



Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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www.workersliberty.org

**The way they've run the crisis
THE RICH ARE
TWICE AS RICH AND
WE'RE POORER**

**Vote Labour,
demand taxes
on the rich**

See page 5



**Music boss Leonard Blavatnik
has scooped up £13.17 billion**

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

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Has the left won control of NUS?

By AWL Students

At this year's National Union of Students conference the right-wing Labour bloc which has dominated NUS for decades lost four of the six elections for the full-time President and Vice President positions to candidates on their left. The new National Executive will almost certainly have a clear leftish majority.

In general, the conference voted left on policy too. Support for free education, funded by taxing the rich, was passed by a relatively small margin in 2014, against the leadership's resistance. This time it won with more like 80 percent of the vote.

In the debate on the general election, conference repeatedly amended the leadership's bland policy document to advocate a program of direct action and alliance with trade unions and the Labour left to win a government serving the majority and "bold and inspiring policies" — including reversal of cuts, taxing the rich, public ownership and control of the banks, an end to anti-migrant policies and freedom of movement. The bulk of this policy originated with AWL and with the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

However, the left's triumph was limited and contradictory.

The right won two full-time positions, including the central organising roles of President (Megan Dunn beat Workers' Liberty member Beth Redmond, who with 30 percent got the highest vote of any left candidate since 2006) and VP Union Development. Moreover, the lefties

elected are mixed. New VP Welfare Shelly Asquith, SU President at University of the Arts, has a record as a class-struggle socialist; the others seem less clear in their views and records.

There were also some defeats on policy. On the first day, delegates rejected support for means-testing student grants; but on the second day, they defeated the left's call for a living, universal grant. The conference, much of which is made up of student union sabbaticals who use zero hours contracts in their union bars, also voted against campaigning to ban such contracts!

TREND

Nonetheless, there was a definite trend to the left.

What produced it? In the period of brutal "austerity", and the relatively strong phase of student activism since 2010, particularly after the student demonstration in November and wave of occupations and actions that have followed, leftish views have worked their way through the structures and networks of the student movement and into NUS. This is expressed in part by the emergence in NUS of a layer of sabbs and experienced activists who would have been first year undergraduates or sixth formers in winter 2010.

The old, basically Blairite right wing which dominated of NUS has declined organisationally, lost political confidence — and is in crisis. At the same time, the clearly delineated left factions which used to have a presence in NUS to one degree or another, for good or ill, have mostly disappeared or declined massively.

The predominant ten-

dency in NUS now can be approximately defined as "soft left" — a spectrum running from the left of the old leadership (even the new right-wing President, Megan Dunn, was an NCAFC member a few years ago) all the way into the periphery of the hard left.

The partial exception to factions declining is the NCAFC. Run by dedicated and impressive unaffiliated activists, NCAFC was the only left organisation to publish a bulletin, hold caucuses, etc., at the conference, and to stand in the full-time officer elections. It put forward most of the left-wing policy and provided many of the left's big ideas. (AWL members took part in and shaped the NCAFC intervention, pushed our own distinctive ideas and sold quite a bit of our literature, including the magazine we had produced specially.) Nonetheless, much of the radicalisation at this conference bypassed all organised factions.

LEFT

Noticeable in this changed political environment is the Black Students' Campaign, which is increasing important and played a big role in the left victories at the conference.

Within the broad leftish political matrix, within particular organisations, within networks and cliques, and within individuals, many confused and contradictory ideas and practices co-exist. The radical left should attempt to draw out the contradictions by making clear proposals and arguing forthrightly about ideas, by being politically sharp but non-sectarian.

At the end of the conference, a meeting initiated by NCAFC but bringing together most of the left discussed the question of a national demonstration to launch a wave of action in the autumn. The meeting discussed how to push for NUS to organise the demonstration, without sacrificing clarity of political message and without neglecting independent activist organisation on the ground. Some, including Socialist Action, advocated the left becoming a supporting cast for the new left-wing officers. Others, including NCAFC, Workers' Liberty and RS21 argued for using the left's new position in NUS while building grassroots pressure on not only the right-wing NUS officers but on the leftie ones too.

There is a struggle ahead, hardly begun, to transform NUS but also its constituent student unions. The key thing is to build up organisation and action at the grassroots and raise the level of political debate among wide layers of student activists, while using every possible lever and foothold in the official structures, and trying to push things open further.

• The election results for the part-time "Block of 15" positions on the NUS National Executive, in which Beth Redmond and two other NCAFCers, Callum Cant and Hannah Webb, and a number of other left candidates, are standing, will be out on Thursday 30 April.

• For a longer report of the conference, including the text of Beth Redmond's election speeches, see www.workersliberty.org/node/25021

Poverty multiplies Nepal earthquake toll

By Gerry Bates

Shaheen Chughtai, an official with the charity Oxfam, has written that Nepal's "ability to cope with a major disaster", like the 25 April earthquake, is "crippled by the lack of the kind of economic and social infrastructure that people in richer nations take for granted".

"I first arrived in Kath-

mandu in 2007 to begin a new job with Oxfam. I remember looking at the thousands of flimsy shacks and hovels lining Kathmandu's dusty slums and the sturdier but still precarious multi-tiered family homes, the cheaply-built apartment blocks and ornate temples that collectively give the city its colourful distinctive appearance. We all understood and feared what a big earthquake would

surely do.

"Kathmandu was fundamentally flawed by more than just its violent geology. A million-plus people are crammed inside it. Half of Nepal's 28 million population don't have access to improved sanitation and live below the poverty line, around one-in-three of them in severe poverty.

"Nepal has long been desperate for a huge, sustained investment to strengthen its physical in-

frastructure in order to keep its people safer".

Now rich governments are offering aid, though tiny amounts in proportion to their resources.

The use and distribution of that aid should be democratically controlled by the people of Nepal, to guard against it becoming a way for officials to enrich themselves and big powers to purchase influence in the country.

Charlotte Monroe: how I got my job back

Charlotte Monroe, a union activist, was sacked more than 18 months ago by Bart's Trust after working at Whipps Cross Hospital for more than 25 years. She spoke to Jill Mountford about her battle for reinstatement.

I spoke at a local council overview and scrutiny committee about planned cuts to our stroke service in the hospital. That seems to have triggered the action against me.

It started within six days. A key allegation was that I brought the trust into disrepute by providing inaccurate information to OSC, though they could not tell me what it was that was inaccurate.

In reality I had given a different opinion about the impact of changes on patient care. I had explained the concerns of the stroke specialist clinical staff. The local "Save our NHS" campaign had asked me, as a trade union rep, to address the councillors alongside them.

The newly-created merged trust seemed to have no accountability to our local population served by Whipps Cross, or our patient organisations. At the time many people suspected an agenda to run down Whipps Cross and centralise services in order to fund the massive PFI debt from the new buildings at the Royal London

and Barts hospitals.

The trust also went into financial turnaround, with management consultants brought in to address a £77m deficit.

That move was announced two weeks after the trust started the disciplinary process. It suspended me from attending the key meetings as a senior union rep. A major plank of turnaround was mass down-banding of nursing and other staff, and loss of posts.

ALLEGATIONS

Other allegations were that I failed to respect confidentiality by talking to staff affected by proposed job reduction.

I was discussing information I had been provided with in my union capacity as their representative, ahead of the launch of consultation.

It was charged that I was involved with or a member of "other groups" and thus subject to a conflict of interest. That charge was not upheld, but it was referred to in my dismissal letter.

Late in the day they added an allegation that when I applied for my job 26 years ago I failed to declare past convictions from 40 years ago for protest related activities.

I could not accept that I was severed from a job that I did well, in the hospital I loved and had given much to, essentially for taking on

additional responsibility as a union rep.

Far more was at stake than just me and my job. If my dismissal was allowed to stand, then it put any trade union rep at risk of arbitrary action against them as an individual. Our legal right to take part in activities of a trade union would be trampled if an employer knew that at will they can define trade union activities as "personal conduct". I had to fight this for everyone's sake.

Fantastic support from so many people – my colleagues, fellow trade union reps, the community health campaigns — gave me strength.

My union branch were very active straight away. They wrote to the chief executive and campaigned. The widespread concern about my case in the health campaigns and the union movement, and the press coverage, with Polly Toynbee writing about my case in her column, were important.

On the legal front, my union took a decision to support me to take my case to tribunal.

A group of colleagues, friends, health campaigners and trade unionists set up a campaigning group. They organised petitions, press statements and circulated information. Many letters and emails of protest to the trust, and messages of support for me, came through.



My case seems to have struck a chord with trade unionists and with people campaigning over the treatment of whistle blowers.

Our East London Save our NHS and Keep our NHS Public campaigns, and the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign, really took my case up and kept everyone informed. Many people from those campaigns came to protests and meetings.

TRIBUNAL

During my tribunal, most days there were about thirty people there, listening intently listening for hours.

At one point, shortly after the appeal outcome confirming my dismissal,

when I was unsure if I could go to a tribunal or not, I thought I might just have to look at a different future and keep telling people about my case. But I never gave up wanting to challenge it.

The hardest time was the initial trauma when I realised they were going for dismissal. In the months after my dismissal I was really in a state of bereavement.

I was involved with the local health campaign, and continued taking up issues. That included, at times, going as a member of the public to Barts Health Trust board meetings to ask questions on issues the community or staff were concerned about. Whipps was still my local hospital.

I think my reinstatement has helped establish that health staff and their trade union reps have a right to speak to the community about cuts to their services.

In legal terms, it was eventually accepted by the trust that my raising concerns about cuts to health services was in the public interest, and because I had already raised the concerns to the trust, that was "protected disclosure". It is not legal to dismiss someone for "protected disclosure".

The case has helped establish that the law protecting trade union rights has to be respected.

However strong corporate power seems to be, the power of people and justice can be greater.

Restore secular politics in Tower Hamlets!

By Jean Lane

I don't like the idea that a privileged, conservative judge ousts Tower Hamlets mayor Lutfur Rahman for alleged electoral malpractice, rather than a tribunal of the people he is supposed to serve.

I also don't know whether all the accusations against Rahman upheld by the judge are true or not. I am not going to take the judge's word for it. I am also not going to take the word of former councillors for George Galloway's Respect group that he is not.

The residents of Tower Hamlets, of which I am one, have plenty of reasons to want Rahman and his communalist politics out.

Some left-wingers are supporting Rahman and



listing wonderful things that his council group are supposed to have done. I was in the council chamber during the cuts vote when Oliur Rahman, Lutfur's stand-in till the election takes place, slashed youth services, describing it as, "an opportunity for parents to spend quality time with their children".

I was also there when the cuts were described by a pro-Rahman female councillor, who was pumping

the air with a clenched fist at the time, as a "triumph for women".

Some also deny the judge's finding that 101 imams said "that it was the duty of faithful Muslims to vote for Mr Rahman... with religious duty being mentioned in canvassing before the poll and to voters attending polling stations on election day".

Why are imams involved in the democratic process at all? This should be a secular society. Residents of Tower Hamlets should be able to decide what they do or think without religious leaders guiding them.

What disturbs me about the accusations of Islamophobia against anyone who criticised Rahman is that they came from the left. At an anti-cuts meeting, a Ben-

gali woman was not listened to when she warned that there were forces in the East London Mosque (the biggest in the area) who were dangerous people. The mosque has been at the centre of the political process, although there are Bengali residents who do not agree with this.

Left-wingers have supported the campaign to close all the sex shops and clubs in the borough, on the coat tails of the vile right wing moral police whose angle is that women should not be allowed to display their bodies.

The right-wing local Labour MP Jim Fitzpatrick had the courage to say that he could not attend a wedding because he disagreed with the segregation of women. He was roundly

vilified. But many Bengali women in the borough do not agree with segregation.

During the council elections, I have canvassers come to my door who, when seeing a white woman at the door, say, "sorry my mistake" and walk away. I challenge them to discuss politics with me about segregation, cuts, faith schools, academies. Not interested.

Left-wingers, in a lash-up with Galloway, carried out a vile campaign against former local Labour MP Oona King, producing leaflets of her scantily clothed and pointing out that she was Jewish. When local youths threw stones at her and her election supporters, they didn't criticise them. None of those pro-Rahman left-wingers had

anything to say about the woman worker in the chemist shop near the mosque who was threatened with losing her job when her manager was told that his shop would be burned down if she did not put on a headscarf.

I will be voting Labour in the general election. And for Labour in the re-run of the mayoral election. Not because I think that they will do what the working class want, but because we need a return to secular politics. The "left" candidates are too discredited in how they have responded to communalism to get my vote.

For democratic process! For secular politics! For women's liberation! For public services, free and available to all.

The continuing attack on Charlie Hebdo

The Left

Pat Murphy



On Sunday 26 April I saw a Facebook posting which carried the pithy comment “anyone still Charlie”? The posting shared a story from “OurAfricaBlog” about an allegedly outrageous cartoon which, the blog claimed, appeared in the French satirical magazine whose leading staff members were murdered by religious fascists earlier this year.

The cartoon dealt with the horrific drowning of migrants in the Mediterranean the previous week. It featured roughly-drawn black figures falling to the bottom of the ocean under the headline “Regroupement Familial En Méditerranée”. The blog translated this as “Family reunion in the Mediterranean”, described the cartoon as “Charlie Hebdo ridiculing the African migrants who drowned whilst on the way to Europe” and finished their commentary on the item as “speechless”.

This Facebook status was from an SWP member. After a bit of research it became obvious that this link was being shared widely on social media and that most people were responding with the full range of outrage, moralism and, most of all, demands that those who had shown solidarity with the French publication apologise, recant and accept the claim that CH is a racist publication.

There are two problems with this story. And they are the same problems that dogged all attempts to smear Charlie Hebdo immediately after the murders at their offices.

Problem number one: the story isn't true.

Charlie Hebdo didn't publish the cartoon. It was drawn by a cartoonist called Ali Dilem and published in an Algerian paper called *Liberté*. There is a link, in that Ali Dilem had recently been appointed to work for CH.

Problem number two: the cartoon is an attack on a racist immigration policy introduced by the French government.

“Regroupement Familial” is a policy for non-EU residents in France being joined by other family members from abroad. This requires an 18 month initial stay (12 for Algerians) before they can come and be given formal status.

The point being made by the cartoonist is that this policy has contributed to the Mediterranean disaster and there is likely to be more such tragedies if the policy is not overturned. This, the satirist's argument goes, is what “regroupement familial” really means. Whether people agree that satire

and cartoons can properly deal with an issue of this gravity and misery, the purpose of this particular example was very plainly anti-racist and for more open borders.

Another aspect of this latest attempt to whip up a scandal was the lack of any attempt to examine the context, to investigate what the magazine's attitude to the Mediterranean tragedy was.

It wouldn't have taken much effort. Last week's edition of Charlie Hebdo carried a full front page cartoon of a crowded boat called Titanic sinking with a female figurehead singing Celine Dion's song from the movie of the same name. The figurehead looks very much to me like Marine Le Pen. The headline is “Une Titanic Par Semaine” (A Titanic Every Week). The message is that the racist attitudes toward refugees promoted by the likes of Le Pen will lead to more deaths at sea.

The determination of much of the British left to smear Charlie Hebdo, months after the murderous attack on their office can seem incomprehensible at times. The persistence and desperation has all the appearance of an especially odd obsession. We should resist that conclusion though. It is nothing of the sort.

AFFRONT

The attack by religious fascists on journalists and cartoonists who dared publish material they find offensive really was an affront to humanity and to liberty.

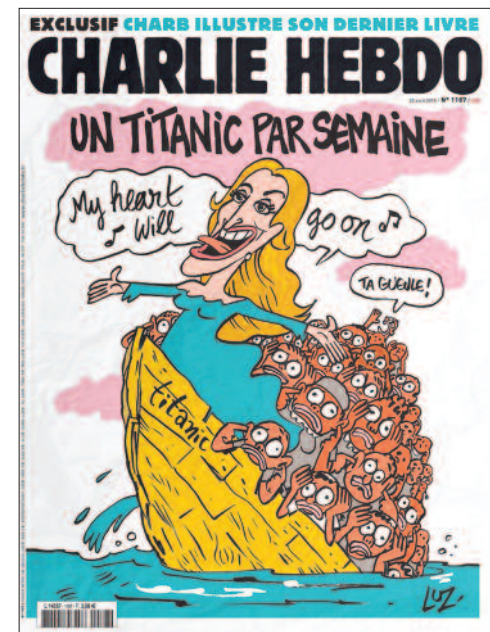
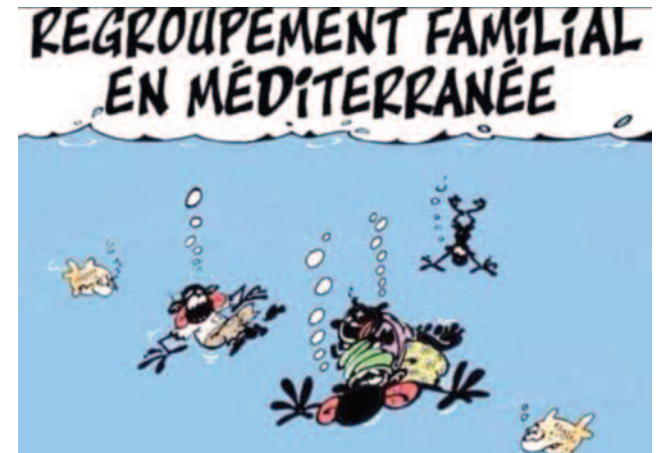
Political questions don't get any easier than “how should we respond to this”? Socialists, democrats, anyone with a shred of humanitarianism owed these victims a basic duty of solidarity. That didn't have to mean enthusiasm for everything (or indeed anything) they published or necessarily declaring that “we are all Charlie”. But it did mean understanding that were clear sides here, there was a barricade, and there was only one side we could possibly be on.

Instead a far-too-large portion of the British left at best ducked the issue and at worst took the wrong side. Attempts to change the argument and portray Charlie Hebdo as racist before the victims were even buried were shameful and indefensible but they were also widespread. These attempts failed and discredited all those who took part in them.

But the persistence of the attack on the magazine is not an odd obsession and nor is it incomprehensible. Rather it is the inevitable product of a political and moral collapse on sections of the left. Until CH can be proven to be what its enemies say it is, until the smears can be made to stick, those that

failed to show it any solidarity cannot recover the ground they lost after the attacks. They don't deserve to.

A socialist politics that equivocates on issues like free speech and fascism is worthless and can play no role in the liberation of the working class.



Above: the cartoon which was not printed by CH. Left: latest issue of CH.

Stop some wars?

The Syria Solidarity Movement UK reports that at a Migrant Lives Matter protest in London on 25 April, the Stop the War Coalition stopped the Syrian movement representative speaking.

The Syrian group calls for “a peaceful, democratic Syria, a Syria without Assad and a Syria without ISIS”. Their speech would have demanded the British government take in more refugees from Syria.

“Stop the War” started by denouncing the NATO bombing which forced Serbia out of Kosova in 1999, but saying nothing about Serbia's slaughter and driving-out of Kosovars. It flourished in justified protest against the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Now, although the government making war in Ukraine has been Putin's Russia, STW's campaigning over Ukraine has been exclusively against the EU and NATO, which are not making war there.

In Yemen STW campaigns against Saudi bombing, but has nothing to say against the Iranian-backed Shia militias, in alliance with former president Saleh, driving into Sunni areas.

STW (and former SWP) leader Lindsey German says that she “oppose[s] foreign military intervention in other people's countries” and she doesn't “justify the actions of regimes that find themselves in the gun sights of our government”.

But when those regimes, like Assad's in Syria, are gunning down their own or neighbouring peoples in their “gun sights”, her concern is to be with those regimes against big powers which demur for any reason, rather than with the people.

Defending the nation from “Red Ed”

Press

By Harry Davies

DAILY EXPRESS

It was St George's Day last week, so I decided to have a look at the Daily Express, the paper which still uses a crusader-esque knight errant as its logo, complete with English flag shield.

It was immediately apparent that they're doing a good job defending the nation, since the paper has identified an insidious threat: “Trident nuclear submarines to be moved to Gibraltar under SNP threat” their headline howled. “Threat” is the sort of language the Express has used to describe the KGB/IRA/Taliban/Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone, so it's great to see the SNP taking part in the undermining of Rupert Bear and the British way of life.

The Express is terrified of an Labour/SNP pact, but they are terrified most of the time. “Oh no! Taxes will be £12 billion higher under Labour warn experts” is actually a story about the think-tank, IFS, saying they think Labour might raise taxes or something. I love the way it's phrased; as if everyone will get a £12 billion final demand on the doormat the second “Red” Ed gets his hands on the burglar alarm code to Number 10.

Boris Johnson “attacks Ed Miliband in a fiery TV clash”. Let's think logically; it's Ed and Boris. It's not going to have been fiery. It's barely going to have been TV. This little fracas was over Labour's rent cap policies which Boris says will

discourage people from being landlords and lead to a housing shortage. Presumably, this is a different housing shortage to the one we're currently living through, the one in which we have plenty of houses, but all too expensive to live in.

It's no great surprise that the Express is laying into Labour; what's chilling is the tendency to lay into the Tories, if UKIP look like they need defending. “Tory standing against Farage runs website that helps EU migrants claim tax credits” makes it sound like an evil benefit tourist scam crimelord kind of deal. In fact, it's a Conservative candidate with a website that advises non-UK residents on how to claim perfectly legal tax credits that they might not have known about.

In a big list of unpleasant things done by Conservative candidates, it's not really that exciting, is it? Just another bit of capitalism bubbling away in the background somewhere. Smearing opponents to support Farage is a scary sign of the way the Express seems to be wandering, far more than any other tabloid.

And, to finish, a groundbreaking and shocking story: 40% of people surveyed believe that Labour plans to scrap grammar schools. Horrors! Imagine! They'll be getting rid of hanging next and bringing in commercial television.

We need to remember the big picture; these attitudes and worse, exist. Labour will not counter them with strong arguments for a socialist alternative. A decent union-led Labour party will. That's what we're campaigning for.

Vote Labour! Demand taxes on the rich!

Since 2009 the richest 1000 households in Britain have more than doubled their wealth. The top thousand's assets total £547 billion, according to the *Sunday Times Rich List 2015*. In 2009 the total was £258 billion.

The 2015 figure is a 32% rise compared even to the figure at the giddy peak of the boom before the autumn 2008 crash.

Meanwhile the average household's real income is still below what it was in 2009-10. Low-paid workers, disabled people (whether working or not), young workers, and public service workers have suffered especially. Some categories are over 20% worse off than in 2009.

£547 billion is almost £10,000 for each child, woman, and man in the UK. It's equivalent to over two million houses at the current average house price.

The cumulative total cuts in public spending, from 2010-11 to 2015-6, have been a bit over £200 billion at 2015-6 prices. So the rich have gained, in extra loot since 2009, over three times as much as the rest of us have lost through cuts. If taxes had just kept the rich to the level of luxury they had in 2009, then we could have had no cuts, a rapidly falling deficit, and better public services.

Usually economic slumps reduce inequality a bit, since the rich have further to fall. The wealth of the top 1000 fell more in 2008-9 than real wages, or average household wealth, did. But since then inequality, by many measures, has spiralled.

That has happened because of the unions not fighting hard enough for wages and public services, and because of government policies geared to refloating high finance and thus boosting share and bond prices.

The Tories and George Osborne want to continue the trend by slashing £20 billion plus more from welfare and reducing



taxes for the rich. Labour promises a few small extra taxes on the rich, but tiny amounts (a billion here and a billion here is small compared to over £700 billion total public spending per year), and will continue with cuts, only milder.

At Labour's Policy Forum in July 2014 all the big unions voted down a constituency move to commit a Labour government to refusing cuts. Labour's weak-kneed leaders feel under more pressure (from big business) to continue cuts than from the labour movement to stop them.

Solidarity and Workers' Liberty are working with the mainstream of the labour movement to get the Tories out and a Labour government after 7 May. But we also agitate in the labour movement for the unions to force Labour to tax the rich and to open the way for working-class people to regain what's been taken from us since 2010.

Help us raise £15,000

Several AWL branches are planning fundraising summer socials. Visit workersliberty.org/fundraising to find out if there is one near you. Camila Bassi is planning a "Bolshy Cycle Ride" fundraiser. If you would like to join in visit bit.ly/bolshy-cycle-ride.

Workers' Liberty stands for a society where the crises, exploitation and inequality of capitalism are replaced by collective ownership and sustainable planning for people's needs — socialism.

But socialist voices are currently small and marginal. We have to educate, agitate and organise to turn the tide and create an emancipated future.

In order for Workers' Liberty to contribute to that fight we need to expand our sources of funds. We are running a fundraising drive to raise £15,000 by our annual conference in November. Will you help us reach that target?

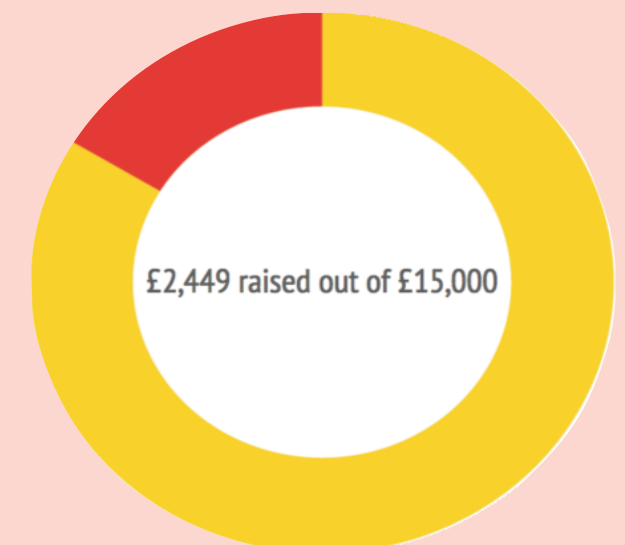
Recently we expanded the number of workers in our office, and have increased our output of books, pamphlets and other publications. We want to overhaul our website. None of this can be maintained or improved without funds.

We have no big money backers. We rely on contributions from workers and students like you! So please consider:

- Getting a subscription to our weekly newspaper, *Solidarity* — workersliberty.org/subscribe
- Taking out a monthly standing order.
- Making a one-off donation
- Organising a fundraising event in your local area
- Committing to do a sponsored activity and asking others to sponsor you
- Buying some of our books, posters, autocollants or pamphlets

For information on standing orders or how to donate visit workersliberty.org/donate. For more ideas and information on fundraising visit workersliberty.org/fundraising

Thanks this week to Mark, Kate and Duncan. So far we have raised £2449.



IMAGINING THE FUTURE 2-5 JULY 2015, BIRKBECK COLLEGE, LONDON

A festival of socialist ideas and leftwing discussion, *Ideas for Freedom*, organised by Workers' Liberty, is an opportunity to explore, through talks, film showings, workshops and debates, ideas about how our world works, and how we can fight for a better one. This year, the theme of the event will be visions of a socialist, egalitarian, democratic future and strategies to fight for it.

PROGRAMME

THURSDAY NIGHT

WALKING TOUR

FRIDAY NIGHT

'CLASS STRUGGLE OR LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR' – SOCIALISTS DEBATE THE BISHOP OF MANCHESTER

SATURDAY

DAY OF DEBATE, FILM SHOWINGS AND TALKS

EVENING SOCIAL – FUNDRAISER FOR RAINBOW INTERNATIONAL

SUNDAY

DAY OF DEBATE, FILM SHOWINGS AND TALKS

SESSIONS INCLUDE:

TECHNOLOGY – THE END OF WORK?

Aaron Bastani, Nick Srnicek and Bruce Robinson

CLIMATE CHANGE: FUTURE OF ENERGY

Dave Elliott, author and engineer involved in the Lucas Plan

SECULARISM, FEMINISM & SOCIALISM

Marieme Helie Lucas, Algerian socialist and author

THOMAS MORE'S UTOPIA

Cath Fletcher, Workers' Liberty and expert advisor on the BBC's *Wolf Hall*

IF WORKERS RAN THE RAILWAYS

With transport workers from London and Toronto

BUY YOUR TICKETS

Tickets bought before 1 May

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Tories plan huge cuts by 2019

By Anne Field

The four biggest parties in the next parliament – Labour, Tories, SNP and Lib-Dems – are all intending to continue to implement austerity policies after 7th May.

Where they differ is in relation to the size of the cuts they intend making, the timetable for implementing those cuts, and the extent to which their election manifestos clarify the cuts which they intend making.

This was the verdict of a detailed number-crunching analysis published on 23 April by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS): "Post-Election Austerity: Parties' Plans Compared".

(The IFS report refrains from making any political judgements about the parties' proposals. In fact, the report takes it as read that more austerity is needed. It measures the parties' proposals against that criterion, but does not challenge the criterion itself.)

All four parties are committed to cutting the current deficit (borrowing) as a proportion of national income over lifetime of the next parliament. The Tories plan to cut it by 5.2% of national income, so that the government actually starts repaying rather than borrowing by 2018-9, and the Lib-Dems by 3.9% by 2018. Neither Labour nor the SNP have given an explicit figure for cuts in borrowing. But other commitments in their manifestos would suggest a cut of 3.6% by Labour by 2019, and a cut of the same amount by the SNP by 2020.

All four parties are also committed to reducing the ratio of debt to national income – currently 80% – over the lifetime of the next parliament. The Tories plan to cut it to 72%. Labour, the SNP and the Lib-Dems plan to cut it over the same period to around 77%, 78% and 75% respectively.

The fact that all four parties have taken cuts in borrowing and debt as their starting point means that they are all confronted with the same question: where to make the cuts in spending which are needed to reduce borrowing and debt.

But all four parties are also committed to "tax giveaways". If the "tax giveaways" are not balanced by "tax takeaways", then the need for cuts will be even greater.

All the parties have also given a commitment to protect or increase spending in certain areas. But if those commitments were honoured, then this would mean deeper cuts elsewhere.

Unsurprisingly, the report found that the Tories were planning on making the biggest cuts in departmental spending: an overall cut of 7.1% by 2018-9, reducing such spending to its lowest level in real terms since 2003.

But the Tories, on paper, are committed to protecting or increasing spending on aid, education and the NHS. This means that other departmental spending would need to be cut by 17.9% by 2018-9.

This would be on top of the 18% cuts in spending implemented by the last parliament, amounting to a total cut of 33% between 2009-10 and 2018-9.

PROMISES

Apart from promising the biggest cuts of all, the Tories – who denounce Labour for making spending commitments which cannot be afforded – have not explained how they will pay for their promises on aid, education and, in particular, the NHS.

Certainly not by increased taxation: Tory "tax giveaways" exceed their "tax takeaways" by 0.1% of national income. This imbalance would require further cuts.

And even where the Tories have given a specific figure for a spending cut – such as cutting social security spending by 0.6% of national income – they have not explained where the axe will fall. The social security cuts they have detailed will cut spending by only 10% of that amount.

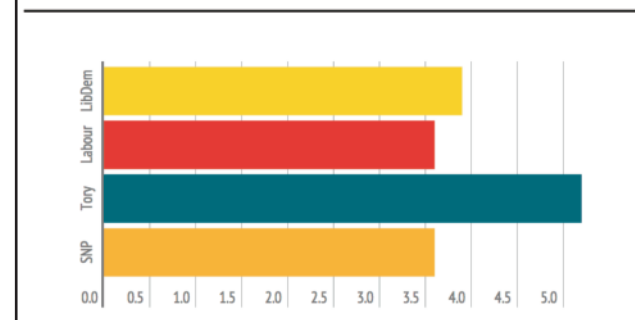
Although, as the IFS report points out, Labour's manifesto is vague about its target, its timescale and its policies for cutting borrowing and debt, Labour is also clearly intending to make cuts as well.

Those cuts are nowhere near as bad as the Tories' cuts – hence the expression "austerity-lite". And Labour's policies also include reducing the "need" to make cuts by increasing tax revenues, such as the bankers' bonus tax and increasing the higher rate of tax for top earners.

But Labour is already committed to implementing the ConDem cuts scheduled for the financial year 2015/16 and to making unquantified cuts in "unprotected" departments (i.e. any department other than aid, health and education).

By the IFS report's calculations, cuts in the budgets of "unprotected" departments would amount to £1.2 billions

Proposed percentage cut to borrowing as a proportion of national income



(0.7%). As a proportion of national income, this equates to a cut of 1.1%

And although total public spending under Labour would increase in real terms between 2015 and 2020, as a share of national income it would fall by around 2.4%.

Like Labour, the Lib-Dems are criticised by the IFS report for the vagueness of their policies to cut borrowing and debt. But some of the planned Lib-Dem cuts are already clear.

They are committed to cutting £12 billions from departmental spending by 2018, equating to an annual cut of 3.4% between 2015 and 2018. But because the cuts are to be made only in "unprotected" departments, this amounts to an annual cut of 9% in the budgets of those departments.

Another £3 billions is to be "saved" from unspecified cuts in social security spending. Overall, under the Lib-Dem proposals, public spending as a proportion of national income would fall by 3% between 2015 and 2018.

The IFS report also points out that the Lib-Dem policies might result in even deeper cuts, on the basis that their proposals for reducing tax avoidance and evasion are "highly uncertain" and would be unlikely to result in the income factored into the Lib-Dem spending plans.

SNP

But easily the most damning section of the IFS report is the analysis of the SNP's fiscal plans.

Not because they are proposing the biggest cuts (they're not) or because their proposals are the least explicit (they're not) but because of the gap between the SNP's anti-austerity rhetoric and their actual pro-austerity policies:

"The implication of the plans they have spelt out in their manifesto is that the period of austerity would be longer than under the other three parties. ... Their plans as stated imply less austerity than any of the other parties over the first four years of the parliament, but more in the final year."

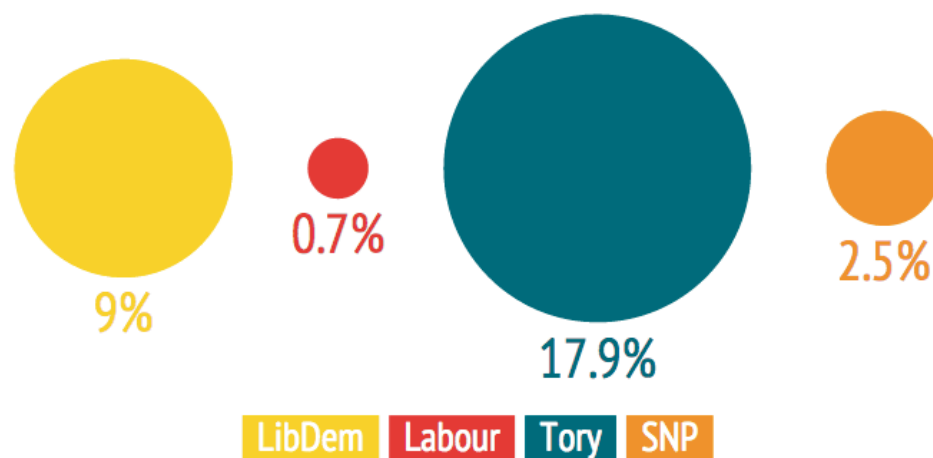
"The implied increase in debt between 2015/16 and 2016/17 would be in breach of the SNP's manifesto statement that they would see 'public sector net debt falling in every year as a share of national income'."

"The SNP plans for slower growth in public spending in 2019/20 than planned by any of the other three parties would result in them having a lower level of total spending than planned by Labour. ... This is despite their manifesto stating 'We reject the current trajectory of spending, proposed by the UK government and the limited alternative proposed by the Labour Party.'"

"For the SNP, a four year freeze in departmental spending outside the NHS and aid (from 2015/16 to 2019/20) would not be quite enough to deliver the spending plans set out in their manifesto.

"Instead they would need to cut 'unprotected' departmental spending in real terms by 2.5% (£6 billion) over the four years from 2015–16 to 2019–20. These were not mentioned in the SNP manifesto."

Planned cuts in "unprotected" departmental spending, 2014-5 to 2018-9



0-20

“The SNP’s recent rhetoric when announcing their fiscal plans states that they would be less austere and, in particular, cut spending by less than the main Westminster parties. ... There is a considerable disconnect between this rhetoric and their stated plans for total spending, which imply a bigger cut to spending by 2019-20 than Labour’s plans.”

It is also worth noting that whereas Labour, the Tories and the Lib-Dems all define “protected spending” as aid, education and health, the SNP define only aid and health as “protected spending”.

Because the IFS report is concerned with fiscal calculations rather than political calculations, it does not address the question of why the SNP is proposing a longer timescale for its anti-austerity policies than other parties. The answer is simple.

The other parties want to “frontload” the cuts so that they are implemented before the run-in to a 2020 general election. The SNP, on the other hand, is more concerned with the Holyrood elections in 2016. It therefore wants to masquerade as “the anti-austerity party” in the run-in to that election.

The IFS report lamely concludes: “Unfortunately, the electorate is at best armed with only an incomplete picture of what they can expect from any of these four parties.”

The picture may be “incomplete”. But it is certainly clear enough to recognise that all the major parties are committed to austerity in one form or another and to one degree or another.

LABOUR

Of the four parties whose manifestos are analysed in the IFS report, Labour is the most “austerity-lite”. But that kind of “lesser-evilism” is not the reason to vote Labour.

Although not all unions are affiliated to the Labour Party, and that includes some of the larger ones such as the Public and Commercial Services union, PCS, Labour continues to be the only party in Britain organisationally linked to the trade union movement and officially backed as a party by trade unions. (The RMT is represented on the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition Steering Committee but is not affiliated as an organisation. In the general election the RMT is backing 45 Labour candidates, 37 TUSC candidates and six



Ed Miliband and Boris Johnson argued over non-dom status

Green candidates. And one of the RMT representatives listed on the TUSC website as a member of its Steering Committee – RMT President Peter Pinkney – is standing as a candidate for the Greens.)

A vote for Labour would be a vote for the party which fourteen trade unions with nearly three million members are affiliated to. That linkage between the party and the unions makes it easier for affiliated unions – if they organise to do so – to challenge the pro-austerity policies of a future Labour government.

This does not mean squabbling about how fast or how slow cuts should be imposed, or squabbling about which departments should or should not be “protected”. Apart from cuts in military spending, and Trident in particular, super-high official salaries, etc., the socialist answer to austerity is: No cuts.

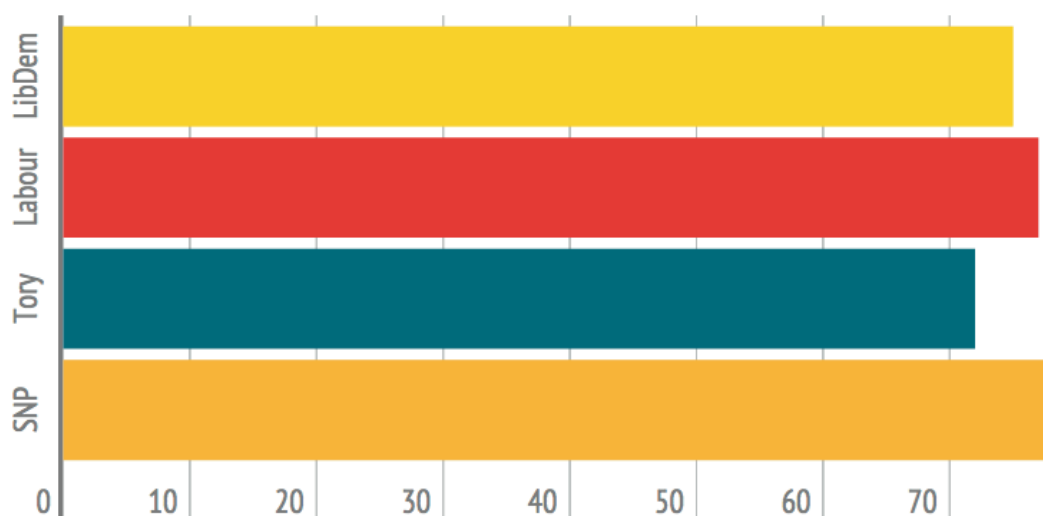
Instead, the labour movement answer to austerity should be demanding of a future Labour government policies such

as taking the banks into public ownership, writing off PFI debts, a wealth tax, and tax hikes for the rich and big business.

The IFS report underlines the need for a campaign such as the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory: campaigning for a vote for Labour while also campaigning for the trade unions to challenge the austerity measures of whichever party forms the next government.

• More information about the SCLV at: socialistcampaignforalabourvictory.wordpress.com

Targets for % ratio of debt to national income by 2019-20



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Vote Labour, not Scottish Nationalist!

By Dale Street

After years of the SNP denouncing England for “robbing” Scotland and stereotyping the English as virtually Tories by birth, leading SNPPer Alex Salmond has now taken to talking of “the real people of England” and explaining how “the people of England don’t think like Westminster politicians”, rather as if they were a new species of life which he has just come across for the first time.

In fact, English people are pretty much like Scottish people.

Some are rich and some are poor. Some have power, but most don’t. Some have benefited from austerity, but the majority have lost out. Most of them work for a living, and a lot of them join trade unions.

Social attitudes are pretty much the same in England as in Scotland.

The path to reversing the damage inflicted by five years of Con-Dem rule and to advance the interests of working people runs through a Labour vote, not an SNP vote.

A vote for the SNP would be a vote for a party which stands for the opposite of the labour movement’s underpinning principle: unity on the basis of class, not national identity. It would cut across the chances of building a political force strong enough to challenge austerity and advance working-class interests.

The SNP is a nationalist party which seeks to mobilise support on the basis of national identity. Salmond’s sickly, opportunist and transient overtures to “the real people of England” do not change this one iota.

The labour movement can flourish only by bringing together people of different national identities into a single movement which represents and advances their interests as members of the same class, and by fighting for a government based on the labour movement.

Privatising public transport

In 2012 the SNP awarded the £350 millions contract to run ferry services to the Northern Isles to Serco (previous experience of running ferries: the Woolwich Ferry in London). Now the Clyde and Hebridean ferry services have also been put out to tender, with Serco a favourite to win that contract as well.

Again, the SNP argues that its hands are tied, this time by the European Union. The RMT and the Scottish TUC have consistently argued that European Union cabotage regulations and the decision of the European Court of Justice in the Altmark case mean that there is no need to put Scottish ferry services out to tender.

In its 2003 Holyrood election manifesto the SNP promised to re-regulate Scotland’s bus services. The policy was re-affirmed by the 2006 SNP conference.

But in early 2007 Stagecoach owner Brian Souter made a large donation to the SNP. A few weeks later the SNP dropped its policy of bus re-regulation. Since then the SNP has consistently voted against Labour proposals in Holyrood for re-regulation.

In 2008 the SNP announced — without consulting transport user bodies or trade unions — that the First Group’s contract to run ScotRail would be extended by three years, until 2014. At the close of 2014 the contract was then awarded to Abellio, while the contract to run the Caledonian Sleeper service was awarded to Serco.

The SNP argues that Holyrood does not have the powers to re-nationalise the railways. But Holyrood does have the powers to run rail-franchising on the basis of a not-for-profit contract, or to set up an arms-length body which could run the railways as an “operator of the last resort”.

The SNP’s independence White Paper did not promise that an independent Scotland would take rail back into public ownership. It promised no more than a “review” of rail ownership.

This puts it to the right of Labour’s current policies on rail, and also to its policy of giving Holyrood powers to take rail back into public ownership.



Put working-class demands on Labour

The SNP can never be such a government. Not in Scotland, and even less so at a UK level.

It stands for the nation, not for any particular class in that nation, and in practice a political party which governs on behalf of “the nation” inevitably governs on behalf of that nation’s ruling class. It has no organisational ties with, or even minimal structures of accountability to, the workers’ movement.

In this election the labour movement alternative to the Tories is a Labour government. It is a very limited alternative. It promises no more than a limited redistribution of wealth, a limited improvement in workers’ rights, and a limited roll-back of the Tories’ dismantling of the welfare state.

Even so, it is the labour movement alternative to another five years of Tory rule. It is an alternative which appeals equally for the votes of workers of all national identities — in contrast to the divisive call by the SNP for workers of different national identities to vote for different parties on the basis of where they live.

It is an alternative actively backed by trade unions representing millions of members. Labour election campaigners are more likely to be union activists than the campaigners of

Trimming policies

A comparison of what the SNP said in the referendum campaign, and what it is saying now, in the general election campaign, makes a mockery of its claims that, unlike the “establishment” parties at Westminster, it can be trusted to tell the truth.

Then, it promised a 3% cut in corporation tax in an independent Scotland. Now, it will make sure Labour increases corporation tax by 1%.

Then, it had not a word to say about zero-hours contracts in an independent Scotland. Now, it will make sure that Labour cracks down on their use and abuse.

Then, it had not a word to say about a mansion tax or a bankers’ bonus tax. (Remember — the bankers were the good guys, according to Salmond.) Now, just two a half weeks before the election, they will make sure Labour implements such policies.

Then, it promised there would be no tax increases in an independent Scotland. Now, it will make sure that Labour increases the higher rate of tax to 50%.

Then, it promised that the National Minimum Wage would increase by at least the rate of inflation in an independent Scotland. Now, it wants to increase the National Minimum Wage to whatever Labour promises plus a bit more.

Then, there was no future for Scotland in the UK and the people of Scotland had to go their own way. Now, the SNP promises to represent the entire UK electorate and to be a

No gold at end of autonomy rainbow

After the collapse in oil prices, the SNP’s abandonment of the corporation-tax cut which was meant to attract new business, and the recent publication of reports by the IFS and GERS, the SNP’s economic case for Full Fiscal Autonomy is even less credible than its case last September for independence.

In its independence White Paper the SNP’s “cautious estimate” of the average price of a barrel of oil in the period 2013-20 was \$113 a barrel. By early 2015 the real price of a barrel had slumped to less than \$50.

any other party. And unions remain the main financial backers of the Labour Party.

Despite the weakening of the party-union link over recent decades, union representation in the structures of the Labour Party and their 50% share of the vote at Labour party conferences provide openings for affiliated trade unions to shift the political direction of an elected Labour government.

If the unions were to take such openings, then this would be real, democratic, labour movement accountability — not to be confused with the SNP’s Byzantine argument: vote SNP (or Plaid Cymru, or Green) but not Labour; SNP MPs will then hold a Labour government to account; but at the first opportunity the SNP MPs will depart for an independent Scotland.

Every seat Labour fails to win, and every seat which it now holds but loses, increases the chances of the Tories being able to form the next government.

If Labour does not win an absolute majority in the election, then this will be a major setback for collective working-class politics and working-class political representation. And the SNP’s key goal is precisely that: to make sure that Labour does not win an absolute majority.

The labour movement needs to combine campaigning for a Labour government with raising clear working-class demands, boosting working-class confidence and militancy in order to win the implementation of those demands by a Labour government after 7 May.

A vote for the SNP is not just a diversion from that goal but an obstacle to achieving it.

voice for “everyone across these islands.”

The SNP pose as the champions of anti-austerity while implementing it in Holyrood. They push policies today which they rejected only yesterday. They declare the Tories to be untouchable after having traded policies for votes with them during the 2007-11 SNP government. As the then Tory leader in Scotland put it in a recent interview in the *Daily Record*: “Our position was very clear. In return for supporting their budget, the SNP would include Conservative policies in their budget. It was as simple as that.”

According to SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon, “Labour voters across the UK” will never forgive Miliband if he fails to work with the SNP to “lock the Tories out of Downing Street”. But Sturgeon thinks that those unforgiving Labour voters should not be voting Labour anyway.

And if the price of Scottish independence were handing the keys to Downing Street back to the Tories, then the SNP would not hesitate for a moment to let other people pay that price.

The SNP is not honest enough to admit that the worst possible election outcome for them would be a majority Labour government which delivered on its “progressive policies”.

Such an outcome would weaken the case for independence and also deny the SNP the chance to horse-trade propping up a minority government for Full Fiscal Autonomy.

A majority Tory government is a congenial second-best outcome for the SNP which could and would be used by the SNP as an argument for Scottish separation.

The hegemony of neoliberalism

Martin Thomas reviews *Never let a serious crisis go to waste: how neoliberalism survived the financial meltdown* by Philip Mirowski (Verso, 2013)

Philip Mirowski addresses the left, very broadly defined — “people who have taken it as a fundamental premise that current market structures can and should be subordinate to political projects for human improvement” — but with “a simple message: Know Your Enemy before you start daydreaming of a better world”.

He dismisses most already-circulating “better world” schemes as helpless against the dominance of neoliberalism.

He quotes Paul Krugman — “I am quite fanatical about defending the relevance of standard economic models” — Joseph Stiglitz — “fortunately we don’t need to rewrite the textbooks” — and Krugman again — saying that “basic, sensible macro” is fine — to argue that the apparent mainstream left critics of neoliberalism are really well within its ambit. Leftish writers like Kenneth Arrow, Amartya Sen, and John Rawls are “virtually as neoliberal” as the hard-nut contract-everything-out “zealous advocate of the market order” James Buchanan.

When Mirowski dismisses “those benighted few, these Revenants of the Economic Rapture, who were certain that only complete and utter breakdown of capitalism would pave the way for a transition to the political ascendancy of the proletariat”, or the “thin and insubstantial” character of the case for a “return to Marx”, I think he means to talk about us, in caricature.

His critique of the Occupy movement is acute, though sneering in tone. He indicts the “absence of any sort of theoretical guidance and hierarchical organisation of short to longer-term goals”; the “disdain of close ties to trade unions”; the “mimicry of media technologies as opposed to concerted political mobilisation”; the acting as if “their primary role in life was to express themselves, especially with cameras nearby, rather than to work patiently for a thought-out political project”.

Neoliberalism, he says, ranges much wider than neoclassical economics. I see three strands in his depiction of neoliberal hegemony.

First (and this is an idea often discussed on the left of late), “neoliberalism as world view has sunk its roots deep into everyday life, almost to the point of passing as the ‘ideology of no ideology’.” It has come to dominate “everyday life in the first few decades of the new millennium”, with “the story of an entrepreneurial self equipped with promiscuous notions of identity and selfhood, surrounded by simulacra of other such selves.”

It has “so addled the populace that they end up believing that adoption of neoliberal notions constitutes wicked rebellion against the powers that be”.

Everyday neoliberalism had so “taken root in the culture” by 2008 that it “provided a bulwark until the active mobilisation of the Neoliberal Thought Collective could mount further responses” to the financial crash.

Second, that sociologically the neo-liberal cadre is deeply embedded in established structures of power, so much so that “when and if the crunch comes, [the neoliberals] end up controlling ‘both sides’ of any momentous debate”.

Economics professors in US universities now get paid 41% more than professors of English literature, a greater premium than any other subject except law. They are highly-valued by university bosses because they bring in the outside dollars more than almost anyone else. Almost all of them combine their academic careers with well-paid positions with banks and hedge funds, or in or around government and the Fed.

This explains well why few economists have wanted to propose discomfiting the bankers since 2008, why different variants of neoliberalism have been able to command the terrain of public debate, and why economic thought is systematically homogenised towards what will bring in the outside dollars and connections to universities.

The third dimension to neoliberal hegemony in Mirowski’s one is a more “Gramscian” one, though Mirowski, I assume deliberately, does not use the word hegemony or anywhere refer to Gramsci.

In Gramsci’s account, hegemony is not so much a state of affairs as an activity, an active relation with wider sections of the population by a particular cadre of what he calls (equivalently, and, I think, wanting us to learn something



The way through for neoliberalism came when Thatcher and Reagan defeated the labour movement

from the odd-at-first-sight equivalence) intellectuals and organisers. They may be activists of a working-class revolutionary party, or the rural-origin officials and lawyers who mediated for fascism, or the local worthies and journalists who transmitted the leadership of the bourgeois “Moderates” of late 19th century Italy, but they are a “hegemonic apparatus”, a more or less cohesive network.

Mirowski writes not of a “hegemonic apparatus”, but of “the Neoliberal Thought Collective”. He identifies that with the Mont Pèlerin Society.

MPS is an international discussion club of a few hundred members. Friedrich Hayek started it in 1947, with a few dozen members, and remained its president until 1961. Other prominent figures have included Milton Friedman, Ralph Harris of the Institute of Economic Affairs in Britain, and Eamonn Butler of the Adam Smith Institute, who is also its current secretary.

Through the work of Antony Fisher, a British businessman who made a fortune from battery chickens, the MPS has had a link to the setting-up of think-tanks like the IEA and the Adam Smith Institute in many countries. Fisher’s granddaughter, Rachel Whetstone, has worked for the Tories and is married to David Cameron’s aide Steve Hilton.

ALL PERVERSIVE?

Mirowski’s picture of the Neoliberal Thought Collective as all-pervasive rests on sliding to and fro between two definitions of neoliberalism. In one definition, Krugman, Stiglitz, Rawls and the like are as neoliberal as it comes; in another, neoliberalism is identified with the full-on markets-for-everything types, the Mont Pèlerin core.

Thomas Sargent, one of the main figures of hard-line neoliberal economics, responded to the crash by saying that models based on his sort of theory are just “designed to describe aggregate economic fluctuations during normal times... they are not designed to be theories of financial crisis”. His comrade Robert Lucas said: “We are not going to have, now or ever... a set of models that forecasts sudden falls in the value of financial assets”. Eugene Fama: “We don’t know what causes recessions... We’ve never known”.

The neoliberals were diverse and vague in their quick responses to the crash not because of clever coordination by a wizard behind the curtain, but because they didn’t know. The “hard” neoliberals are not as solid a “hegemonic apparatus” as they seem now; and they were not as isolated in 1947, when the Mont Pèlerin Society was founded, as their self-serving narrative had it.

Hayek had been a professor in Lionel Robbins’s LSE economics department since 1931, and Robbins accompanied him to Mont Pèlerin. Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* had been a best-seller, further popularised by *Reader’s Digest* putting out a condensed version which General Motors then distributed for free as a pamphlet. The Tories wanted to do a new print-run of *The Road* for mass circulation in the 1945 general election, and failed only because they could not organise it in time.

Walter Eucken, the prime theorist of ordoliberalism, the version of neoliberalism which dominates in Germany to this day, was also at Mont Pèlerin. Ludwig Erhard, economics minister or Chancellor in West Germany continuously from

1949 to 1966, was a Mont Pèlerin member. Arguably, he, a figure from long before modern neoliberalism, represented the closest the Mont Pèlerin hard core have ever come to the centres of power.

Erhard’s “social market economy” did not look much like modern neoliberalism, and nor did the regime of the Hayek-enthusiast Tories when they returned to office in 1951. Why? Because canny bourgeois politicians then reckoned that the labour movement was too powerful for them to risk putting the harsher implications of the theory into action; and high growth rates and prosperity meant they had no need to take that risk.

By 1979-80 the capitalist world had moved on so that politicians like Thatcher and Reagan represented a large body of bourgeois opinion who thought that the labour movement was fragile enough that they could take the risk of confronting it, and capitalism was disarrayed enough that they must take that risk.

The “wizard behind the curtain” has not really been pulling all the strings of bourgeois politics; rather, the shift in bourgeois politics has let a number of wizards come more to the front of the stage.

Categorising all mass politics as mere play-debates within neoliberalism also dissolves specifics too much. If the “mainstream” debate on economic policy in the USA were between Paul Krugman and Ben Bernanke, rather than between Ben Bernanke (who, as Mirowski accurately says, is a thoroughly orthodox follower of Milton Friedman) and those who find him not right-wing enough, it would still in a general way be “within” neoliberalism, but the openings and opportunities for socialists to get a hearing would be greater. Or if the “mainstream” debate in the UK were between the Tories’ cuts and even mild “fiscal stimulus”.

The facts suggest a beaten-down, atomised sensibility, not Mirowski’s archetypal “entrepreneurial self”. The carriers of neoliberalism are far short of a Mont Pèlerin cadre.

For now people see few feasible ways of rebelling against the rules of the market; but plenty of them are open to rebellion if we, the left, can initiate and organise it well enough. And once they rebel, even with lots of neoliberal ideas in their thinking, ideas start fermenting.

Far-right groups like UKIP and the French Front National, which have gained support recently, fundamentally conform to neoliberalism, and offer surprisingly little social demagoguery. But they do not appeal to the ultra-flexible neoliberal “entrepreneurial self” depicted by Mirowski, but rather to a backward-looking and reactive search for a more stable collective “self”.

To some degree we have been drawn into constructing neoliberalism, through some of our everyday transactions, rather than just submitting to it; but the wizards of neoliberalism lack a hegemonic apparatus, equipped with an elaborated world-view, able to reach down so far that neoliberalism will seem to us to come from the inside.

We on the left also lack that collective enterprise, for now. But we can start building it and operating it now, so long as we do not let ourselves be overwhelmed by the feeling that neoliberalism surrounds us so much, on all sides, that it is unbreachable.

• Abridged from bit.ly / mirows

The hinterland of the contemporary left

Pat Yarker reviews *Utopia or Bust: A Guide to the Present Crisis* by Benjamin Kunkel. (Verso 2014)

This book presents six occasional essays in which the American novelist Benjamin Kunkel gives an account of recent work by contemporary thinkers of the left.

In an autobiographical introduction, Kunkel declares his support for “replacing a capitalism bent on social polarisation, the hollowing-out of democracy, and eco-ruin with another, better order... marked by public ownership of important economic and financial institutions... and by social equality”. In Kunkel’s view the left has been intellectually disorientated for a generation. It appears uncertain about how best to analyse contemporary capitalism as well as about any programme for capitalism’s replacement. At the same time, in the wake of the financial crash there has been a revival of interest in current Marxist, or marxisant, thinking. Kunkel would bring some of the fruits of this thinking before a wider audience, and so help the left to find its way.

The half-dozen intellectuals whose work Kunkel expounds are all eminent academics. They are also all male and white, and of a certain vintage.

The youngest, anthropologist and self-described anarchist-activist David Graeber, was born in 1961. Kunkel uses Graeber’s book, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, to précis several ideas from economic theory. (Graeber’s recent series on money and debt is still available to download from Radio 4.) In Kunkel’s view an understanding of at least the broad lineaments of neo-liberal economics is essential for challenging the capitalist social order, and for meeting its defenders on their own ground.

Kunkel outlines Graeber’s examination of the changing role of money in its credit/virtual and bullion/metal forms. He touches on sovereign debt, on the need for debt-forgiveness (rather than default) and on the credit-system as a network of human relationships. Kunkel exhorts the left to propose “credit systems and monetary authorities that can prise apart debt and hierarchy, exchange and inequality”. The left must make clear how our alternative vision of society would retain the complexity of today’s world, rather than regress from it.

Economic issues also dominate the essay devoted to Robert Brenner and his 1998 study, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*. Kunkel considers the structural role of unemployment in capitalism, and the nature of inflation. He outlines other explanations (drawn from Ernest Mandel and Andrew Glyn) for the stagflation of the 1970s and the end of the post-World War Two “long boom”, in order to confront them with the position held by Brenner.

Against explanations based on a wage-induced profit-

squeeze, Brenner advances the role of increased global competition. As the global market matures, so investment in manufacturing declines and footloose capital scampers towards financial speculation.

The essay on Brenner has much in common with what Kunkel has to say about David Harvey’s work, principally *The Limits of Capital* and *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*. Harvey locates the source of crises in the over-accumulation of capital, or “capital unable to realise the expected rate of profit”. Lack of investment ensues. Where labour has been disempowered wages are low, slackening demand. Cheap forms of credit increase, ensuring deepening indebtedness. Kunkel’s survey takes in what Harvey thinks about under-consumption theories, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, ground-rent as a feature of fictitious capital, and the sharpening contradictions between highly-mobile finance capital and fixed capital.

For a reader as ignorant as I am about economic theory, Kunkel’s mediation of these matters is clear and manageable. Readers with more knowledge and understanding may take a dimmer view of the substance of what is argued.

JAMESON

In the one essay (on Fredric Jameson) where my own awareness of the works discussed is less cursory, I found Kunkel’s summarising uncontentious.

As a literary/cultural critic Jameson has defended a totalising perspective in the teeth of post-modernist objections, and in doing so has maintained Marxism’s claim to be the key interpretative method for understanding our times. Kunkel writes: “Totalization might be defined as the intellectual effort to recover the relationship between a given [physical, intellectual or cultural] object... and the total historical situation underneath and around it... Anathema to conservatives, the recourse to ‘totality’ was no more endearing to a cultural left whose slogans included difference, heterotopia, nomadism et cetera”.

Kunkel notes Jameson’s characteristic provisionality: his “preference for a conditional over a declarative mood”. He might also have pointed out that Jameson’s demanding prose-style is, like Adorno’s, a strategy of resistance: an attempt to keep the act of thinking properly difficult, and hence less likely to be assimilated by viewpoints more at ease with the currently-dominant dispensation.

Kunkel criticises what he sees as Jameson’s “political paralysis” and relative neglect of economic questions, his “thin description of the economy”. Oddly, in view of the title of his book, Kunkel avoids engaging in any depth with the quintessentially-Jamesonian theme of the role of the Utopian in

social struggle.

The two final essays are on Slavoj Žižek’s *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, which is mainly about the Arab Spring, and two books by the Stalinophilic art critic Boris Groys. In a brief essay Kunkel tends to dismiss Žižek. Implacable hostility to reformism prevents Žižek from recognising that, in Kunkel’s view at least, the reform versus revolution debate is outmoded. Nor can Žižek offer in any detail a viable post-capitalist alternative to the market, of the kind that socialists must be equipped with if our arguments are to carry credibility. Kunkel wants to know whether, under a mode of production characterised by common ownership, productive enterprises would be “owned by those who worked for them or by society at large — or somehow jointly between the two groups? Žižek doesn’t ask, let alone answer, such questions”.

As for Groys, Kunkel is wary of his subject’s politics, recognises him as a provocateur, and says that “the big question is how seriously he means to be taken, and how seriously he can be taken”. Kunkel dutifully picks over what Groys argues about the value of Stalinist socialist-realism, the role of the avant-garde, the point of museums, and how the USSR was a society which granted art its due. Of all the six essays, which are really expanded book reviews, this was the one which made me happiest to be reading Kunkel rather than the books he was considering.

Kunkel’s writing is lively, engaging and at times aphoristic. He conveys the pith of his reading with clarity and verve. Yet he never reflects on the exclusively male composition of his authorial line-up, or what it might suggest about today’s Left as well as yesterday’s. Rosa Luxemburg is name-checked, and the “guide to further reading” which concludes the book makes passing mention of the work of Silvia Federici and Ellen Meiksins Wood. These can’t be the only women writing in the academy whose Marx-inspired critiques of capitalism are especially important.

The question which grips Kunkel, of how the capitalist mode of production might be made to give way to a better, and what such a process might look like and result in, is as urgent as it is necessary. But Kunkel has nothing to say about matters we would see as fundamental to an answer. The pivotal role of the organised working class as a historical agent and subject, the experience of workers’ self-management in industry, or the nature of a communist party, merit no mention.

Kunkel’s guide serves to underline how much has withered from the intellectual hinterland of the left and needs to be restored.

The urban dystopia

By Camila Bassi

“The Yankees have invented a stone-breaking machine. The English do not make use of it, because the ‘wretch’ who does this work gets paid for such a small portion of his labour, that machinery would increase the cost of production to the capitalist.” (Marx, *Capital: Volume One*)

My recent visit to Shanghai was the last of nine in which I have glimpsed urban development “the China way”. My photo story (see bit.ly/1EMQJm7) captures themes present in each of my visits that have haunted me.

The former Chinese Communist Party leader, Deng Xiaoping, who initiated the era of “opening and reform”, famously said: “Development is the only hard truth.”

If capital is akin to a monster, then a gigantic monster was set loose in Shanghai from 1990, and has gluttonously and mindlessly trampled over people and eaten up land ever since — commodifying and extracting surplus-value at a reckless speed.

Over the years, the sight of low-rise alleyway, working class living that is half demolished, with people still residing within it, has been less and less prominent in downtown Shanghai, simply because more and more of the demolition



has been completed. The working class have been largely moved out of the centre to the isolating high-rise apartments of the suburbs — placed within new tower blocks that have been as quickly put up as old homes have been destroyed, and which signify urban regeneration that will fast degenerate.

Shanghai is urban dystopia. It is a city of hardware, with no regard for software: culture, civil society, freedom to pause, and to think, and to question.

If one sits in a taxi at night driving through the dazzling skyscrapers of Pudong, the Special Economic Zone just over the river from downtown Shanghai, one feels like one has entered Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*. It’s an uncomfortable feeling. The scale of Pudong is a frightening mash-up of the might of global capital and the muscle of Chinese totalitarianism — this is urban development, the China way.

It is the subtle sights of Shanghai that have always struck me the most, and the absences too: where are the poor? Space and place is so controlled in Shanghai’s centre that one can stroll from Starbucks to Starbucks, visiting global retail chains in between, and simply miss the missing population. What we call gentrification in the West appears on such a vast scale in Shanghai that what one can actually see — if awake enough — is capitalism at its most naked.

There’s the next, near-erected skyscraper, such as the one I walked passed once by the Bund at midnight, with orange sparks against a black sky right at the top, generated by welding, as rural migrant workers toil for little pay and no health and safety protection. And there are the rural migrant workers digging holes in roads and pavements with pick axes and shovels, rudimentary equipment which once puzzled me.

Yes, labour in China is that exploited, it is cheaper to employ workers to dig into concrete with pick axes and shovels than it is to employ a mechanical digger.

Reclaim Brixton!

By Ruth Cashman

2000 people gathered in Brixton on Saturday 25 April under the banner of Reclaim Brixton.

The day included a short lived occupation of the Town Hall, several marches and speeches and music in Windrush Square.

Reclaim Brixton brings together a number of new and existing campaigns.

Demands of the protest included:

- Refurbishment not regeneration of council estates — no evictions of Lambeth residents
- Stop racist policing, stop police violence, no more stop and search
- No cuts to local services — save Lambeth Libraries
- Private rent cap, new property development to be used for those on the housing list
- Save the Arches and Brixton Market

Though covering a number of issues, the demands are united by the overarching theme of “Lambeth is Not For Sale” — we will resist our homes and services and communities being treated as simply commodities.

The windows of Foxtons, an estate agent which has come to symbolise the spiraling cost of housing and evictions in the area, were smashed and “Yuppies Out” painted on the window. Organisers were disappointed that Foxton’s broken window received so much attention. One community organiser commented;

“The world won’t be changed by broken Foxton’s windows. It wasn’t the aim of the day. But put it in context. Is a broken

window, of a company making millions and can easily replace it, a big deal? More important than people ripped from their homes? Torn from their communities? Losing their Services? Come on, violence is committed against people, not against high street windows!”

Turnout at the gathering was impressive given it was organised over a few weeks by an ad hoc group, largely by word of mouth and a Facebook event announcing;

“Earning less than £25,000? Or long-standing Afro-Caribbean resident? Maybe artist, musician? Shopkeeper? Librarian? Community worker? A teenage skater? A senior resident? A child who likes to play outside pens? Show the world your love for Brixton. The fight against gentrification starts here!”

Campaigns and individuals behind the protest vow to keep up the momentum from the demonstration. 2000 people in Windrush Square has to be the beginning, not the end of Reclaim Brixton.

We have to meet the new government, whoever they are, with resistance and a commitment to defend our communities.



LeSoCo staff gear up to strike

By a UCU member

On Friday 1 May, the UCU union at Lewisham and Southwark college will begin the ballot for industrial action to save 110 full-time equivalent jobs.

We are now one of several colleges in London preparing to resist attacks on our jobs and our ability to serve local working class students with what is for many the last chance to escape poverty and the hopelessness of unemployment.

The bulk of the leadership and governance of further education in the UK are so-

cially useless and parasitic on the funding of further education. They do little more than administer the dismantling of educational hope for large sections of the working class.

They are committed to a “Burger King” model of education. They are committed to the privatisation of what ever would be left of further education after this dismantling. We are fighting against this.

That we share this same fight with other colleges in London may be the key to pushing back this assault on further education. Unions fighting alongside other

university.

Speakers at the rally at City Hall were Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn, NUS Vice-President elect for Further Education and president of LeSoCo students’ union Shakira Martin, and from London Metropolitan Union, amongst others.

However a clear strategy and declaration of a fight by the leadership of the UCU, the union representing lecturers in FE colleges, was lacking.

On Saturday 25 April several hundred UCU and Unison members, college students and other activists marched from LeSoCo campus at Waterloo to City Hall to protest against cuts to FE funding.

They were joined by a feeder march from a University of the Arts (UAL) campus in Elephant and Castle of students campaigning against cuts to foundation courses at the



Protesters gathered at City Hall to protest against FE cuts

unions, supported by the local community, and colleges fighting side by side — this must be the shape of the battlefield if we are to win.

Of course, managers, and their supporters in boards of governors, local councils and national government understand this. They will try to isolate support staff from teaching staff in the college. They will try to isolate the college unions from the local community. They will try to isolate each college union’s fight by using their anti-union laws.

In the few weeks remain-

ing of the college term, unions need to escalate their actions and to synchronise them.

We need to further educate ourselves in lessons from past struggles in education, both official and unofficial actions. We need to educate ourselves in the skills of sit-ins, teach-ins, locking management out of their meetings and the occupation of campuses.

Whatever the tactic, whatever the action, this lesson must be learnt: Striking as protest good; striking to win better.

Teachers to debate academisation head

By a Lewisham NUT member

The next step in the struggle against academisation in Lewisham is an open debate on 14 May between the teaching unions and the Executive Head of the Prendergast Federation, David Sheppard.

On Saturday 25 April, around 100 people attended the second demonstration to stop academisation of the

Federation schools in Lewisham.

The protest, organised by Stop Academies in Lewisham (SAIL), was different in its makeup this time around, with lots more parents and teachers, which is promising for the campaign.

The rally heard from parents, students, trade unionists and, interestingly, Lewisham and Deptford’s Labour candidate, Vicky

Foxcroft, who has given her support against this academy proposal.

Students from the anti-academisation campaign from Sedgill School also attended to show solidarity and build links.

The fact that Sheppard has agreed to the debate shows the pressure from the campaign.

There is also news of the Federation being questioned on this move by MPs and

the Mayor behind the scenes.

We must keep the campaign going to tip the balance fully in our favour.

The demonstration on Saturday 25th seems to show the campaign is steadily building momentum.

• More information: stopacademiesinlewisham.org

Other industrial news

Strikes against outsourcing at Barnet Council — bit.ly/Barnet-strike

RMT ballots members on Docklands Light Railway — bit.ly/DLR-ballot

UCU and Unison ballots against job cuts at London Met — bit.ly/London-met-jobs

Barking and Dagenham bin lorry strike continues — bit.ly/BD-bins

National Gallery strikes

PCS members at the National Gallery struck again on the 20-24 April in their dispute over privatisation of gallery services.

Workers will strike again on Friday 1 May, and rally at 2pm in Trafalgar Square, joining May Day celebrations. Workers will have struck for a total of 22 days in the dispute.

Artist Grayson Perry has supported the campaign to stop the privatisation and signed an open letter to gallery directors calling for

a halt to the tendering process, due to start two days before the general election.

Workers are calling for increased solidarity as management continues refusing to consider other options.

• Donate to the strike fund, organise a solidarity event, pass a motion of solidarity, or sign the petition by visiting bit.ly/Help-Nat-Gal

Network Rail ballot

Network Rail workers in the RMT union will ballot for strikes to win a decent pay deal, after a reps’ meeting on 16 April rejected the company’s latest offer.

Network Rail wants staff to accept a four-year pay deal, with a £500 non-consolidated payment in year one, and RPI-linked increases through 2018. The company also wants to revoke a previous promise of no compulsory redundancies in 2016, suggesting that

job cuts may well be on the horizon.

A consultative ballot of RMT members over a previous pay offer returned a nine to one majority against the deal. Some RMT activists on Network Rail questioned why the union did not also ballot for strikes at that time, which would have given the option of taking action if no improved offer was forthcoming.

The union is yet to announce a timetable for the strike ballot.



Stop Mediterranean deaths OPEN THE BORDERS!

By Gemma Short

More than 1,700 people have believed to have died so far this year, crossing the Mediterranean from Libya, and other north African countries, to Europe. Many are fleeing the brutal civil war in Syria.

Yet as European interior ministers met for crisis talks last week, they still talked about Mediterranean rescue missions being a “pull factor” for migrants.

The gruesome logic here is one journalist put it, “drowning migrants to save migrants”.

The current death toll is 50 times higher than the same point in 2014, when the more extensive search and rescue mission Mare Nostrum was still operational. Cancelling that operation has not meant fewer boats. It has meant more people dying.

There has been mounting pressure to extend current limited search and rescue missions. 50 former European prime ministers, foreign ministers and business leaders signed a letter to EU leaders. Despite this the EU leaders agreed only:

- 5,000 resettlement places across Europe,
- a rapid-return program for migrants,
- an effort to identify, capture and destroy boats



that may be used by smugglers

- working with governments in “transit countries” to prevent migrants reaching the Mediterranean coast,

- doubling funding to Operation Triton and Operation Poseidon, which patrol up to 30 miles off European coasts but do only limited search and rescue.

The head of Frontex, the EU’s border-control agency has said that “saving migrants’ lives should not be the priority for his maritime

patrols.” He put very plainly what EU ministers are trying to avoid saying with their hand-wringing about preventing trafficking.

Former Tory foreign secretary William Hague has warned against relaxing immigration controls in response to the numbers drowning. But it is the tight immigration laws in UK and throughout Europe that are forcing migrants to pay thousands of dollars to be smuggled across the Mediterranean in dangerous boats.

Such immigration controls include fining airlines which allow passengers to reach the UK without the correct documentation, or if they are not “deserving of asylum”. Airlines have been made the judge of who may “deserve asylum”. Inevitably they largely refuse travel to those without full paperwork.

Immigration controls do not mean that fewer people need to flee war or poverty. Immigration controls force people to risk their lives getting to Europe.

Open the borders!



Killed for “failing to obey”

By Charlotte Zalens

The US National Guard was called into Baltimore on Monday 27 April to put down riots which followed the funeral of Freddie Gray, a young black man who died last week of injuries sustained during a violent arrest by police.

Freddie suffered a broken neck which left his spine “80% severed” and his voicebox crushed. He lapsed into a coma and died a week later.

Freddie was chased and arrested for “catching an officer’s eye” and running away. Mobile phone footage of Freddie’s arrest shows him being dragged into a police van while yelling in pain, one of his legs appearing limp.

Police chiefs have admitted that officers failed to provide Freddie with medical attention and did not seatbelt him in the van. He was transported with his hands tied behind his back and his legs in restraints. Many activists have claimed that police deliberately do “rough rides” in which police vehicles are driven erratically to injure passengers.

The six cops involved in Freddie’s arrest have been suspended and a criminal inquiry into the death is under way.

Riots have resulted in many arrests, with police and national guard officers firing tear gas grenades, so called “less lethal” bullets and pepper balls. At least one officer has been reported as throwing a brick back at protesters.

The US *Socialist Worker* website (not connected to UK *Socialist Worker*) reports:

“Right-wing pundits like Tucker Carlson labelled the protests a ‘threat to civilization itself’, but the media have been less willing to show police provocations, including cops driving armoured vehicles onto the sidewalk as a means of ‘crowd dispersal’, and the deliberate closure of portions of Baltimore’s transit system, which stranded high school students and forced them into confrontations with heavily armed police as they tried to get home.”

In a eulogy at Freddie’s funeral, pastor Jamal Harrison Bryant attacked the police for punishing Freddie for “looking a man in the eye”, an instruction he said young black men are frequently condemned for failing to obey.