate not so much to the revolutionary working-class as to a victorious revolution, which is not the same."

Hobsbawm saw the Soviet Union as a gatekeeper of Enlightenment values; its demise had "enormous and still not fully calculable, but mainly negative, consequences". In short, although nominally a Marxist, Hobsbawm was less committed to the class struggle, or even the working class, than to the existence of the so-called "socialist sixth of the world".

For Hobsbawm, growing up in Berlin in the early 1930s, it was by no means irrational to see the Stalinised German communists as a key force for the possibility of defeating fascism. To his credit, Hobsbawm wrote later of the "lunacies of Comintern policy during the notorious so-called 'Third Period'", which encouraged "wilful blindness not only to the rise but also to the triumph of Hitler". But rather than drawing the conclusion that the "Third Period" was one of a series of shifts motivated by the needs of the Soviet bureaucracy rather than the requirements of the revolutionary movement, Hobsbawm embraced the next opportunistic zig-zag — the Popular Front.

Under the Popular Front Communist Parties embraced bourgeois forces opposed to fascism in the interests of maintaining an alliance between the Soviet Union and the "democratic powers" of France and Britain for reasons of self-preservation.

In *The Age of Extremes* Hobsbawm says, "this period of capitalist-communist alliance against fascism — essentially the 1930s and 1940s — forms the hinge of twentieth-century history and its decisive moment." Here the Soviet Union played the role of the saviour of democracy and the bulwark of anti-fascism. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 is summarily dealt with in a few sentences as a justified tactical manoeuvre by Stalin, "since 1934 the unswerving champion of an alliance with the west against [Hitler]."

In practice the Popular Front meant the suppression of the real, living struggles of the working-class, most notably during the Spanish Civil War. This is the historical reality behind Hobsbawm's claim that the "communists ...turned themselves into the most systematic and, as usual, the most efficient, champions of anti-fascist unity." The Stalinist suppression of the anarchists and Trotskyists in Spain was nothing if not systematic and efficient, although Hobsbawm, as recently as 2007, was dismissing these debates as arguments "among the losers".

It would be a travesty to dismiss him as merely a Stalinist propagandist. He was certainly not an "in-house" CPGB historian, and was harshly critical of those who were, such as James Klugmann, who wrote the *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*.

In 1966 he bemoaned the atrophying of debate within

Marxism after 1930, noting that the "more unconvincing our own beliefs were, the less we could afford dialogue... How could we discuss, say, the history of the Soviet Union, if we left Trotsky out of it, or thought of him as a foreign agent?" Moreover, he denied that "correct Marxism" could be "institutionally defined", especially given that some of the most prominent Marxist historians in Britain, such as Thompson, found themselves outside the CPGB.

There is a noticeable tension between Hobsbawm the historian and Hobsbawm the Stalinist. This is most evident in the omissions and emphases in Hobsbawm's narratives. As Ian Burchill has noted, Hobsbawm does not dwell on the Paris Commune in *The Age of Capital*, even though it marked the high-point of nineteenth-century working-class revolution.

Hobsbawm dismissed movements outside the Stalinist parties, such as Trotskyism. "It became clear", we are told, "that separation from the communist party, whether by expulsion or secession, meant an end to effective revolutionary activity."

Central to Hobsbawm was identification with the Soviet state and its satellite parties rather than with the revolutionary potential of the working-class. This view was put to the test when the Soviet Union invaded Hungary in 1956. Unlike Thompson, Hobsbawm failed the test, choosing to remain inside the CPGB.

The sum total of Hobsbawm's protest against the murderous crushing of the working-class revolution in Hungary was a letter of protest. He even recalled the letter with an almost embarrassing sense of pride as "a flagrant breach of Party discipline". It allowed him a few years later "on an emotional evening in an Austrian pub, to checkmate a very drunken and ill-tempered Arthur Koestler who wanted to know whether people like me had ever opposed the Russians over the Hungarian Revolution."

## CURRENT

**But Hobsbawm admits to having "little direct political activity ... in my life after 1956." He did not even actively support the Eurocommunist current within the CPGB.**

Nevertheless, Hobsbawm's lectures and articles did have a political impact. Intellectually he did contribute to Eurocommunism, not least by over-stating the extent of dissent against Stalinism in Palmiro Togliatti's Italian Communist Party.

He also wrote for the CPGB's *Marxism Today* journal. His 1978 article *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* argued that the decline of the industrial working class and the growth of a technical and white-collar "labour aristocracy" meant that the working-class was no longer was predisposed towards socialism; he dismissed the the wave of strikes in Britain in the 1970s as "economistic", with no necessary socialist corollary.

The argument was a symptom of Hobsbawm's increasing political pessimism and a drift rightwards. It was seized upon by Neil Kinnock in his struggle against the Bennite left and was used to move the Labour Party away from anything which could be described as class politics.

In his autobiography, Hobsbawm wrote: "Whatever his limitations, Neil Kinnock, whose candidature I strongly supported, was the leader who saved the Labour Party from the sectarians. After 1985, when he secured the expulsion of the Trotskyite Militant Tendency from the party, its future was safe."

Whatever the problems with the Militant Tendency (and there were many), the expulsion move was part of a general attack on the Labour left which paved the way for Blairism. Hobsbawm's pre-occupation with party over class, which led him to back Kinnock over the left, contributed to the triumph of New Labour.

Hobsbawm was, despite everything, an excellent historian who made a lasting contribution to human knowledge. His historical writings were often artful, creative and intellectually stimulating. But Hobsbawm's Stalinist politics often intruded into his historical work, almost always to the detriment of his judgements and analyses.

**His political contribution, both in the form of committed Stalinism, and later, pessimistic reformism, was uniformly negative. The paradox defines his legacy.**

# Teachers' action escalates to strike

By a teacher

Teachers at Bishop Challoner school in East London have voted to strike against increasing inspections and observations, after their headteacher threatened to hold a mock OFSTED inspection.

NUT and NASUWT members already voted unanimously not to cooperate with any mock inspection, as part of their unions' industrial action against excessive workload.

The headteacher performed a limited climb-down, saying that although extra lesson observations would take place, they would not constitute a full



Ros Asquith

mock inspection. Workers were not satisfied by this guarantee, however, and voted by 50-4 to escalate to strike action in the event of any inspection going ahead. The strike could begin on Monday 15 October.

A mock inspection con-

tains all the usual discomfort of an OFSTED — inspectors with questionable judgement, reams of lesson plans, stressed teachers and wasted hours better spent on teaching and learning — with the added obscenity of costing the school somewhere in the region of

£35,000 (a teacher's annual salary). Which would you rather have?

The strike vote has not come out of the blue. Members have been experiencing continual management attacks for the last year, with frequent abusive comments about their commitment to the students' educational development and their own professional capacity launched in whole school staff meetings and in menacing "quiet little chats". Staff turnover has increased. Workload, SLT drop-ins, and stress have rocketed in an atmosphere of fear where members felt isolated and powerless.

With this vote, the culture seems to be changing. The Bishop Challoner

strike vote gives a model for how teachers in other schools around the country can use the framework of the existing NUT/NASUWT joint action to escalate to strikes against the over-inspection and observation culture.

Members at Bishop Challoner are also discussing what other action short of strike action they want to take, and what other pointless activities like the mock OFSTED can be done away with. And what will teachers do instead? Their job: teaching.

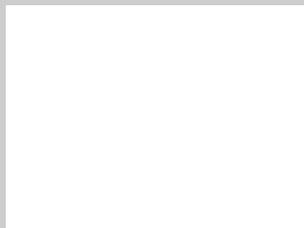
**Who knows... some of them might also use the time they would've spent in this pointless inspection to develop a more even work-life balance.**

## Chelsea cleaners in strike vote

By Ira Berkovic

Street cleaners in the richest borough in London will vote on whether to strike, with action likely to take place on 29 October if the strike vote wins a majority.

The workers, who are employed by contractor SITA in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, are paid £7.85 an hour — less than the £8.30



that even Boris Johnson admits is the minimum amount necessary to live a decent life in the capital. Their pay is also significantly lower than other

workers working for contractors in London Boroughs; street sweepers in the City of London earn £8.30 an hour.

According to GMB, the union which represents the workers, the average weekly wage in the borough is £1,305 — more than three times what the SITA cleaners earn.

**Their strike ballot opens on 9 October, and will conclude on 19 October.**

## Sparks fight union busting

Pic: Kelvin Williams

From the *Siteworker* bulletin

Since the sacking of 28 electrical construction workers three weeks ago, there have been daily pickets at the Westbourne Park Crossrail site.

Activists should arrive at

the picket any time between 7am and 1pm. The nearest tube is Westbourne Park, and the site is opposite the station. Four or five pickets can cause havoc at the Crossrail site; just imagine what 40 or 400 could do!

Remarkably, there are those that still say blacklisting is a thing of the past.

But it's going on right here, right now. So as well as the daily pickets we have had some great protests over blacklisting and sackings with our comrades in the Blacklist Support Group.

BAM, the main contractor at Westbourne Park, are one of the biggest blacklisters going. There has been plenty of coverage in the press lately on blacklisting.

**When employers break the law our response has to be civil disobedience all the way.**

- 28 electricians were sacked from the Westbourne Park Crossrail site, including elected union stewards and health and safety reps. Since the sackings, a major accident has occurred on the site (a gantry collapsed onto the track).

## Blow to democracy in journalists' union

By an NUJ conference delegate

Delegates at the National Union of Journalists' (NUJ) annual delegate meeting in Newcastle (4-7 October) voted to move to biennial policy-making conferences.

They were asked to support the proposal by the National Executive Council to only meet biennially as it would help save the union money at a time when it is in financial difficulties.

Outgoing president Donacha DeLong said it was not just about the money,

but would also give officers more time to achieve things passed at conference. He also said it would allow more events to take place during the interim year.

Other speakers, including a Workers' Liberty member, opposed the move, arguing that the union should not put a price on democracy.

**The decision went to a counted vote and was only passed extremely narrowly, with 82 delegates voting for and 79 against.**

- Latest issue of the AWL's 'Mediaworker' bulletin - [bit.ly/VPQMEi](http://bit.ly/VPQMEi)

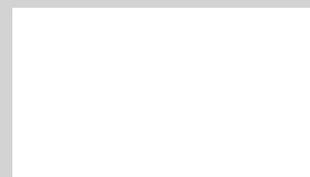
## More industrial news online

- London Overground workers' strike ballot — [bit.ly/SXTH9f](http://bit.ly/SXTH9f)

- European Court of Human Rights approves UK anti-strike laws hearing — [bit.ly/RqdUpe](http://bit.ly/RqdUpe)

- Newsquest journalists strike — [bit.ly/Rqgagc](http://bit.ly/Rqgagc)

- Three more Remploy sites to be sold off — [bit.ly/VQLvwq](http://bit.ly/VQLvwq)



## Fighting low pay in retail

By Pdraig O'Brien

The GMB union has been conducting a campaign of demonstrations outside Next stores to highlight the issue of low pay at the high-street clothing retailer.

The union is demanding a pay increase for all staff, who are currently paid at the national minimum wage of £6.19 (for workers aged 21 and over). GMB wants workers to be paid at least £7.20 an hour, the "living wage" for workers outside London.

A recent trading statement from Next showed that they expected a profit increase of between £10 and £15 million, taking profits for the year to January 2013 up to £620 million. Next makes profits of 17.5p for every £1 spent in the store, while average staff wages are less than £10,000 per year.

The GMB has recently conducted a survey into low pay in the retail sector, showing that some companies — such as Matalan, Oasis, and McColl — pay an average of less than £9,000 per worker per year.

GMB North West Regional Secretary Paul McCarthy said: "It is a scandal that Next should be paying minimum wages and that some apprentices are paid £2.60 per hour when they are making such huge profits. There is no excuse for this absolute greed."

GMB's campaign of demonstrations and awareness-raising surveys is positive, but it must be a complement — not an alternative — to a campaign of industrial organising within stores, warehouses and distribution centres.

**Only strong, confident union organisation on shop floors will make retail bosses sufficiently scared of workers' action to plough a greater slice of their profits into workers' wages.**

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Organise to rescue the NHS!

By Jill Mountford

**At the start of October, on the initiative of the NHS Liaison Network, Labour Party conference voted to prioritise the NHS for debate and then passed a resolution calling for the repeal of the Health and Social Care Act, opposing the cuts, and demanding the rebuilding of the NHS, paid for by taxing the rich.**

Within hours of conference passing the resolution, Labour leader Ed Miliband told Channel 4 news he could not promise not to make cuts in the NHS.

Few believe we can rely on the Labour leaders to

save the NHS. It was the last Labour government that promoted the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in the NHS, that same PFI that is now choking the life out of the NHS as hospitals are forced to pay private contractors interest and maintenance charges totalling £122 billion over the coming years.

Our job is to convince workers everywhere that we can win if we rely on ourselves, organise across the rank and file, work out our demands for ourselves, and fight for them in the labour movement, that is, in the unions and the Labour Party, in the workplace and on the streets.

We need to bring to-

gether the many hospital and health campaigns - uniting in action, sharing ideas, information, tactics and strategies; building a solidarity network that can support and mobilise and fight to win.

We need to raise the argument, loud and clear, that the rich and big business can and should pay for the NHS through higher taxes.

We need to take the battle to defend and rebuild in the NHS into the unions, all the unions, not just Unison and Unite.

### RANK-AND-FILE

**We need rank-and-file organisation in the unions to take up the fight when the union leaders shy away from it and tell us to wait for a Labour government, as they will do, more and more, the nearer we get to a general election.**

The battle will not be won overnight. At the moment, despite having no popular support for their attacks on the NHS, the Tories and their Lib-Dem bag-carriers have the upper-hand.

The NHS is being chopped up and hived off to the private sector. An estimated 20% of the NHS will be in the hands of private business within the next few years (*Financial Times*).

The Tories plan £50 bil-

lion of cuts. Services and whole hospitals are closing, jobs are being lost, patients are receiving poorer care.

There are already many hundreds of people across the country campaigning to defend hospitals, services and jobs. In order to defeat the Tories we need to mobilise hundreds of thousands of workers and their families.

Millions of people support the NHS and believe in the founding principle. As yet far fewer have the confidence, experience and know-how to win back and rebuild the NHS.

Socialists need to take the initiative for local campaigns, to help build them or where necessary to set them up, with the support of trade unions, trades councils and Constituent Labour Parties.

We need to organise public meetings, inviting local doctors, nurses and other health workers to speak and support the campaigns.

We need to organise regular stalls explaining the case for the defence of the NHS. We have to understand the facts and statistics, the detail of what is happening.

**We need to organise to transform people's belief in the NHS into a belief that they can fight and win.**

## Protests grow in Spain and Italy

By Ruben Lomas and Hugh Edwards

**Anti-austerity protests in Spain are continuing to grow, with many cities witnessing near-daily protests.**

There were marches in 56 different cities on Sunday 7 October, mobilising tens of thousands of people. Around 60,000 people marched in Madrid.

Spain's unions are now threatening a general strike unless Prime Minister Rajoy holds a referendum on his deeply unpopular austerity budget. The budget, which involves €13 billion of additional cuts, was passed on Tuesday 25 September despite enormous protests in Madrid on which 35 people were arrested and 64 people injured. A survey in the *El Pais* newspaper showed that nearly 80% of people support the protests, with 90% expecting them to become more frequent.

Ignacio Toxo, the leader of the CCOO union (Spain's largest), said that it was "up to the government" whether a general strike went ahead, and that Rajoy could avert it by holding a referendum.

In Italy, tens of thousands of students in every major city marched on Friday 6 October in the

largest and most militant protest for nearly a year.

From Turin and Milan in the north to Naples and Palermo in the south, university and high school students defiantly out-facing the ferocious thug squads of the state as they tried to prevent the students getting near to local or national government buildings.

"Away with the Castes", protesters roared, referring to the putridly bloated, corrupt fabric of everyday life — political, economic, social and cultural — that is contemporary bourgeois Italy, whose survival depends on the immiseration of millions of its youth.

The naked brutality of the cops' reaction against defenceless children once more underlies the icy determination of those in power to meet every manifestation of dissent with evergrowing repression.

**But further marches are planned this month.**

### Is revolution possible in Europe? A Workers' Liberty dayschool

**Saturday 24 November, 12:00 - 18:00, London (venue tbc)**

**Join us, and speakers from across Europe, to discuss how we can develop European working-class unity and a Europe-wide fightback, and what Marxist ideas can contribute to that fight. Discussions will include:**

- What is a revolutionary situation? Is there now one in Greece?
- Who are Syriza?
- How Leon Trotsky's ideas can help us understand the crisis
- Should we want the EU to break up?
- Facing and beating the threat from Golden Dawn
- Solidarity without borders: migrants' struggles
- Women across Europe fight back

**Tickets bought in advance: £12 waged, £8 low-waged/uni students, £5 unwaged/FE/school students**

**Free creche and accommodation available. Followed by a "Beats, Rhymes and Picket Lines IV: musical and poetic dispatches from the frontlines of industrial unrest" @ The Star of Kings, York Way, N1 OAX, Kings Cross; doors at 8pm. More: [www.workersliberty.org/24nov](http://www.workersliberty.org/24nov)**

### March on 20 October

**The TUC's "A future that works" demonstration on Saturday 20 October (assembling at Embankment at 11am) will be an important opportunity to send a message of defiance to the government.**

The bigger and more belligerent the demonstration, the more galvanised and emboldened people will feel going into the fights ahead.

But a simple A to B march, no matter how large, can only achieve so much, particularly if its headline message is the

content-free platitudes of the TUC. Workers' Liberty members will be attending the march to argue for working-class political alternative to austerity, and a fight to transform the labour movement to make it fit to rule.

**Look out for our banners and stalls, and our newspaper! To meet up with Workers' Liberty members on the day, ring Daniel on 07961 040618.**

• Demo website: [afuturethatworks.org](http://afuturethatworks.org)