

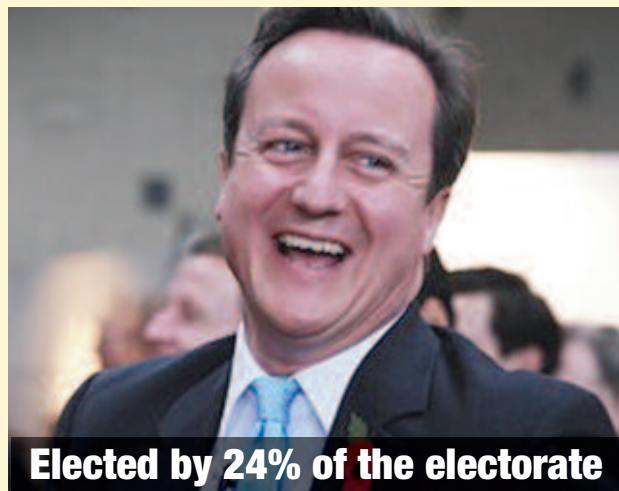
For a  
workers'  
government

# Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 365 20 May 2015 30p/80p

[www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)



Elected by 24% of the electorate

**24% enough to elect a  
government, 40% not  
enough to decide a strike?**

## **STOP NEW TORY ANTI-STRIKE LAWS!**

**Unions should call  
a national  
demonstration:  
Page 5**

**Also inside: Tories attack the  
disabled — pages 6-7**



Voted for by union members

## 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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# Italian school reforms spark rebellion

By Hugh Edwards

Having wiped the floor with the major Italian unions over the Jobs Act, and blown away what passes for the "left" in his own party, Italy's Prime Minister Matteo Renzi believed he could have another victory with his latest bill to reform the country's decrepit and dilapidated educational system.

Of course he had every right to feel confident — his counterparts in the schools

and university system were mainly the same unions he had already humiliated.

Renzi had announced the terms and principles of "la Buona Scuola" (the Good School) reform last autumn. This is a reactionary attempt to rationalise and streamline the educational system according to the poisonous and philistine prerogatives of business. Since then the leaders of the major unions have done nothing, or, even worse, proffered their own "alternatives" of how "merit" could be a collective rather

than an individual competitive criterion of disciplining the workforce.

Fortunately the Base, autonomous unions, COBAS, led by Piero Bernocchi, has campaigned and organised relentlessly against the proposed Bill, not only among their fellow teachers, but among students of the universities and, crucially, among the parents and families of their pupils. They struck in early spring, calling for a united front of all the unions.

When Renzi introduced the bill, Bernocchi called for an immediate walkout of his and the other unions on 5 May. The militant and enthusiastic reaction from the vast majority of teachers was electric, with spontaneous mass assemblies.

Other unions were forced to support the call and on 5 May Italy witnessed the largest and most militant day of action in the history of the education system. 70-80% of the workforce came out. Participation in the

mass assemblies that prepared for the strike was enormous in a rising tide of anger and determination.

What has begun to take shape, perhaps already eclipsing it, has all the features of the mass teachers, protests of the 80s when a rapidly spreading network of mass, democratic rank-and-file committees assumed the leadership of action in the teeth of opposition from unions.

The COBAS union itself was born in the throws of that specific struggle.

Renzi has now introduced the Bill in parliament. Bernocchi has announced that his members will refuse to participate.

**As strike action, protests and mass assemblies continue to spread, any attempt to criminalise the COBAS militants could be the turning point in the decade.**

• Full article: [bit.ly/1IJg2Xh](http://bit.ly/1IJg2Xh)

## Release jailed Iranian trade unionists!

By Charlotte Zalens

On 19 April Ali-Reza Hashemi, the General Secretary of the Iranian Teachers' Organisation, was arrested and taken to Evin prison.

Hashemi had been sentenced to five years in prison in 2010 for "pursuing [teachers'] trade demands" and "meeting the families of imprisoned teachers". He was also charged with "gathering and collusion to disrupt national security" and "propaganda against the system". However the sentence was never carried out. Hashemi was also sentenced to three years in prison in 2007, but that sentence was revoked after protests and an appeal. Activists suspect that the Iranian regime has decided to carry out Hashemi's 2010 sentence in an attempt to break teachers' protests and to wreck May Day activities.

Teachers in Iran have been fighting against low pay and pay disparity. On 16 April they demonstrated outside Educational Ministry office across Iran.

In the lead up to May Day several trade union activists were arrested. On 29 April Davood Razavi and Ebrahim Madadi of the Tehran bus workers' union were arrested and taken to Evin prison.

On 28 April Mahmoud Salehi and Osman Ismaili of the Coordinating Committee to help form Workers' Organisations were also arrested.

- Workers' Liberty is supporting the LabourStart campaign for their release. You can sign the petition online — [bit.ly/Iran-petition](http://bit.ly/Iran-petition) or download paper copies at — [bit.ly/MayDayIran](http://bit.ly/MayDayIran)

## Manchester occupies!

By Luke Neal

On Wednesday 13 May students occupied part of the Manchester Business School, Manchester University.

They reclaimed the space, which was being redeveloped into a £50 million "executive education centre", in protest at the Tories' continuing marketisation in education.

The university has prevented anyone else entering the occupied area through aggressive security measures. Initially management were also preventing deliv-

eries of food to the occupation, but backed down on this measure following after national media attention.

The University's management are still refusing to let anyone into the occupation, betraying their alleged commitment to students' right to protest and demonstrating their intention to contain to stifle dissent.

**The occupiers' demands express the desire for a "free, liberated and democratic university", based on a programme of workers' rights and taxing the rich.**

- Read their demands in full at [bit.ly/1dhNbfK](http://bit.ly/1dhNbfK)

## The plight of Rohingya boat people

By Gemma Short

Thousands of Rohingya migrants, fleeing Myanmar, may be facing death as they drift in the Andaman Sea in boats provided by and now abandoned by people smugglers.

The Rohingya, a persecuted minority in Myanmar, are being turned away from Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. Boats reaching the coasts of these countries are being towed back out to sea and left adrift after being handed basic provisions, despite starvation, disease, and increasing violence on the boats.

The UN now estimates as many as 8,000 migrants are adrift, and that as many as 25,000 migrants set off from the Bay of Bengal between January and March.

In Myanmar the Rohingya people almost all live in camps of up to 100,000 residents. Food is severely restricted, as is movement in and out of camps, and state forces often attack the camps.

Migrants continue to be rescued from boats in the Mediterranean; on May Day weekend alone the Italian



Open all borders

coastguard rescued 6,801 migrants from about 16 boats.

Theresa May has said Britain will not participate in a mandatory EU programme to resettle migrants trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean. May continues to argue that EU proposals to deal with the growing crisis will "encourage people to make the perilous journeys to Europe."

**Migrants seeking refuge from oppression, persecution, natural disasters and poverty across the world are faced with the choice of death, disease and poverty at home, or potential death at sea. Open the borders the world over!**



## German rail strike shows the way

By Paul Cooper

**A much needed reminder of the power of organised labour in a rich and advanced economy is currently being demonstrated in Germany.**

Freight and passenger train drivers for Germany's Deutsche Bahn recently completed the latest of their strikes over wages and conditions. Their confidence and determination is growing in what is already a 10 month-old dispute.

The latest action was the longest strike in the rail operator's history, lasting for six days and costing German business an estimated £360 million. The wailing of German bosses at that £360 million hit was still echoing around marbled boardrooms when kindergarten staff walked over pay and postal workers are now threatening industrial action.

The GDL union is the smallest union in the rail industry, only 15,000 members, but that is more than enough to do two things to

focus the mind of German employers: cripple the rail network and put pressure on its much larger sister union, the EVG, to be more militant; it is now demanding higher pay too.

Karl Brenke of the German Economics Institute sees the significance:

"In the last decade, Germany's large trade unions were accused of being too modest and not fighting hard enough for higher salaries.

"So, as a result, wages didn't match inflation or productivity.

"Now, the smaller unions do that and there is a knock-on effect on the bigger unions — they will have to be more aggressive to remain attractive."

The professors are warning the bosses. Germany has had a much lower history of strike action than the UK in recent years. Politically it has often been held up as a "sensible and conservative" labour movement, integrated into the needs of its employers. A model for British trade unions.

What is scaring the German employers is that the huge industrial unions are losing control over the small craft unions. Such is the fear that Chancellor Merkel is now driving through a law to remove this freedom from the small craft unions. Union representation in a company will be restricted to just one — the largest.

The European labour movement is beginning to stir. Its power is shocking to the bosses and they are beginning to "shape the battlefield". Legal limitations on the ability of workers to strike and organise are the high ground on that battlefield.

Chancellor Merkel must gaze with longing at the set of crippling anti-union laws we have in Britain. Militancy walks on two legs: action and solidarity. These laws attempt to break both legs. We are limping but not broken.

**The best solidarity we could make with our German brothers and sisters is to kick over the anti-union laws.**

## Daesh captures Ramadi

By Simon Nelson

**Daesh (ISIS) has captured the Iraqi city of Ramadi.**

This represents a reverse of Daesh's perceived fortunes, after air strikes seriously injured their leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. With Iraqi forces again fleeing a majority Sunni area, Iranian backed Shia militia are moving towards Ramadi with the Iraqi Government's backing.

Ramadi is the capital of Anbar province and is just 70 miles from Baghdad. It was a key battleground during the "Sunni Awakening" and the US troop surge which helped to partially defeat al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The US has pledged to provide no military or logistical support to the Iranian funded militias, but is un-

likely to try to prevent them confronting Daesh inside Ramadi or blocking the road to Baghdad.

Daesh has boasted of the widespread killing of "apostates" in the territory, and has gained a further large cache of weapons, including armoured Humvees and artillery abandoned by the Iraqi Army and its "Golden Division", the elite unit.

Up to 25,000 people could now be displaced.

Escalating sectarian conflict is likely as Shia paramilitaries begin fighting, for the first time, on the front-line of Sunni areas.

The US conducted a series of air strikes in the vicinity of Ramadi prior to its takeover. Despite their limited effect those air strikes have had — driving

Daesh out of Tikrit and stopping Daesh from taking Kobane — the lack of Iraqi military boots on the ground left Ramadi extremely vulnerable.

Al-Baghdadi has called on his supporters and the Sunni populations to fight their enemies wherever they live, putting particular focus on Ramadi. Whilst Daesh remain scattered and have lost territory earlier in the year, their ability to regroup in the face of airstrikes and the Iraqi Government means there is little hope for ending the sectarian conflict.

**The Sunni population of Iraq is increasingly torn between Daesh and an Iraqi Government that fails to provide any level of inclusion in the post-2003 Iraq.**

## Three decades of organising

By Gerry Bates

**Veteran Australian trade union activist and Workers' Liberty member Bob Carnegie has been speaking to meetings around the UK about his organising experiences over three decades.**

Starting the tour on Tuesday 12 May Bob spoke to a meeting of Lambeth Left Unity, alongside an activist from the Ritzy Cinema workers campaign. On Wednesday 13 May Bob spoke at the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) conference with Dave Smith of the Blacklist Support Group. The FBU may have been subject to blacklisting practices and a police cover-up.

On Thursday 14 May Bob attended the Royal Courts of Justice, with the Blacklist Support Group campaigners who are pursuing a class-action-type litigation through the High Court against the construction contractors who blacklisted them. One BSG activist said afterwards, "I had the honour of meeting and talking to Bob Carnegie today. He is pretty much a living legend in left politics!"

Bob spoke to victimised RMT cleaners' rep Clara Osagiede at RMT headquarters at Unity House, then accompanied RMT rep Daniel Randall on a workplace visit to Oxford Circus station. In the evening, he spoke at a meeting of the RMT Central Line East branch, sharing stories, particularly experiences in the 2012 Queensland Chil-



dren's Hospital construction workers' strike.

On Monday 18 May Bob was in Liverpool speaking at a meeting hosted by Unite Liverpool construction workers' branch. Over 50 people attended, including current and ex-construction workers, many of whom have been blacklisted.

Bob will visit PCS conference on Tuesday 19 May, attending a social hosted by the Independent Left group. On Wednesday 20 May he will speak at the London Unite construction workers' branch.

**On Thursday 21 May he will speak at a joint meeting hosted by Workers' Liberty and the University of London IWGB branch at 7.30pm, Room D103, 25 Gordon Street, London.**

• Facebook: <http://bit.ly/Bob-LDN>

## Abolish the monarchy!

By Michael Johnson

**After the election of a Tory majority government, it was heartening to hear Jack Straw on the Today Programme last week, taking up the cudgels for those benighted souls who need it most, like Prince Charles.**

In the wake of the release of the so-called "black spider" memos from Charles to the Blair government, Straw told the BBC that it was "absolutely essential" that Prince Charles had been able to offer his views in private. If the public was entitled to know what Charles was saying, he added, it would "stop him saying anything at all to ministers".

And your point is, Jack?

Heaven forbid that the government of the day would be denied Charles Windsor's pearls of wisdom on the plight of the Patagonian Toothfish, the upkeep historic buildings, or the fate of herbal medicine.

I almost feel for the ministers, too, having to pen obsequious responses to a mediocre crank, elevated to prominence only by lineal accident. That is, though, until you read the fawning responses, such as this choice sign-off, from one of



**Reserve power for ruling class**

New Labour's other bio-degraded Stalinists, Charles Clarke: "I have the honour to be, Sir, Your Royal Highness's humble and obedient servant."

But there is an important point of principle here.

Charles' lobbying, banal and eccentric as some of it was, did touch on politically sensitive areas such as education policy, on which he had privileged access to the government with no democratic sanction whatsoever.

And we do not know the whole extent of his lobbying, especially now that the law has been changed to restrict Freedom of Information requests on royal correspondence.

Liberal responses, such as the objection from the outgoing *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger, that the prince

was a "powerful person" who should be "above politics" miss the point.

The monarchy is not, in reality, "above politics". The whole institution, in times of political deadlock and crisis, plays the role of lobbying and manoeuvring to secure a new government. In order to preserve the fiction that the monarchy is "above politics", the work is necessarily done in secret, away from the prying eyes of the electorate.

Seemingly harmless now, in times of heightened class struggle the monarchy could serve as a hugely important reserve power for the ruling-class, acting to concentrate the forces of reaction against the impositions of working-class democracy.

Charles' letters make clear what we already know, and demolish the cant that the monarchy is a quaint reality-TV-show-cum-tourist attraction.

It's not. It's a vile and backward institution, and a survival, in James Connolly's words, "of the tyranny imposed by the hand of greed and treachery upon the human race in the darkest and most ignorant days of our history."

**Abolish it now. Up the Republic!**

# Keep up fight for Labour democracy!

By Jon Lansman



**We don't have a left candidate for Labour leader, and we are unlikely to get one. The reason is the legacy of the exclusion and marginalisation of the left under Blair. That's not to say that we should ignore the election: we have got to stop Progress winning. It is very important that we do not go back to Blair.**

If we don't have a leftwing candidate, we may have to settle for someone who is the best of a not-so-good bunch.

I'm very concerned about people becoming overly and prematurely attached, too soon, to candidates who they see the best of a bad bunch. I think that it is worrying that Ian Lavery, when he announced that he would not stand for the leadership, said at the same time that he was going to back Andy Burnham.

Even if the left chooses to back Andy Burnham, there is no reason for doing so now. Other candidates might emerge. Committing yourself to a candidate who is not really a left candidate makes it harder for better candidates to emerge.

And it makes it easier for Burnham to shift to the right in order to seek to win people who might have voted for Chuka Umunna. That is why he has made the statements he has, saying he is in favour of business, and saying the last Labour government ran too big a deficit. In many ways I think those statements put him to the right of Yvette Cooper. The left should not give away what leverage we have got.

And we should not concentrate exclusively on the leadership elections. We must continue the battle for party democracy, and focus on the other internal elections, such as Conference Arrangements Committee and NPF elections, and on more proposals for democratising the party.

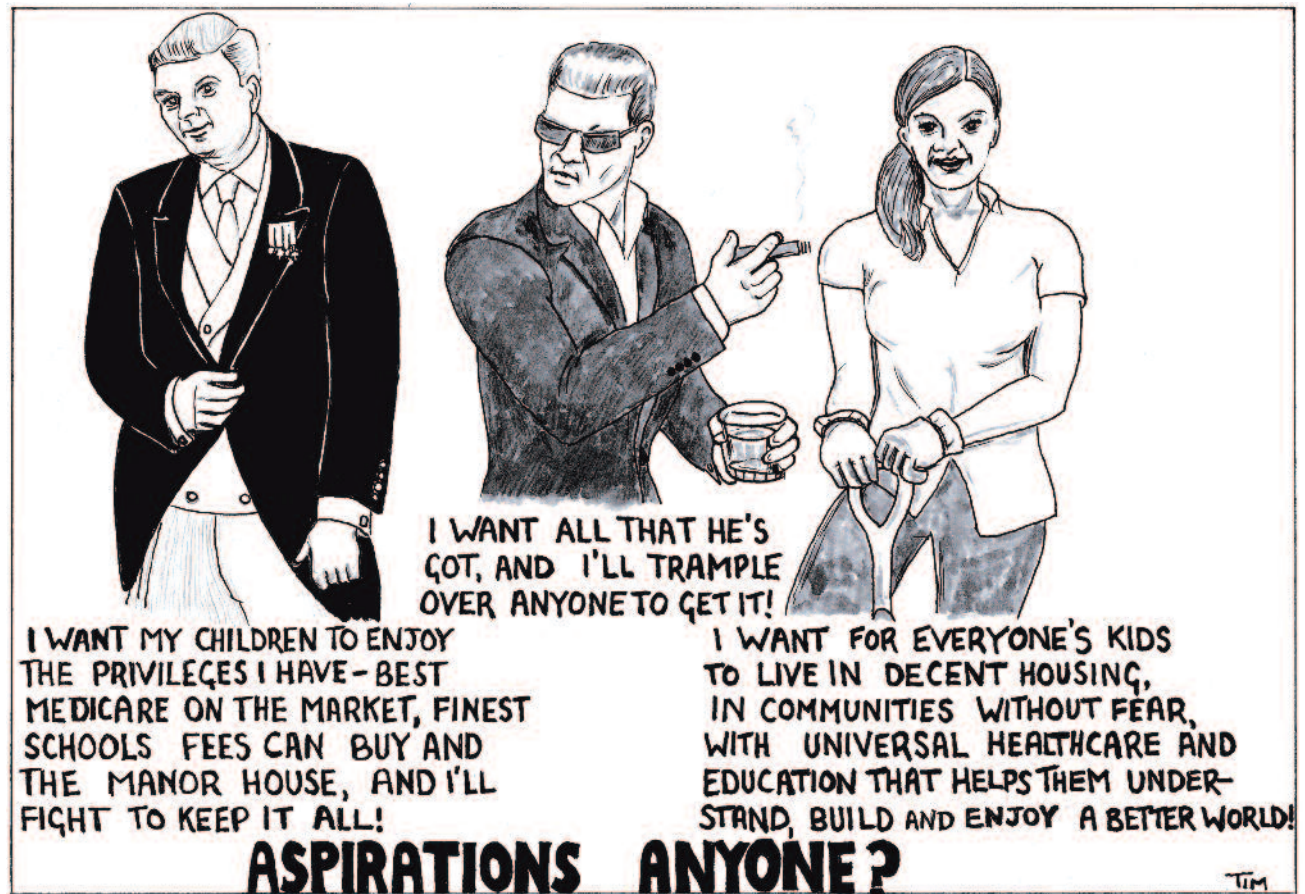
## UNIONS

**And we have to focus on ensuring that the leverage that we have at conference is used to its best effect. That means ensuring that the unions' 50% of votes at conference are used to best effect.**

The unions have until 12 August to sign up people as Labour affiliated members so they get a vote. I know some of the unions are getting on with that. They are using phone banks, which is one tool: but we need to do it in workplaces, by email, all the methods at our disposal.

It would have been better if the sign-up had been done a box to tick on the ballot paper. But you could argue that this is a rather more explicit consent from members than they would have given had they merely ticked a box on a ballot paper.

Judging from reports from left members of the Executive, the suspension of Christine Shawcroft seems to be for something that the election commissioner said about her in his judgement, almost in passing, and which is not true. As a result of substantial opposition on the NEC, the Party's General Secretary agreed to undertake the investigation as quickly as possible, and that if there is no evidence that Chris-



tine did campaign for Lutfur Rahman, then that will be the end of the matter. That it looks like it may not be as bad as we at first thought.

It was obviously in the unions' interest that there should be a longer campaign for the leadership, and the NEC wanted to ballot for all the other internal elections at the same time, for cost reasons. But now the officials have extended the nominations deadlines for CAC and NPF – but not for the London Mayor. There was no discussion of those deadline changes at the NEC, although there was an agreement that the ballots would happen at the same time.

It was helpful for the right to have a longer nominations period for CAC and NPF because they had not got their act together, whereas the left had got its requests for support out to GCs months ago. On the other hand for the mayoral nomination, the conventional wisdom is that keeping the deadline short is to the advantage of Sadiq Khan, the establishment figure, and Tessa Jowell.

I am sympathetic to the idea that the Unite union should have some kind of Scottish policy conference. I am sympathetic to the idea that members of Unite in Scotland should be able to discuss their response and their policies within Scotland.

I am concerned that this should not be allowed to result in

a break between Unite at the UK level and the Labour Party. I understand that there is a lot of pressure on affiliated unions from members in Scotland who supported independence, and who voted SNP, or just didn't vote Labour. But I don't see the SNP as being to the left of the Labour Party in any real sense, and in the UK we should still be looking to a Labour government.

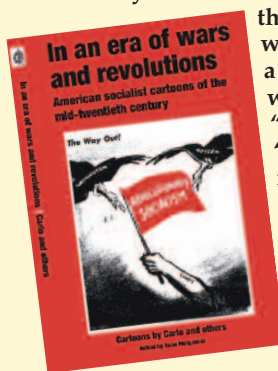
I don't think that the Scottish Labour Party could recover with Murphy as leader. So it is good that he is going; but he wants, before he resigns, to put a package of reform proposals regarding to the structure of the party in Scotland and the method of electing a leader. That could be very dangerous. We have got to make sure that the effect of these changes is not to break the link between the Scottish Labour Party and the trade unions.

The reasons why the Scottish Labour Party was wiped out are complex, but the fact that the Scottish Labour Party, much more than the Welsh Labour Party, followed a Blairite line meant that the party was seen by working-class voters as having abandoned the working class.

**The unions in Scotland are part of the answer, not part of the problem, as the Blairites think. The trade unions have one hell of a better reputation in Scotland than the Scottish Labour Party.**

## In an era of wars and revolutions

A few bold strokes by an artist can convey an idea more vividly and fix it more firmly in the viewer's mind than an editorial or an article would. The cartoons collected in a new book depict US politics, workers' struggles, America's "Jim Crow" racism, Roosevelt's "New Deal" and Harry Truman's "Fair Deal", and Stalinism in its era of greatest prestige and triumph, as revolutionary socialists saw them at the time.



£10.60 including postage

[www.workersliberty.org/books](http://www.workersliberty.org/books)

## Labour leadership: draft a left candidate!

**Left Labour MP John McDonnell has launched a website, [radical-labour.co.uk](http://radical-labour.co.uk), "to host a debate on the issues the Labour leadership candidates have to address" and thus to "transform this leadership election into a real debate".**

Much better, though, would be to have a left candidate who will challenge the other candidates, all more or less on Labour's right, directly.

Without that, and especially if one of the not-quite-so-right-wing candidates is given credit early on as the lesser evil which the left must support, we really have no leverage. The selected not-quite-so-right-wing candidate can feel that he or she has the left and union votes in the bag, and tilt right to scoop other support.

He or she may even tilt so far as to run their campaign on a line to the right of some of the "greater-evil" candidates.

Soon after Ed Miliband resigned, some Labour activists launched a campaign to "draft" Ian Lavery, a Labour MP

and former president of the National Union of Mineworkers. Lavery declined and, unfortunately, said he was backing Andy Burnham.

Now a campaign is under way, on Facebook at least — [bit.ly/draft-mcd](http://bit.ly/draft-mcd) — to draft McDonnell.

As we understand it, McDonnell and other left MPs say this is a hopeless effort because leadership candidates need to get nominations from 35 MPs (15% of the total).

But the left should demand that the Labour hierarchy either waive that rule, or circumvent it by arranging for enough MPs to give nominations just to allow a contest. That's not far-fetched: in 2010 the hierarchy did exactly that because it wanted to be seen to allow a contest.

**We campaigned to "draft" a left candidate before, in 1992, trying to push either Tony Benn or Jeremy Corbyn to stand. We ended up with the non-choice of Smith vs Gould; but the "draft" campaign was important if only to give some profile to the left.**



## On the streets against the new anti-strike laws!

**The unions and the labour movement should launch a life-or-death campaign to stop the Tories' planned new anti-union laws, starting with a mass street demonstration.**

Britain already has "the most restrictive trade union laws anywhere in the western world", as Tony Blair complacently told the *Daily Mail* in 1997.

Now the Tories plan to ban public service strikes unless the ballot majority for the strike comes to at least 40% of the workers balloted.

Only 24% of the electorate voted Tory on 7 May, and they think that's enough to decide the government!

But in strike ballots, essentially, they want to count non-voters as voting against.

In fact strike turnouts in the public services are better than ballot turnouts. Workers are willing to lose pay to join strikes which they don't even vote for.

Why? They lack confidence, and, tacitly or deliberately, prefer to see whether more confident workmates return a majority for the strike, in which case they'll join it. Or they just don't get round to voting. Under already-existing Tory law, the ballot has to be by post, and strike votes don't get the same publicity as national and local government elections.

### "Tiny elite rule", says member of that elite

**"Our democracies are increasingly captured by a ruling class that seeks to perpetuate its privileges.**

"Regardless of who's in office, the same people are in power. It is a democracy in name only, operating on behalf of a tiny elite no matter the electoral outcome."

"It seems today that political legitimacy stems not from votes, but money. The more of it you have, the more that government pays attention to your concerns".

Steve Hilton, who says this, should know. He is now an academic in the USA, but was director of strategy for David Cameron from 2010 to 2012. His background: private school, Oxford, then straight to a job in Tory Central Office.

He is married to Rachel Whetstone, a Google boss, a long-time Tory adviser and grand-daughter of Antony Fisher, who founded both of Britain's two main right-wing think-tanks, the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute.

Workplace votes, rather than ballot papers sent to home addresses, would get a better turnout in strike votes. But the Tories won't allow that.

The Tories also plan to rule strike ballots invalid everywhere, not just in the public sector, unless the turnout is at least 50%. In disputes involving workforces scattered over different workplaces, that turnout is hard to get.

A general rule that votes don't count unless the turnout is 50% would mean no elected local government. When leading Tory Boris Johnson was elected Mayor of London in 2012 — in a contest with vast publicity, so almost no-one could forget to vote — the turnout was just 38%.

Ballot votes for strikes should follow the same rule as other votes: those who don't take part aren't counted.

The Tories will also allow bosses to use agency workers to break strikes, repealing laws which ban that strike-breaking.

The effect will be to make legal and effective strikes very difficult except in compact workforces specialised enough that the boss can't easily use agency workers for strike-breaking.

The union leaders' initial response has been sluggish and timid. TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady spoke at the Fire Brigades Union conference (12-15 May) and said we must "box clever", "find new alliances", and "confuse our opponents". Protest strikes and demonstrations against the planned new laws were off her agenda. Anyway, she said, we should wait until the TUC General Council gets round to discussing this at its meeting in June.

The Campaign for Trade Union Freedom (CTUF) was formed in 2013 by the merger of previously-existing campaigns, one of which was a grouping initiated by a conference which Workers' Liberty was central to organising, in 1997. Sadly, it's been proof that broader unity can sometimes mean burying the active minority under bureaucratic inertia.

CTUF is sponsored by all the main unions, but hasn't even posted a comment on its website about the new Tory plans.

Most unions have made no prominent comment on their websites. The Unite union says that the Tory plans are "a terrible shame", but "we are open for constructive discussions with ministers". That's about as militant as it gets. Labour Party leaders have said nothing.

**If the leaders won't speak up for workers' rights, then the rank and file must! We must raise a storm which shakes the union leaders out of their demoralisation and forces them out onto the streets.**

**Solidarity will skip a week for the spring bank holiday. Solidarity 366 will be out on 3 June.**

## Help us raise £15,000

**At Workers' Liberty's London post-election aggregate on Saturday 16 May, discussion centred around the task we now have to intervene with our ideas while people's thinking is in flux.**

Comrades reported that sales of the post-election issue of *Solidarity* were higher than usual. Working class people are looking for answers for what we do under the next five years of Tory rule. Large meetings, rallies or marches have happened in several towns and cities.

Without a substantial transformation of the labour movement, people currently gearing up for action will have nowhere to go. We have a task to do to make our movement fit to fight.

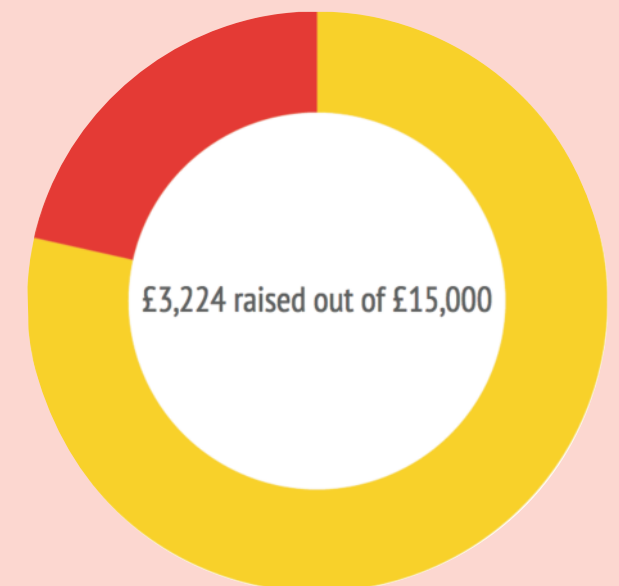
In order for Workers' Liberty to contribute to that fight, we need to be able to print our weekly paper, *Solidarity*, maintain our stock of books and print new ones, overhaul our website, and organise and send people to speak at meetings, amongst other things.

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](http://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](http://workersliberty.org/donate) For more ideas and information on fundraising visit [workersliberty.org/fundraising](http://workersliberty.org/fundraising)

**Thanks this week to Eddie, Daniel, Jade and Keith. So far we have raised £3224.**



# A government for the rich

By Ann Field

**The Tories are committed to cutting public spending by £30 billion over the next four years. This will mean annual cuts twice the size of any year's cuts over the past five years. Although they have not identified all their cuts it is already clear to some degree where the axe will fall.**

Policies include debarring unemployed under-21s from claiming Housing Benefit and cutting the annual benefits cap — the maximum payable to any claimant, whatever their circumstances — from £26,000 to £23,000.

Jobseeker's Allowance for 18-21 year-olds will be replaced by a six-month Youth Allowance, after which the young unemployed receive nothing if they do not take an apprenticeship, a traineeship, or "community work".

Working-age benefits (apart from disability and pensioner benefits) are to be frozen for two years from April 2016. And leaked DWP papers suggest that the Tories will scrap several other benefits completely and begin to tax disability benefits. Some experts believe the Tories will meanstest Child Benefit, with millions of families losing out.

If the Tories stick to their promise of increasing NHS spending by £8 billion, this will mean even bigger cuts in other areas. Spending on local government and transport is likely to be decimated.

Subsidies for the development of renewable energy will be slashed. Instead there will be big tax breaks for fracking in order to encourage more environmentally destructive onshore drilling for oil and gas.

While the Tories slash welfare benefits and services, other areas of spending will be protected or even increased. The size of the regular armed forces will be maintained, with an army at least 82,000 strong. The armed forces reserves will be increased to 35,000. £40 billion will be spent on Trident renewal.

## PERKS FOR RICH

**The rich and better-off can look forward to all kinds of perks from the Tories over the next five years.**

The threshold for the 40p tax rate goes up to £50,000, for inheritance tax to £1 million. A law will ban any increase in income tax in the life of the Parliament.

Enjoying an absolute majority in Parliament, the Tories can be guaranteed to press ahead with attacks on workplace rights which even their former Lib-Dem coalition partners — hardly champions of workers' rights — found "excessive" and blocked them from implementing.

Big business can look forward to the Tories' "free market instincts" and their commitment to do "everything possible to encourage free enterprise" resulting in the implementation of unspecified Tory promises to "cut red tape". This will mean even more cuts in basic workplace rights, including another tranche of attacks on health and safety laws, while the Tories' new anti-union laws will make it more difficult to fight back.

High on the Tories' legislative programme will be an in-out referendum on membership of the European Union, to be held before the end of 2017 and possibly as early as 2016. The Tories support EU membership. But many of its backbenchers support withdrawal. If Cameron cannot win concessions from the EU on restricting cross-border freedom of movement and denying benefits to EU migrants, the Tories may end up officially backing withdrawal.

The mere staging of the referendum will provide a platform for Tory and UKIP nationalists to further whip up anti-EU and anti-immigration agitation. Now EU migrants will require four years residency before being entitled to social housing. EU jobseekers are to be denied benefits and required to leave the UK after six months if they have not found work.

Skilled migration from outside the EU is to be capped at 20,700 a year. And the principle of "remove first, appeal later" is to be extended to all immigration cases apart from asylum cases. (In fact, the principle already applies to many asylum cases.)

The Tories' pledge to scrap the Human Rights Act, relies on falsely portraying it as an import from the EU which provides immigrants with legal immunities and protection against removal. In fact the Human Rights Act is about... protecting human rights.

Running in parallel with scrapping legal protection for human rights are plans for a "snooper's charter" which will allow the police to monitor internet communications and for new laws "to defeat extremism".

Nominally targeted at Islamist extremists, the new laws will be a licence for an anti-democratic crackdown on all forms of "extremism". They will "combat groups and individuals who reject our values and promote messages of hate." They will allow for "extremist organisations" to be banned (although such powers already exist) and for premises to be shut down "where extremists seek to influence others".

## FREE SCHOOLS

**The Tories are now committed to creating another 500 free schools and transforming 3,000 state schools into academies. This will mean worse working conditions for staff and a widening of inequalities in educational attainments.**

The Tories' "big idea" for housing is not to do what is needed, i.e. to make money available for building more social housing, but to do the opposite: to give Housing Association tenants in England the "right to buy" their accommodation.

In the 1980s Thatcher introduced the 'right to buy' for council tenants, providing them with large discounts based on their length of occupation. The result was that the better council housing was sold off on the cheap, and the costs of housing maintenance and repairs rocketed as a proportion of a council housing department's rental income — it was the remaining stock which was the most in need of repairs and maintenance.

The impact of this "right to buy" on Housing Associations will be the same, as well as being accompanied by job losses (less properties mean less staff) and mergers between stock-depleted housing associations (which will result in further job losses).

The Tories plan further devolution of powers to Scotland ("Smith Commission plus"), a devolution of powers in England to "large cities with elected mayors", a veto for English MPs over issues which affect only England, and reducing the number of MPs to 600.

Cameron believes that such measures will preserve the Union. In fact, however many powers are devolved to Scotland, this will never be enough for the pro-independence SNP. And the proposals for devolution to big cities and for "English votes for English laws" will do nothing to promote a balanced federal structure of 'Home Rule All Round'.

Cameron has been promising a "down to earth" legislative programme, which will deliver "a good life" for everyone willing to work for it and public service reforms which will be rooted in "true social justice and genuine compassion".

In reality, the first Tory government since 1997 to have an absolute majority in Parliament will rule on behalf of the rich, the powerful and the bigoted.

**It will target the poor, the disadvantaged, the sick, the working class, and the one force capable of defeating the Tories' new laws: the trade union movement.**



# Disability can spearheading

By Paula Peters, Disabled People Against Cuts, personal capacity

**The Tory majority government will be disastrous for disabled people, even more than it is already. Over the last five years disabled people have borne the brunt of the cuts — losing nine times more, in financial terms, from their benefits and services, than other people.**

If you add all the current and already proposed cuts in benefits and services together, the total financial loss for disabled people up to 2018 will be £28.3 billion, with things like the ending of the Independent Living Fund, and the ending of the Severe Disability Premium with the introduction of Universal Credit. Now the Tories want to cut another £12 billion from welfare. Iain Duncan Smith says he wants to cuts in working age benefits. Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is going to be taxed. Council budgets are going to impact on care packages. Benefit sanctions will go through the roof.

This is causing enormous stress for disabled people. These cuts will kill; cuts and benefit sanctions have already killed, with people dying of hardship or committing suicide in despair.

We are facing an absolute tsunami of cuts.

When we add to the picture the privatisation of the NHS, the weakening of the voluntary and charity sector and deep cuts to social services, we will soon have no welfare state. We are going back to Victorian times.

The government are also going to make it easier to fire at will.

So people are scared and worried. It has been a tough five years and is going to be another tough five years, but there are things we can do. There are terrific housing campaigns in London and elsewhere. And of course DPAC has been one of the groups to spearhead the resistance.

We are seeing an initial rebellion in reaction to the election, but we need to think long-term. We need to build community campaigns. Everyone fighting the cuts needs to reach out to disabled people in the community. Many of them do not have access to the internet and may not know how they will be affected and what they can do to fight back.

We need to build on the anger in the streets and show people how to get involved.

Trade unions, groups, community forums need to build across the country and we need to link all the campaigns together. The industrial unions have not been good at linking up with the community, and that needs to change. They need to reach out and support people. Trade unionists need to get along to what we

# Oppression, liberation, and disability

By Janine Booth

As we wage the fight of our lives against Tory government attacks on disabled people, it may seem that discussing “models” of disability is an irrelevance, a distraction, a waste of time.

But the approach we use to understand disabled people’s position in capitalist society makes a big difference. Understanding oppression lays the foundation for an effective struggle for liberation.

There are several “models” used to describe disability. The two most prominent are the medical and the social models.

In short, the medical model sees the person’s physical or mental impairment as the problem, and therefore focuses on what a person can not do. The solution it offers is treatment, cure or, failing that, managing the person as an incomplete or defective human being who needs pity, care and decisions made on his/her behalf.

The social model, in contrast, distinguishes between impairment and disability. Impairment is the shortfall in full bodily or mental functioning; disability is the obstruction that society places in the way of an impaired person’s equal participation. Barriers may be physical e.g. steps; use of limited means of communication e.g. print but not Braille; attitudes and prejudices; financial and social disadvantage and stress.

For example, a wheelchair user attempts to enter a building but is confronted by steps. The medical model regards the person’s impairment as the problem; the social model says that although this is an impairment, the disability is the lack of an alternative to the steps. The medical model would either leave the person outside, or perhaps lift them up the steps; the social model would have installed a ramp or lift already.

The medical model has a long history, while the social model was devised by disability rights activists within the last half-century as a challenge to it.

Industrial production caused physical injury on a large scale; imperialist war caused still more. The victims of these, together with other impaired people, have long been treated as objects of pity, whose only hope lay in either a medical cure or dependence and charitable care. The consequence of this has been to disable people, consigning them to institutions or to poverty and social exclusion.

The 1960s and 70s saw a surge in liberation struggles — anti-war protests, feminism, gay liberation, workers’ struggles, and the black civil rights movement. A disability rights movement also grew. Activists spoke out against discrimination and set up Independent Living Centres in several countries.

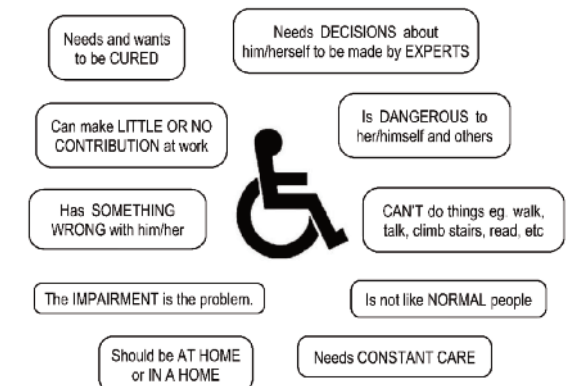
By the mid-70s, socialists in this movement were outlining a distinction between impairment and disability. This became the foundation of the social model of disability. It turned the medical model on its head, and provided a tremendous boost to the confidence and assertiveness of the disability movement. It is a liberatory approach.

The social model, and the movement behind it, has achieved significant progress. Pitiful images of crippled kids on charity collection boxes are being left in the past. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities takes a social model approach, having been drafted by representatives of disabled people’s organisations.

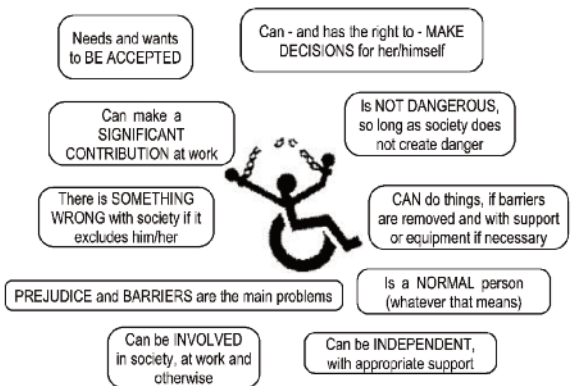
However, even where there has been progress in our legal rights, it is often based on, and therefore limited by, the medical model. The UK’s disability discrimination legislation, incorporated in the 2010 Equality Act, requires a person to prove that they are disabled and therefore entitled to the limited rights contained in the Act by showing what they can not do. It is an individualistic and demeaning process focused on a person’s shortcomings rather than on the barriers that society places in their way.

A social model approach would require organisations to identify barriers and remove them rather than relying on individuals to plead for special treatment. The last Labour government nudged UK legislation in a social model direction

## THE MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



## THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



by introducing the Equality Duty in 2006, obliging public sector bodies to challenge discrimination and promote equality, but the 2010-15 Tory /LibDem coalition government weakened the Duty to the point of practical uselessness.

Attitudes based on the medical model of disability help to maintain and condone the continuing inequality and marginalisation experienced by disabled people.

If the blame lies with the impairment, then there is a logic to blame the impaired person, especially if it can be portrayed as self-inflicted on “all in the mind”. Even if it is not their fault, or a cover for their idleness, then the medical model suggests that what we need is pity rather than the removal of obstacles. In “tough economic times”, pity — or at least, the money to give it practical expression — becomes a luxury society can no longer afford. Disabled people become scroungers, a burden, the “undeserving poor” of the Victorian era.

The social model of disability is not in itself a Marxist theory. Indeed, it is a model — an approach, a way of understanding, a guide to action — rather than strictly a “theory” at all. It is, however, consistent with Marxism.

There are some criticisms of the social model, in particular that it disregards the genuinely significant impact of impairment, and that it fails to address other oppressions alongside disability. However, its strength is that it describes disability in a materialist way, in the context of the society in which impaired people live. Capitalist society causes many impairments and causes discrimination and disadvantage even where it does not cause impairment.

By focusing on material, social barriers, the social model offers the prospect of removing them and achieving equality and liberation through self-organisation and struggle.

To paraphrase Marx, disabled people have thus far had to deal with an oppressive society; the point, however, is to change it.

• The TUC Disabled Workers’ Committee’s guidance, Trade Unions and Disabled Members: Why the social model matters, can be downloaded at [www.tuc.org.uk/disability](http://www.tuc.org.uk/disability)



# Campaigns resistance

are doing and support us and take the message out to a wider public.

The union leaders need to do more in supporting rank-and-file union members. They need to support whistle blowers in workplaces. When there is a strike, the strikes need to be supported. In Bromley, where I am from, there has been a strike [against privatisation of local services] for five weeks now. It needs support. The point is we should have been supporting each other in the last five years. We need to do that. It is the only way to build a big resistance.

We have got to remember that this government only has a majority of 12. I think they are on a crash course with people on the Human Rights Act. There will be a rebellion from backbenchers and opposition parties on that. And they are on a collision course with the trade unions over the right to strike.

We are living in worrying times and interesting times. We need to be empowering people and showing how it is possible to stand and fight. We need to say to workers in jobs, these fights [over benefit cuts etc.] are their fights. If you’re off sick for four weeks you will face a strict fit-for-work test.

**The Tories came for disabled people, now they are coming for workers. We need to build towards strike action but one day is not enough, it will not win anything. We need to build cross-union strike action for more than a day. We need to give people hope.**

• Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC): <http://dpac.uk.net>

## The new “Minister against the disabled”

**The new Tory disabilities minister, Justin Tomlinson, has in the past voted against protecting benefits for disabled children.**

He supported letting contribution-based Employment and Support allowance expire for those undergoing cancer treatment. He voted against a minimum floor on the amount of money that could be given to disabled children and against a plan to stop benefits being eroded by rising prices.

As disabilities minister Tomlinson will have responsibility for the Access to Work fund, which provides money for disabled people to enter work, a fund which the DWP has already threatened to cut. Tomlinson will also be responsible for child poverty and other cross governmental disability issues.

**The man tasked with helping Iain Duncan Smith cut £12 billion from the welfare budget certainly has the correct resumé for it!**

# Make sure Murphy goes!

By Dale Street

**After surviving a no-confidence vote by 17 votes to 14 at the meeting of the Labour Party Scottish Labour Party Executive Committee (16 May), the Party's leader, Jim Murphy, tendered his resignation.**

Murphy's election as SLP leader last December was the product of a carefully orchestrated plot by Blairite MSPs and Scottish Labour MPs. Last summer Murphy was given the lead role in the Better Together campaign, in order to raise his profile. The Blairites then triggered the resignation of incumbent leader Johann Lamont, reportedly by circulating a statement of no confidence in her.

With Lamont gone, Murphy was presented as the "big hitter" (never mind the politics!) on the basis of his role in Better Together. That was also the basis on which he secured his election.

The left – in the Labour Party and in the affiliated unions – warned that his election as leader would be a disaster for the SLP. And so, unfortunately, it proved to be, with the SLP losing 40 of its 41 seats on 7 May.

True that the scale of that defeat cannot be attributed to just one person. Nor can the scale of the defeat be attributed to the politics embodied in that one person. Those politics had been sapping the life out of the SLP for years before Murphy took up office, resulting in an ongoing decline in electoral support.

Given his typical Blairite arrogance, Murphy was — and is — someone who believed that he was right and the rest of the world was wrong. He refused to take responsibility for the SLP's defeat and instead attributed it to weaknesses within the SLP which he had not had time to remedy.

In the days following Murphy's declaration that he was staying on as SLP leader, a campaign among rank-and-file

Labour Party members got off the ground. At two days notice over a hundred members attended a teatime meeting in Glasgow convened by the Campaign for Socialism.

This was a rank-and-file revolt by Labour Party members, not a manoeuvre instigated by Len McCluskey in London, as claimed by Murphy in announcing his resignation.

Murphy's own politics doubtless precluded him from understanding that the Labour Party membership was not a passive body whose role in life was to be manipulated by Murphy and bossed around by his sidekick John McTernan, but one capable of asserting its will.

## FARAGE

**According to an unnamed SLP spokesperson quoted in the Observer, Murphy's resignation is "not a Farage".**

Murphy is not handing in his resignation only for it to be refused by the SLP Executive Committee (more akin to the withdrawal of the Tsar's abdication by popular demand in Eisenstein's *Ioan the Terrible* than to the Farage scenario).

Even so, there is no room for complacency, and no reason to exclude the possibility of backroom manoeuvring by people who believe that presentation is more important than politics (even though their presentational skills have proven to be even worse than their politics).

Murphy could have resigned on the spot on Saturday. He could have said that his resignation would come into effect at the next meeting of the SLP Executive Committee. He didn't. He made a point of saying that the next meeting of the SLP EC could refuse to accept his resignation.

The SLP EC currently has a majority so out of touch with reality that they voted on Saturday against the no confidence motion. If they have so much confidence in Murphy, why should they accept his resignation at the next meeting?

The 17 who backed Murphy included Murphy himself and



His rule was a disaster for Labour

a Labour peer unconstitutionally drafted in (by whom?) to take up one of the two seats on the EC reserved for Westminster MPs. The vacancy arose because the SLP has only one MP left in Westminster.

The following scenario is therefore not outside the bounds of possibility:

- Big Jim Murphy offers his resignation for the good of the party, even though only a troublesome minority under the control of Len McCluskey opposes him. In the following weeks the silent majority in the CLPs rallies behind him.

- When the SLP EC next meets, it decides that it would be in breach of the wishes of the majority of the party membership to accept Murphy's resignation. Murphy then remains in the post on the back of supposed popular acclamation.

CLPs should keep up the pressure on the SLP EC by passing motions which welcome Murphy's resignation as an opportunity to move on from the disaster of 7 May and to concentrate on defining the politics needed to win next year's Holyrood elections.

**And when Murphy goes, he should take McTernan and all his bag-carriers, flunkies, wasters, spin doctors, hangers-on and has-beens with him.**

# Murphy tries to shift the blame

By Dale Street

**When Jim Murphy announced he was standing down Murphy claimed that he had been "at the centre of a campaign by the London leadership of Unite the Union, (who) blame myself or the Scottish Labour Party for the defeat of the UK Labour Party in the general election."**

"Sometimes people see it as a badge of honour to have [Unite General Secretary] Mr McCluskey's support. I see it as a kiss of death to be supported by that type of politics... We cannot have our leaders selected or deselected by the grudges and grievances of one prominent man."

"The leader of the Scottish Labour Party doesn't serve at the grace of Len McCluskey, and the next leader of the UK Labour Party should not be picked by Len McCluskey."

Len McCluskey has twice been elected Unite's General Secretary, in 2010 and again in 2013.

Either way, Murphy's criticisms of McCluskey amount to a gross insult of the majority of Unite members who have backed McCluskey in two successive union elections.

And that, in itself, tells you a lot about Murphy's own politics and view of the world: He's right, and the rest of the world (including the Scottish Labour Party, its affiliated unions, and the Scottish electorate) is wrong.

Murphy's claim is incoherent in another respect.

In mid-2013 Ed Miliband announced the Collins Review, involving a fundamental change in the relationship between affiliated trade unions and the Labour Party, one which will lead to unions having much less of a say in the Labour Party's decision-making processes.

McCluskey backed the Collins Review from the outset. Although many Unite activists opposed it, and were correct to do so, McCluskey argued for support for the Collins Review in Unite and in the broader trade union movement.

But Murphy, and those who share his politics, did not denounce McCluskey's support for the Collins Review as "the kiss of death" and more evidence of his "destructive behaviour". On the contrary, they welcomed his support.

Murphy's claim that who Unite decides to back in Labour Party elections is the product of "the grudges and grievances of one prominent man" is another claim that does not stand up to scrutiny.

When Unite backed Neil Findlay and Katy Clark in last year's Scottish Labour Party (deputy) leadership contest, it did so because their election platform embodied Unite's policies. Jim Murphy's election platform certainly didn't. Nor did Kezia Dugdale's.

Murphy was equally wrong in claiming that in the week between the general election and last weekend's meeting of the Scottish Labour Party Executive Committee he had been "at the centre of a campaign by the London leadership of Unite the Union."

## DRIVING

**He had certainly been at the centre of a campaign calling on him to resign. But the driving force behind that campaign were ordinary members of the Scottish Labour Party who saw Murphy's position as untenable after the debacle of 7 May.**

Only a minority of them were Unite members. And even those who were Unite members were acting at their own initiative, not under the instructions of "the London leadership of Unite the Union".

Murphy was particularly angered by what he described as McCluskey having "blamed myself or the Scottish Labour Party for the defeat of the UK Labour Party in the general election." But McCluskey's actual argument was straightforward. The leadership and politics of Jim Murphy, following on from the Labour-Tory-Lib-Dem Better Together alliance, had allowed the SNP to pick up the votes of many traditional Labour voters.

The growth in support for the SNP had then allowed the Tories in England to win votes through an appeal to English nationalism, by presenting themselves as the people who would stick up for the English against the SNP.

And that argument is backed up by facts.

Anyone who canvassed in Scotland during the election campaign will have experienced longstanding Labour voters saying that they were switching to the SNP because of — although certainly not solely because of — Better Together and the politics embodied by Murphy.

That was the sentiment which the SNP opportunistically played to in their election material:

"Labour used to stand up to the Tories. Not any more.

Labour and the Tories campaigned together in the referendum. And they voted together at Westminster for deeper spending cuts. The only way to lock out the Tories and force Labour back to its roots is to vote SNP."

The surge in SNP support was then exploited by the Tories in England.

Even if it could have been better phrased, McCluskey was right to make the connection between Murphy, the SNP surge at Labour's expense in Scotland, and Labour's eventual defeat at a UK level.

Murphy thinks that it is the "kiss of death" to be backed by McCluskey. But it was Murphy's seizure of the leadership of the Scottish Labour Party last year which proved to be the "kiss of death" for its election prospects on 7 May — and possibly even longer.

And Murphy and his supporters seem determined to carry on with their attacks on McCluskey, and the broader principle of trade union input into the Labour Party.

On Monday 18th, two days after Murphy's denunciation of McCluskey, the Scottish press ran front-page articles under the headline (or slight variations of it): "Len McCluskey: Unite could back SNP if new Labour leader ignores unions."

In fact, what McCluskey had said in the interview referred to in the articles was not consistent with the headlines.

McCluskey had said: most Unite members voted SNP; there is a Unite rules conference in July which may introduce new rules allowing non-Labour candidates to be backed; if Labour wants to retain Unite support, it needs to support working people.

Although the logic of the proposed new rules, if adopted, would allow Unite (or individual Unite branches) to support SNP candidates, nowhere did McCluskey actually say this. McCluskey did no more than make a series of factually accurate statements about the current situation in Unite.

The fact that the entire Scottish press punted the same line — McCluskey says Unite may support the SNP — suggests that this was a line fed to them, probably from the Murphy-McTernan team.

**Murphy may be stepping down. But his pernicious influence on the future of the Scottish Labour Party — if it has one — as embodied in his attacks on McCluskey is far from finished.**



# England right, Scotland left?

By Rhodri Evans

**One story being told about the 7 May election is that Scotland has become left-wing, and England right-wing. Labour lost, so they say, because it was too left-wing for England and too right-wing for Scotland.**

A likelier explanation is that the SNP was able to project itself as both a bit left-wing, and safe, whereas Labour's combination of general talk against "predators" with extravagantly cautious and tiny policies left it looking neither really left-wing nor really safe.

The SNP was able to scoop up a swathe of middle-of-the-road, disaffected-leftish, or left-on-some-things-right-on-others voters who in England voted Green, Ukip, or even Tory, or didn't vote. Turnout in Scotland, 71%, was significantly higher than overall, 66%.

The basis for this SNP success is the surge of nationalism in Scotland, which allows those who see an independent Scotland as a welfare oasis and those who see it as a low-corporate-tax destination for global capital to imagine a common cause.

The British and Scottish Social Attitudes surveys are the nearest we have to statistics. They show Scottish people to be a shade more leftish than England, but no more than we would expect from the fact that Scotland's population is more concentrated in big cities than England's.

Trade-union density is a bit higher in Scotland than in England. Like Wales, whose union density is a shade higher again, it has a higher percentage of public-sector employment. Two-thirds of Scotland's population is in its five biggest city areas, and only 33% of England's. 35% of Wales's population is in three city areas.

36% of voters in England and Wales wanted more tax and more social spending; 52% of voters wanted to stay the same; 7% wanted tax cuts and spending cuts. In Scotland it was 44%, 48%, 5%.

Although Scotland has no university tuition fees, 73% in Scotland said it should have; 78% in England and Wales supported fees.

40% in Scotland want the EU to have looser powers, but to stay in; 17% want out. In England and Wales it was 39% and 25% ([bit.ly/scotleft](http://bit.ly/scotleft)).

Such opinion surveys are always unreliable, because dependent on exactly how questions are phrased and in what context. But they fit with other evidence: Scotland does not necessarily have (proportionately) bigger demonstrations or



SNP: a bit left wing and a bit safe

anti-cuts campaigns or strikes than England.

The best guess from the evidence is that opinion in Scotland, as in England and Wales, edged to the right during the Blair years and has continued that way, but it is fluid and by no means hardened.

Two conclusions follow for the labour movement. A shift back to full-on Blairite politics by Labour in England would have damaging results as in Scotland, even if the impact is less immediately spectacular because no party in England has the SNP's ability to scoop

up a range of the disaffected.

Secondly, the idea that unions disaffiliating from Labour in Scotland (as some suggest) will allow a new left surge there is fantasy.

The Labour Party was formed in Britain thanks to long efforts by growing socialist organisations who pulled unions, at first a minority of unions, with them. In Scotland, the last decade has seen a spectacular decline of the socialist left, much greater than the damage we have suffered in England.

In the 2001 general election the Scottish Socialist Party — the activist core of which came from the former Scottish organisation of Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal — got between 6% and 10% of the vote in every constituency in Glasgow, bar one where it got 4.5%.

This time the SSP, much weaker in activists than it was in 2001, ran in only four constituencies in Scotland, two in Glasgow, averaging 0.5%. Elsewhere it advised voters to back the bourgeois SNP. TUSC, the other attempt to run left-of-Labour candidates in Scotland, did worse in Glasgow (average 0.5%) than its poor average across Britain (0.6%).

If unions were about to disaffiliate because they had waged a real left-wing battle against Labour's leaders had reached breaking point, things would be different.

**In fact it's more a matter of union leaders being bothered by their members swinging to the SNP, and disaffiliation would almost surely lead to unions' politics in Scotland being reduced to client-relationship-type haggling for deals with SNP and the Labour rump.**

# Unite and a New Popular Front

By Jim Denham

**"... The [Labour] party's leaders in parliament know that if they were to lose Unite, there could be an English Syriza formed with more resources and dynamism than the party it would replace" — Counterfire**

It hasn't been widely publicised, but for the last couple of years Unite leader Len McCluskey has been saying that in the event of Labour losing the general election, Unite would seriously consider disaffiliating from the party.

Many of us considered this a bizarre position to take: surely the aftermath of a Labour defeat, and the ensuing ideological struggle between the Blairite right and various more left-wing currents, is precisely the time when affiliated unions should be exerting their influence?

McCluskey's strange position seems to have been a concession to anti-Labour forces within the union, which include the Socialist Party (and their pathetic TUSC electoral front), various free-lance syndicalists within the United Left, a significant number of Scottish members, and — perhaps most importantly — his "Chief of Staff" Andrew Murray, to whom he has in effect sub-contracted the running of politics within the union.

Murray, a member of the Communist Party of Britain who is on record supporting North Korea, tends to decide the union's political "line" without reference to the union's executive, in accordance with his own Stalinist predilections.

Murray is part of the current within the CPB that favoured closer links with Galloway and Respect and, through his

prominent involvement in the Stop The War Coalition also has a close relationship with John Rees, Lindsey German and their small ex-Trotskyist organisation Counterfire.

This influence over the union's leadership accounts for the enormous resources Unite has poured into Counterfire's initiative the People's Assembly, Murray announcing (without debate) the union as supporting Lutfur Rahman in Tower Hamlets, and also McCluskey's hesitation about calling for a Labour vote in Scotland.

Counterfire and its circle have two prominent friends in the mainstream press, Seumas Milne (in the *Guardian*) and Owen Jones, both of whom, immediately prior to the election, were promoting the idea of a popular frontist anti-Tory coalition, and the idea that a Tory minority government would be, in effect, a "coup" against the anti-Tory parliamentary majority.

Counterfire is small and politically insignificant, but via Murray, it wields influence within Unite. Therefore Unite activists who understand the vital political importance of maintaining the Labour link should prepare for battle against the defeatists, class collaborationists and syndicalists who'll be arguing for a break with Labour and the creation of a lash-up with the SNP, the Greens and even (according to the schema put forward by Seumas Milne) sections of the Lib Dems!

**They may present it as "an English Syriza" reacting to the "Pasokification" of Labour ("English" because the SNP's autonomy in Scotland must be respected), but in reality it would be a new variation on an old, class-collaborationist theme: the Popular Front.**

# Jacques Morand, 1938-2015

By Martin Thomas

**Jean-Claude Kerjouan, known in his political activity as Jacques Morand or Illy, died on 10 May, at the age of 77. He was a leader of the L'Étincelle group in France, with which AWL have collaborated for many years.**

L'Étincelle is now a group within the NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party), but was previously, from the early 1990s until it was expelled in 2008, a faction in another large French revolutionary socialist group, Lutte Ouvrière [LO].

As far as we can see Lutte Ouvrière has published no tribute to Morand. Yet for many decades he was a leader of LO. He joined in 1956, as a high-school student, and by the time we came to know LO fairly well, in the 1970s, he was one of its three prominent speakers and writers, with Francois Duburg and Georges Kaldy. LO's other main leader, Raymond Barcia, known as Hardy, who died in 2009 ([bit.ly/hardlo](http://bit.ly/hardlo)), was more reclusive.

We had known a bit about LO (or Voix Ouvrière, as it was called before 1968) since 1967, from a former LO member active in Britain for a while. We learned about the skill and precision it had developed in the production of workplace bulletins, combining workplace news with socialist politics. LO continues to produce many such bulletins, and so does L'Étincelle. AWL produces some on a similar model, trying to learn from LO's work.

We have also tried to learn from the systematic and meticulous way in which LO discusses with and educates contacts, and integrates new members.

In the mid-70s LO organised a series of international discussion conferences open to all Trotskyists. After a while, though the conferences were still open, the only people coming were LO, its small sister groups elsewhere, and us.

We had a period of more intensive discussion with LO. As part of that I went to work with LO in Paris for some months. Both LO and we concluded that our differences made closer links impossible; but the experience was valuable.

LO's style has always been dour, but Morand often added a twist of humour or inquiry to the message. In their tribute L'Étincelle's US comrades, "Speak Out Now", recall "his curiosity, his interest in others, his kindness to all and his sense of humour".

Maybe it was that talent for looking at things aslant which led to the division between the rest of the LO leadership. In the early 1990s he and a few other central LO activists observed that Russia, after the collapse of the Stalinist regime in 1991, was mutating to capitalism.

LO's established doctrine was that the other Stalinist states were bourgeois states (because there had been no workers' revolution), but the USSR was a degenerated workers' state. We always thought this view was incoherent, and explicable only from a quirk of LO's history. LO was the continuation of a group which was active from 1939 to about 1948 (at which date most Trotskyists still balked at calling the East European regimes workers' states) and then lapsed from some years. It was revived in 1956, and made it a rule to avoid theoretical innovation.

Incoherent or not, the doctrine saved LO from the illusions about revolutionary Stalinism which afflicted other Trotskyists. After 1991, however, some theoretical innovation or other was necessary. The other LO leaders did not think so. They condemned the perception of a mutation to capitalism in Russia as premature. Morand and his co-thinkers were pitched into being, not just comrades with a different view, but a faction. They also came to differ from the majority in advocating more open, unity-seeking, experimental tactics.

We were able to discuss with them repeatedly from about 1997. I remember one discussion with Morand in which I put it to him that if Russia between 1917 and 1991 had regressed from workers' power to capitalist rule, then it made no sense to see the decisive setback as in 1991. It must be located in the late 1920s. Morand agreed tentatively that "one might say" that the USSR had been state-capitalist as far back as the 1930s. We got no further, but like every discussion with Morand, it was bracing, thought-provoking, memorable.

**We mourn the loss to the movement from his death, and send our condolences to his comrades and friends.**

• [bit.ly/morand](http://bit.ly/morand)

• [speakout-now.org/jacques-morand-tribute/](http://speakout-now.org/jacques-morand-tribute/)

# Greek health workers strike against cuts

By Theodora Polenta

**The trade union Poedhn, representing all workers in Greece's public sector hospitals, has called a 24-hour strike for Wednesday 20 May, with a demonstration at 12.30 outside the Ministry of Health.**

The hospital workers are demanding money to fund public and free healthcare, staff recruitment, and payment of accrued overtime for doctors and nurses.

The role of Syriza's trade-union fraction in the health sector is of pivotal importance. General meetings were called of all Syriza's healthcare workers between 11 and 15 May and a decision was taken to build and support the strike. Every Syriza member is responsible for calling general assemblies and touring their workplaces to popularise the 20 May strike and help impose the saving and reclaiming of public health as a very rigid "red line" for the Syriza-Anel government.

The 20 February agreement between the Syriza-led government and the eurozone finance ministers, in which Syriza leaders promised full debt payments and no "unilateral" actions without eurozone approval, has created concern and confusion in the workplaces and a "waiting" stance.

Syriza's rank and file and health-care workers can break this passivity and bring the drawbacks of the February agreement out into the open.

They should be exposing the hypocrisy of the Pasok and New Democracy (ND) groups in the union, who organised no effective fight against the dismantling of the public health system during the previous Memorandum years, and now are opportunistically agitating about the tragic situation of public health and blaming all its ills on the Syriza government. The Pasok and ND factions which hold the majority in Poedhn hypocritically denounce the underfunding of public health, but accept the operation of public hospitals as businesses that sell services to patients.

The trade union leaders of Syriza and the revolutionary left should not become passive applauders of the government, but fight in order to hold the government accountable and "support" the government by demanding it deliver on its pre-election commitments. At the same time the trade union leaders should be ready to defend the government if it carries through its promises and defies the blackmail from the EU, the ECB and the IMF.

Syriza's local organisations can organise meetings or assemblies in every neighbourhood to contribute consistently in the same direction.

The Health Minister had promised 4,500 new recruits for



the public health system, but made no commitment to increase government health spending for 2015. Hospitals are still in a terrible economic situation. State funding of public hospitals fell by 60% over the years of 2010-2014 and the budget for 2015 is €290 million less than for 2014.

Shortages of basic goods, pharmaceutical and medical supplies, are becoming unmanageable. Even the government's commitment to recruit 4500 additional doctors has been postponed, and most of the recruitment done has been on temporary contracts.

In January-April 2015, hospitals received a total regular state funding of €43.3 million. In the same period in 2014, they received €229.6 million, and even that was not sufficient to cover their needs. The government is implementing the state budget for 2015 decided by the previous administration, which reduced by 22.9% the already insufficient state funding for healthcare.

In this way, the government is inadvertently opening the way for hospitals to try to cover their operational needs, including staff salaries, by "selling" health services to patients.

The Syriza government's abolition of the €5 "ticket" for hospital appointments and the introduction of access to health care for 2.5 million uninsured people, including the

unemployed, by the Syriza government, were positive steps, but not enough to stop the deterioration of the public health system.

Pro-Memorandum hospital administrations remain in their positions and are oriented to further privatisation and subcontracting of public health care.

The Syriza government, needs to step up its game in tune with its pre-election pledges: that is to reverse all damage being done during the memorandum year and to extend and democratise health care service provision so that it is "free at the point of use" with no exclusions.

The public hospitals, which were closed during the memorandum years, such as the special hospital for infectious diseases and the General Patisision hospital, should be reopened. The government should make the "unilateral" decision not to hand over money for debt repayments and instead to redirect public funds to enable to full and immediate access to public health facilities for all.

**A government that oscillates between EU-IMF pressures and the expectations of its base can go nowhere. The only "bridge agreement" that should be accepted by the people is the cancellation of the debt. We have no right to "compromise" with social disaster.**

## Piraeus docks strike against privatisation

**Hundreds of dock workers marched to Piraeus [Greece] on Thursday 7 May, and there was a 24-day strike in the sector in response to the government's reported intention to proceed with the completion of the sale of 67% of Piraeus Port Authority.**

The strike was called by the Panhellenic Federation of Dockers (Omyle), the dock workers' union of OLP, and the union of seamen, Penen. A strike and demonstration also took place in Thessaloniki.

"They are trying in a thousand different ways to give the port to Cosco [the Chinese corporation which already operates part of Piraeus port]" said Giannis Tsalimoglou, a Piraeus worker. "Unfortunately, after three months of the coalition government of Syriza-Anel, Syriza's electoral promises that the port will not be sold and the contract with Cosco will be cancelled have collapsed like a house of cards.

"The greatest responsibility lies with the Minister for Shipping and the Aegean, Theodoris Dritsas. From 2005 he had been here with us at demonstrations, but now he has gone over to the other side.

"Unfortunately for them, we are here today. And tomorrow and when required. My demand on the union, after today's strike, is that if the government does not commit against the selling off the port, the union should call a multi-day strike. Or even to go to camp outside the Ministry of Shipping."

"There is an ongoing process for the privatisation of OPL, despite the government's commitments to the contrary," said Nikos Georgiou, president of the dock workers' union on Piraeus Port Authority. "Privatisation is not a matter that concerns only the workers at the port. The majority of the working-class people and the popular strata of Piraeus are against it. These are clearly neoliberal moves that have been failing for the last 20 years".

The rally was addressed by Tasos Anastasiadis from Antarsya: "We are here today just like all previous years to oppose the privatisation of Piraeus port. The retreats and compromises which the Troika, the EU and the IMF are trying to impose on the government are translating into further privatisations, continued cuts and Memoranda. The power that can halt these moves is the workers with their struggle and strikes. Onwards until victory!"

Even during the first days of the government, and despite the programmatic statements of the minister of Shipping, Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis stated in an interview given to the BBC he was not averse to the further privatisation of Piraeus port. Deputy prime minister Yannis Dragasakis, on a visit to Beijing, reinstated the government's commitment to proceed with the further privatization of Piraeus port, implying that the government would sell its majority stake of the shares of the Port Authority to Cosco.

Cosco already runs part of the port of Piraeus port under

a long-term contract organised by the previous Memorandum government. It has imposed worse conditions in the port's free economic zone and for its employees.

Before its election victory on 25 January 2015, Syriza was categorically against the sale of the state's majority holding in Piraeus port, a sale that was launched by the Memorandum government of ND and Pasok. The Syriza leaders' apparent about-turn on this is a dangerous setback, among many that have occurred so far in the course of negotiations with the "EU/IMF partners" who systematically and methodically mess up and cancel out even the minimum electoral promises of Syriza.

More than ever the working class movement must intervene directly with public actions and initiatives, expressing the option of conflict and rupture. The political forces of the left inside and outside Syriza have to take immediate initiatives to avoid a humiliating compromise and thus the political and social defeat of the left.

**Faced with the "fatalistic path" to the third memorandum, we do not need "false alarms" and hollow "threats" or even more "bluffs", but brave political decisions: defaulting on debt payments, abolition of Memoranda. and unravelling of the Memorandum regime. We need a plan of rupture against the domestic and international capitalist system.**

# Strike to save London Met jobs!

Max Watson, London Met Unison branch secretary, spoke to *Solidarity*

**The Section 188 redundancy consultation is now over and we are waiting for the results.**

Management used changes to the law for a shorter, 45 day, consultation, and we got this extended by just a week. It is likely they will make people reapply for their jobs, forcing people to go through the very upsetting process of competing with their colleagues.

We've fought against job cuts and privatisation, and to defend overseas students before — our members are used to fighting management and are prepared to

do so again. We had unanimous votes for strike action at our branch meetings and a consultative ballot, conducted over the Easter holidays, 86% voted for strike action.

## YES

**We are confident that we will get a yes vote in the ballot which ends on Friday 22 May.**

There is a huge feeling of anger and resentment for being made to suffer for management's strategic blunders which have caused this crisis.

The University leadership has driven us from one crisis to another, and are now proposing cuts again. We have faced year on year cuts every year for the past five

years. This is the largest attack since 2011.

The cuts focus on the Faculty of Business and Law.

University management claim this is because student numbers are down in this faculty. However we think it is part of their longer term plan to restructure the university campuses into one campus based on the Holloway Road Campus, even though the university has just spent £10 million on refurbishing the Moorgate building, where business and law are housed.

Staff are not cowed by these year on year cuts. We continue to organise a new layer of reps and activists. We won a living wage campaign and we have high

density in outsourced sections. Cleaners and security guards now have high density. Outsourced catering staff have 85% density.

Every time they have come to attack us we have increased our membership — people join the union as they see us resisting the on-going attacks.

## UCU

**We have been working closely with the UCU since the fight against job cuts in 2009 where we took three strike days together.**

There are however rules which hamper us and hold us to different timelines — for example the ballots over job cuts this time have been at different times.

Tower Building (166-220 Holloway Road) and at Ladbroke House (62-66 Highbury Grove) from 8.30am.

**Join the #HandsOffLondonMet solidarity rally at Highbury Fields at 1pm.**

• <https://uculondonmet.wordpress.com>

calating strikes — not simply an isolated one day strike. Action short of strike will also escalate to a marking boycott if required. The one day strike on Thursday 21 May will be followed by two days the following week, three days the next week and further strikes to be decided if needed.

Join picket lines at the

The weak point is with the student union, who currently have a position of "neutrality". We know they are coming under lots of pressure for the university to not support us.

The fight is not just about jobs but all cuts and the effect on our staff. We are using the slogan "cut stress, not jobs". Even if people leave voluntarily it's about a job being lost and the effect on other people.

Redundancies leave an increasingly stressed and overworked work force behind, as people have to pick up the work left by the loss of 165 jobs. IT services had 30% sickness absence rate at the beginning of last term. Staff are already under too much stress and we cannot continue with this spiral of decline.

Management have said in a leaked document they want to "manage out" the "actively disengaged" staff (who they feel do not commit to management's initiatives). We have turned this round and produced badges saying "actively disengaged" for our members to wear in a show of defi-



ance.

Management's own staff survey recently found that 83% have no trust or confidence in their leadership. Until we see change in leadership and management those staff will continue to be "actively disengaged".

While we wait for the ballot result (due on 22 May) we are leafletting members to keep the momentum up and are planning a winning strategy which includes action short of strike and a 'work to rule'.

**UCU have now announced their first day of strike action on 21 May and we will do all we can to show our support within the rigid laws and existing protocols and ensure that all further action is coordinated.**

**UCU members at London Metropolitan University will strike on Thursday 21 May in the dispute over 165 job losses.**

UCU members voted by 85% for strikes over the job cuts and agreed in a meeting on 12 May to strike on Thursday 21 May. UCU has a Dispute Resolution meeting with representatives of

the Board of Governors on Wednesday 20 May. It was decided to have a strike planned so that Governors at the meeting would be left with no doubt as to the strength of feeling and resolve of members to defend jobs.

The UCU branch meeting also decided that it will launch a programme of es-

## FE colleges fight cuts

By a UCU member

**UCU members at Lewisham and Southwark college (LeSoCo) have voted by 85% for strikes over job cuts.**

At a meeting with the chair of the college governors, union reps made it quite clear that we were going to fight to build a college, not a scrapheap composed of redundant education workers and working class people denied a further education.

Already, more than a hundred students have demonstrated to governors their opposition at a meeting at the Camberwell site. This is only the beginning of a range of actions, on all sites, which will now unfold over the coming weeks.

By the last week in June, as many as nine London colleges will be in action, actions which are becoming increasingly synchronised.

We call on all college workers across the country to bring forward their ballots and actions, to join

their resistance and to join in the broader fight against austerity and cuts.

As we go to press, the joint branch meeting has decided on a series of escalating strike days through June. Other tactics are being discussed that will feed into the strike action and build links with the other unions, Unison and NUS. Links with the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign have already proved fruitful.

We will contact every nurse, every bricklayer, every technician and care-worker, every public ser-



vant who began their working life with a training at LeSoCo.

**We will call on them to make a gesture for the defence of future generations by the defence of their old college.**

some college sites and courses.

**Workers at Greenwich college struck four times in April and on 1 May and are meeting to plan more strikes.**

• Message of support Greenwich — [Markw@gcc.uk](mailto:Markw@gcc.uk) City and Islington — [Veronika.Johnson@candi.ac.uk](mailto:Veronika.Johnson@candi.ac.uk)

## Squeeze on uni staff

**University staff have been offered a cost-of-living pay rise of just 1% after the annual round of negotiation between unions and employers' organisation UCEA.**

The bosses have paid lip-service to calls for a living wage, proposing to increase the bottom points of the pay scale (though there are no promises this will extend to outsourced workers). But they're increasingly trying to sneak in performance-related pay, offering higher rises for those who jump through their hoops.

The offer now goes back to the unions for discussion. UCU will debate strategy at its annual congress at the end of May.

The pay offer is clearly inadequate but after the shambles of the 2013-14 pay dispute, many members are sceptical about the union's ability to lead a serious fight. The left needs to have an honest discussion about how best to turn that mood around.

Immediately, activists should organise for the na-

tional demonstration against casualisation in higher education called by Warwick UCU on 18 June. Outside the formal negotiations, the biggest squeeze on pay and conditions is happening through the shifting of teaching onto highly-casualised adjunct staff. Warwick managers have been leading the way here with a scheme to roll out a national casualised staff agency for university tutors.

**Let's make sure they can't get away with it!**

• National demonstration against Casualisation — [bit.ly/NoCasualisation](http://bit.ly/NoCasualisation)

## Reinstate Candy!

By Charlotte Zalens

**National Gallery bosses have sacked PCS rep Candy Udwin following her disciplinary hearing on Tuesday 12 May.**

Over 50 gallery workers and supporters, including PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka, held a protest in front of Candy's hearing.

**Gallery staff will strike on Wednesday 20 May and from 26 May to 4 June. PCS has also called a national demonstration to save the gallery on 30 May, in Trafalgar Square.**

## Other industrial news

**FBU conference report — [bit.ly/FBU-conf](http://bit.ly/FBU-conf)**

**22 strike days for Barking and Dagenham**

**bin lorry drivers — [bit.ly/BDBins](http://bit.ly/BDBins)**

**Eighth week of Glasgow homelessness**

**support workers' strike —**

**[bit.ly/Glasgow-homeless](http://bit.ly/Glasgow-homeless)**



# Solidarity

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## Support Network Rail strikes

**Network Rail workers will strike for 24 hours from 5pm on Monday 25 May, and will impose a 48-hour overtime ban from midnight on Sunday 24 May, in their campaign over pay and for job security.**

Members of the RMT union and the TSSA union voted for strikes after workers in both unions rejected Network Rail's latest pay offer: a £500 non-consolidated payment followed by increases pegged to the Retail Price Index until 2017, with a no-compulsory-redundancies guarantee withdrawn from 31 December 2016.

Network Rail claims it cannot afford a larger pay award, despite reporting £1 billion profits in June 2014, and top directors earning close to £1 million per year, enjoying increases of up to 47%.

RMT's ballot returned a huge majority for strikes, with 80% voting for them on a 60% turnout. TSSA members voted by 53% for strikes, and by 80% for action short of strikes, on a turnout of slightly more than 50%. The RMT's ballot would pass even the stringent new restrictions on strike ballots proposed by



the Tories.

As *Solidarity* went to press, on 19 May, Network Rail bosses have issued a legal challenge to the TSSA ballot (but not to the RMT one), stating "numerous defects" with the ballot but not giving details.

The strike will be the first national walkout on the mainline railway system since a signallers' strike in 1994. Network Rail employees work in a variety of roles, including signalling, maintenance, and engineering. A solid strike will have a huge impact on train services throughout the country.

The strike is particularly significant as the first

major national dispute since the re-election of the Tories, and the first since they announced their intention to quickly press ahead with imposing new anti-strike laws. The strike is part of a wider battle across the entire railway industry against destaffing and attacks on pay and conditions, resulting from the recommendations of the McNulty Report (commissioned by New Labour and accelerated by the Tories).

**As *Solidarity* went to press, on 19 May, unions were meeting Network Rail bosses at conciliation service ACAS for talks.**

## Keep up the pace!

**By a Network Rail worker**

**It's good that RMT moved quickly after the ballot to set dates for action, which put pressure on TSSA. We should make sure the pace of the dispute continues to accelerate now.**

In the RMT, the campaign has been inclusive and had an all-grades focus; the engineering side has been given as much prominence as the operational side, which includes signallers.

The talks at ACAS could lead to the strike being called off. But the re-election of the Tories might encourage management to dig their heels in.

We need to mobilise support, both locally and nationally, and counter the anti-union offensive in the press. The unions' national press departments need to do more, but local branches, Regional Councils, and Trades Councils should be making sure we're getting leaflets out there, and using the local press.

Unions should organise high-profile pickets and solidarity demonstrations at stations. These might not directly affect whether or not people come into work, as most signal boxes and engineering depots aren't at stations, but will have a lot of propaganda value. We can learn from the work RMT activists did with "Hands Off London Transport" on London Underground, leafleting members of the public to explain the links between the industrial dispute and the wider issues. Passengers need a properly-staffed railway, staffed by well-paid workers in se-



that our class unites us across national boundaries. It will be interesting to see whether Plaid Cymru and the SNP, who postured in the election as opponents of austerity and parties of the broad left, will back the strike.

The dispute began somewhat sluggishly. The original pay offer was made in Autumn 2014, and the settlement was due in January. It would have been better to run a strike ballot concurrently with the ballot on the pay offer. In future, we should always aim to strike when our pay settlement is due (if bosses haven't met our demands), rather than letting talks drag on for months.

The RMT has conducted the dispute in a relatively democratic way so far, convening mass reps' meetings to discuss the strategy. Those meetings need to continue, and involve TSSA reps too. Although it's not always possible to convene mass meetings to vote on every aspect of a dispute, wherever possible strikes should not be suspended without such meetings. Rank-and-file reps and activists need to be in the driving seat.

There's a feeling amongst many workers that we should see how the first strike goes and then decide on further action from there.

**But the unions need to send a clear signal, both to the bosses and to their own members, that we're in it for the long haul — if not by naming the next set of strike dates now, then at least by giving a clear message that we will strike again, and quickly, if our demands are not met after the first strike.**

cure jobs.

Workplace picket lines should be mounted wherever possible. All grades and functions have a role to play; creating a backlog on engineering work could cost the company huge amounts of money in the medium to long term, and a solid strike from signallers has the power to stop the job on the day. We need to look at extending the action, though, as there's a possibility the company could use managers to cover individual signallers' work on the strike day.

### DEMANDS

**The unions' demand is for a substantial pay increase, and for the no compulsory redundancies guarantee to be extended throughout all four years of the deal.**

We should argue for that demand to go further: we should oppose job cuts and destaffing altogether. If technology and productivity mean there's less work to go around, we should respond by arguing for reduced hours to ensure the work is shared rather than accepting that some jobs will go, and only fighting over whether redundancies are compulsory or not.

Politically, we should put the Labour Party on the spot to back the strike. The dispute involves workers in England, Scotland, and Wales — which shows



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