

# Solidarity

## & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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Photo: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

## 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 and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

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## Israel-Palestine

### The Wall must fall

By Heather Shaw

On 17 April 2009, at the weekly demonstration against the separation Wall in the West Bank village of Bil'in, 29 year old protester Bassem Abu Rahmah was killed when a high velocity tear gas canister was fired directly into his chest by an Israeli soldier.

On 1 January his sister died from poisoning caused by inhalation of tear gas at a New Year's eve demonstration on the same spot.

Protesters say the gas used was an especially potent mix and an unprecedented amount was fired in response to the number of people joining the demo. Over 1,000 people had answered the call by the Bil'in Popular Committee Against the Wall and Settlements to attend the final demonstration of the year.

The Israeli Occupation Force had sent hundreds of soldiers to the posts on the Wall and declared the area a "closed military zone". Despite these efforts Palestinian, Israeli and international activists swarmed into the village from the surrounding hills and farmland to join the protest which marched from the village centre under the banner of "The Last Day of the Wall".

At Bil'in the determination of the people in the village, and the many around the world who support them, to resist the occupation and to do so peacefully even in the face of such brutality, is truly inspirational. In 2007 the Popular Committee was involved in a High Court battle against the path of the Wall, which separates the village from the vast majority of their land. They won and the path was changed to return 170 acres to the village.

### Defend Korean socialists!

On 3 December 2010, the prosecutor in the Seoul Central District Court demanded prison terms of five to seven years for members of the Socialist Workers' Alliance of Korea (SWLK), a revolutionary socialist group.

The eight militants were accused of no crime except being socialists, but in reality the indictment was the result of involvement in important strikes.

A defence campaign has been launched.

• [www.workersliberty.org/node/15784](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/15784)

The IOF has yet to act on the judgement. The Wall remains in its original position and the protests continue.

The use of tear gas and other "crowd control" weapons is a weekly occurrence in Bil'in and across the West Bank and Jerusalem where people gather to protest against the occupation. The Israeli military has been accused of taking advantage of the occupation in order to test and develop new weapons and methods of "crowd control" and dispersal — so while activists struggle against the occupation that destroys life, the Israeli military and its related weapons manufacturers are making profits and developing new marketable products.

Hundreds of activists were in the village to carry Jawaher's body and join a funeral procession through the streets of Bil'in to her home, where her family could say their final good-byes before she was buried next to her brother.

The community in Bil'in continue their struggle with even more determination than ever. The voices of the Palestinian people will not be silenced with injustice and brutality! The vile and disgusting Wall must be torn down and the occupation ended before more lives are lost!

• Israeli activist Jonathan Pollak has been sentenced to a three month jail term for protesting. [www.workersliberty.org/node/15735](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/15735)

• The Israeli Knesset (parliament), which has a right-wing majority, has launched an investigation into Israeli human rights organisations. [www.workersliberty.org/node/15798](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/15798)

• Gaza Youth Manifesto [www.workersliberty.org/node/15741](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/15741)

## "Protesting is part of everyday life in Italy"

By David F

A reform of Italian universities eventually approved by the Italian Parliament on 23 December, was met by protests.

Violent clashes occurred on 14 December in Rome, over the vote of confidence won by Berlusconi. These ended with 57 police and 62 people injured, 15 million euro worth of damage and 41 arrests.

These demonstrations followed those of 24 November when 18 train stations were occupied.

Students tried to break in the Senate House, a chamber of the Italian Parliament. That has never happened before in the history of Italy. Then they headed to the private house of the Prime Minister and to the Chamber of Deputies. Police charges stopped them.

Other student demonstrations took place last October, last September and last scholastic year.

Protesting is now part of everyday life in Italy.

The earthquake victims of L'Aquila are fed up with more than a year living in an emergency situation. They went to Rome to demonstrate but were brutally charged by police.

Then there are flood victims of Veneto.

And immigrants asking for a permit to stay in Italy. They are climbing on cranes in order to resist.

People asking for housing are climbing on roof tops.

In Naples there are scuffles with the police, and protesters set fire to the

rubbish that has not been removed from the street.

In Sardinia there is a movement of breeders and shepherds. On 28 December 200 of them were heading to Rome for another protest. They were stopped in the Civitavecchia haven and some of them were injured by the police.

Workers of the cultural sector protested against budget cuts last November; museums, libraries, archaeological areas have been shut down.

There are also many local protests.

Demonstrations are always followed by controversies in the media and accusations of policemen infiltrating protests to create disorder.

Blame is put on the government, but the mainstream political opposition is also ineffective. That is a legacy from the last Prodi one-vote-majority government, which ended after just two difficult years.

Berlusconi doesn't understand what is going on. Or, better, he doesn't want to understand.

When the country is shaken by demonstrations, Mr Berlusconi and friends are trying to approve laws that will ensure they avoid serious criminal charges.

But the people who are in the deepest troubles are the people of Italy. It is a gloomy future for them with a public debt far above 1,800 billion euros, a very slow job market, a deficient welfare state and a stagnant economy.

The government cannot satisfy people's needs.

## Mass sackings in Cuba

Cuba's Stalinist rulers have begun sacking 500,000 public-sector workers.

The government claims the sackings are necessary because of the pressures the economic crisis has placed on an already cash-strapped state.

But isn't this just a bosses' government making savage cuts under the pretext of a financial crisis? Exactly the sort of thing any working-class socialist, wherever they are in the world, would be resolutely opposed to, right?

We'll see. Undoubtedly the sycophantic cheerleaders of the Cuban Stalinism

will sink to new lows of political contortion in an attempt to justify the government's action and explain how they are somehow consistent with an assessment of Cuba as socialist, a degenerated or deformed workers' state, or otherwise "progressive".

For us, they are further confirmation that Cuba is a state in which a boss class rules over an exploited class, and in which the only ultimate avenue for real, fundamental change is a revolution in which that exploited class overthrows that boss class and smashes its state.

## Capitalist crisis — working-class socialist answers

### An online pamphlet

• [workersliberty.org/socialist](http://workersliberty.org/socialist)

## Will the Mark Kennedy case help our fight for the right to resist?

By Louise Gold

**I was sitting in a room, in a small Nottingham school. The curtains were closed and the lights on.**

I was surrounded by people discussing what up to that moment had been a top secret plan to take over Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal fired power station. I had been invited because of my involvement in Workers Climate Action by a close fellow activist. I was wondering why I had come.

It wasn't that I didn't agree with closing down a coal fired power station for a week to save 150,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. It wasn't that I was scared shitless by the idea — though the thought of scaling a cooling tower to camp on top made me sweat and shake.

It wasn't even the secrecy of the plan, which made me enormously uncomfortable as it undermined democratic processes and made me feel I was being led blind. It's just that this "action" would have been done so much more powerfully by the workers themselves. The thought of the impact of a week's closure on low paid workers was really making me sweat and shake...

However, it's easy to see why the young and the brave of the anarchist milieu had come together for a targeted action. For them, this kind of theatrics, rather than long-term work in the labour movement, is the only way to save the world from catastrophic runaway climate change; and the one they have a grasp on.

The revelation that a policeman — Mark Kennedy — had, under the pseudonym Mark Stone, been agent provocateur in the power station action and had set up to the largest pre-emptive arrest (of 114 people) in British history, reminds of that day in Nottingham. The case has been thrown out of court, the defendants' sentences quashed.

Kennedy infiltrated the movement for

seven years, often providing the resources for actions to take place.

Despite my fears on the day, Judge Teare ruled that the action on Ratcliffe would have been safe.

The defendants' solicitor, Mike Schwarz, said they were taking part in legitimate action. "One expects there to be undercover police on serious operations to investigate serious crime. This was quite the opposite. This is civil disobedience which has a long history in this country and should be protected."

The anti-fees marchers more recently were well within their legal — not to mention democratic — rights. In both cases the police have ignored the civilian right to resist the privatisation of every aspect of our lives, as well as its spiral into ecological disaster.

The Kennedy issue throws up questions about provocation, responsibility and media documentation. Kennedy went for a final reconnaissance mission at Ratcliffe by himself, coming back to assure activists that they could continue with the action, as their fear of police presence at the station was unfounded. He set them up.

Hopefully such revelations will ensure that fewer people are willing to put up with the entrapment of environmental activists, as well as the police violently abusing their powers.

I was never arrested in Nottingham. Owing to my shakes and sweats I was kindly given the role of media runner and stayed well out of harm's way.

It was an odd experience to wake up the next morning and be the only one left. I walked through the quiet of Nottingham station on my way home, feeling like it was the end of a film. It's probably because I'm cowardly and like the comforts of central heating, but the hard work of battling the trade union bureaucracy had suddenly become much more attractive than the heroics of direct action.

## The inspirational Jayaben Desai

By Pete Firmin, President, Brent Trades Union Council

**An indication of the regard in which Jayaben Desai was held was the fact that on a miserable December weekday morning over one hundred people turned out for her funeral. A good proportion were there to show their respect for the inspirational woman who came to represent the Grunwick strikers of 1976-1978.**

Many photographs of the strike show a diminutive Mrs Desai towered over by large policemen, but she was never intimidated by anyone.

When she walked out of the photoprocessing plant she said to the manager: "What you are running here is not a factory, it is a zoo. But in a zoo there are many types of animals. Some are monkeys who dance on your finger-tips, others are lions who can bite your head off. We are those lions, Mr Manager." She proved herself to be a lion throughout the course of the two year long strike which followed for union recognition.

The dispute brought out both the best and the worst of the movement. While thousands turned out to picket, risking injury and the mass arrests by the police, the strikers had an additional constant battle

with their own union, APEX (now part of the GMB) and the TUC, who wanted the mass pickets called off.

While local postal workers took solidarity action, refusing to deliver Grunwick's mail in November 1976 and again in the summer of 1977, their leaders were fined by their national union (the UPW) and threatened with expulsion from the union.

Other unions called on to cut off services to Grunwick's (water and electricity) either refused point blank or demanded levels of support they knew wouldn't be agreed.

In the end the desperation of Mrs Desai and the strike committee, with the lack of backing from the unions, led her and three others go on hunger strike outside the TUC in November 1977. Their union then announced that any strikers participating in the hunger strike or involved in the organisation of any further mass picketing would be suspended from office in the union and lose strike pay for four weeks. It took 30 years for the GMB to get round to apologising to Mrs Desai for this terrible act of treachery.

The regard with which she was still held was shown by the standing ovation she got when she spoke at the 30-year commemoration event which Brent Trades Council organised.

## Straw's rape comments feed far right

By Sam Price

**Former Labour minister Jack Straw has described young white women as "easy meat" for sexual abuse by Pakistani men.**

Apart from the sexist overtones of the phrase "easy meat", Straw is, once again, stereotyping British Pakistanis.

After two Asian men who raped and sexually assaulted young women in Derby were given indefinite jail terms, Straw said that there is a "specific problem" of Pakistani men who "target vulnerable young white girls"

and called for "the Pakistani community to think much more clearly about why this is going on".

But the judge who sentenced Mohammed Liaqat and Abid Saddique said that he did not believe the crimes were "racially aggravated", arguing that the ethnicity of the victims and the perpetrators was "coincidental".

Jack Straw has form. Previously he raised the (real) issue of the niqab in a regressive way; as Home Secretary he presided over foul anti-migrant policies.

Now the far right has jumped on his comments — something he might

have predicted, if he cared.

There are predatory and sexually abusive men in every religious and ethnic "community" — some will regard women of their own background as "pure" and other backgrounds as targets for sexual predation. There is no "over-representation" of black and Asian men among sex offenders.

What combination of personal prejudice and search for political advantage is involved in Straw's comments is difficult to judge, but they have nothing to do with fighting violence against women.

## Unions' political rights under threat

By Ira Berkovic and Colin Foster

**Ed Miliband has had Labour Party general secretary Ray Collins write to the Committee on Standards in Public Life (a sort of quango, set up in 1994, with members appointed by the Government and the three big parties) to say donations to political parties should be capped at £500.**

That was last October. At the end of December, Miliband's people fed the story of the £500 cap to the press, together with speculation about Ed Miliband giving 25% of the vote in future Labour leadership elections to "supporters" who are not Labour Party members. The 25% scheme was soon disavowed by Miliband's office.

Collins's letter says, cryptically, that "Party funding reform should not be used... to alter the internal constitutional arrangements of... political parties". Miliband's people have told the press that this means that union affiliations to the Labour Party could stay, being deemed to be only an aggregation of individual members'

political levy payments. Extra payments by unions to the Labour Party, decided by union committees, would presumably be banned.

Miliband is probably trying to be "clever", and wrongfoot the Tories by forcing them to defend bigger political donations. But we know Nick Clegg regards Hayden Phillips as a priority demand in the coalition government; and David Cameron may want to cut him some slack there.

Even during the Labour leadership contest, Ed Miliband said he wanted to "make progress on party funding together with other parties".

Without consulting Labour's National Executive (and, in fact, without most Labour Party members noticing, because they never read the dreary document), Ed Miliband wrote into Labour's May 2010 manifesto: "We believe that the funding of political parties must be reformed... Our starting point should be the Hayden Phillips proposals of 2008. We will seek... cross-party agreement..."

Hayden Phillips proposed limiting political contributions to £50,000.

The plan was rejected by Labour at the time.

Many Blairites have long wanted to cut Labour's union links. They have held back because state funding is unpopular, and, despite a flurry in the early Blair years, big-business funding for Labour has faded.

It will be idiotic if the unions, having elected Ed Miliband as leader on the promise of a break from ultra-Blairism and a leadership more responsive to the labour movement, now allow him to stumble into carrying out the ultra-Blairites' programme.

Unite leader Len McCluskey said, "If anybody is attempting to sever the link with the unions, we will oppose that. This is our party. What Ed needs to understand is that the trade union movement created the Labour Party. If there are people who just see us as a cash cow, the dotty aunt and uncle who are... just brought out to sign cheques, then that's not going to happen." Trade union members should see that McCluskey is held to those words.

• Hayden Phillips: [www.partyfundingreview.gov.uk](http://www.partyfundingreview.gov.uk). Collins: <http://bit.ly/hRL8fr>.

## Letters

### Not tweeted

A recent article by Malcolm Gladwell in the *New Yorker* magazine tells us that “The revolution will not be tweeted”, and I think he’s right.

Serious causes, explains Gladwell, author of best-seller *The Tipping Point*, require tough, tight organisation, and “strong ties” between activists. The “weak ties” typical of social networking via the internet have many uses, but not that of being able to organise hard battles for change.

Gladwell cites evidence debunking the story that big social movements in Moldova and Iran recently were held together through internet social networking. Internet social networking, with its “weak ties”, is good for getting people to do small things that go more or less with the flow. For people to do scary things against the flow, and stick to them through rough and smooth, they need “strong ties”, in which face-to-face communication is crucial.

They also needs structured (or as Gladwell provocatively puts it) “hierarchical” organisation — which, for socialist organisations specifically, must be democratic.

For effective organisation for the long haul, we need “strong ties” of political comradeship, woven by the feeling and the practice of standing by and with each other, against an often hostile world, on the basis of a commonly-understood set of ideals and ideas.

Rhodri Evans, Islington

• [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa\\_fact\\_gladwell](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell)

### Unite the anti-cuts movement

Like other supporters of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), I have received emails signalling a dispute in the Network between the Socialist Party (SP) and others led by Network chair Dave Chapple.

NSSN secretary and SP member Linda Taaffe says that the Network’s 22 January conference should “set up a working-class, trade-union-based campaign [with] a clear no-cuts programme... The opponents of this idea want the NSSN to tail-end other organisations which do not have a consistent no-cuts policy”.

She condemns especially “the separatist splitting Right To Work” campaign, in which the SWP has a controlling influence.

Chapple and others want to work with groups like RTW and the Coalition of Resistance (COR), and keep NSSN as a broad shop stewards’ network.

I think activists should back Dave Chapple and his group. I’d urge them to support Workers’ Liberty’s call for RTW, COR, NSSN and others to get together for a united anti-cuts conference, and to stop the farcical situation of having rival anti-cuts committees in some areas and competing in united committees to annex them for one national campaign centre or another.

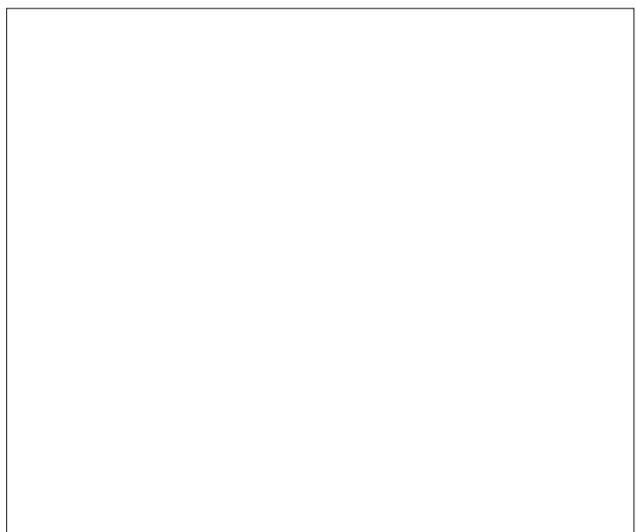
Daniel Randall, Coalition of Resistance  
National Council member

### Down with Harry Potter!

Daisy Thomas writes (*Solidarity* 3/187, review of ‘Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows’) that “A lot of people, myself included, have grown up with Harry and his friends. Some people only really got into reading because of Harry Potter...”

Since when do esoteric fantasy-stories help to explore class-structures, and not cover them up? Don’t they stop young people reading better books? Is this what we want children to grow up with? Can Marxists approve such literature?

Guenter Meisinger, Germany



Stops us reading better books?

# Why the Tea Party brews up

## Barry Finger

**When capitalism crashes, the ambulances first come for the wealthy. The next wave of ambulances comes for their luggage and their attendants. When it is time to come for the working-class victims, there is a budget crisis and the ambulance corps is decommissioned. The walking wounded are left to fend for themselves, dazed and disoriented.**

Where is the outrage? Where is the fightback? Where is the left? It is not that the American left lacks a sophisticated understanding of power, of how wealth subverts democracy or how it domesticates the media and pollutes public opinion. It is not that the left lacks an understanding of Obama’s failings, of the Democrats’ stunningly miserable record of compromise and sell-out — all the more contemptible insofar as this was accomplished while holding the presidency and both houses of Congress. It’s just that the liberal left can’t offer an alternative and the broad radical left won’t.

In the American scene, only the Tea Party right showed up. Yes they, like everyone else, were outraged at the Wall Street bailout. But they had the field all to themselves. All the more remarkable since the bailout was a Republican lash-up, continued under the Democrats. Still, if sections of the working class wished to register their anger and indignation they had nowhere else to go. And what was the Tea Party’s message? They came to the crash scene to scream — innocent of the open invitation to self-parody — that the rich and the poor, the ruling elite and the working class, should equally find their own way out of this mess and stop looking to the government for a handout or a hand-up. This, they insist with a patriotic fervor bordering on the rhapsodic, is what the founding fathers had in mind when they drafted the Constitution.

And what of the left? For the liberals, it is the perpetual struggle to wrest the Democratic Party from its wealthy financiers. If only Obama had not relied on the usual clique of Wall Street advisors, ideologues and hangers on. But then how does a capitalist party reassure the bond holders that their investments will be properly administered?

The Democrats are the party of reconciliation — of advancing capitalist interests, while diffusing working class discontent by granting strategic reforms. When faced with a wave of working class insurgencies, as was Franklin Roosevelt, the Democrats, it is true, “welcomed” the hatred of Wall Street. That hatred strengthened Roosevelt’s hand in diffusing labor

### As Tea Party grows, left fails to find a strong voice.

movement rage and housebreaking the left. Were today’s liberals, who are likewise in no sense socialists, actually able to “wrest” the Democratic Party from its patrons — motivated only by their sense of betrayal, rather than street heat — the ruling class would simply establish a new party of the “responsible” center, hand that party a few quick, cheap victories and — in short order — demobilise what was left of the independent Democratic Party of liberals.

The ruling class after all has no overarching need of a third capitalist party. And the labour movement bureaucracy — the hollow shell of a dwindling movement — has no need of a capitalist party that lacks the power to advance a reform agenda needed to fortify that bureaucracy’s continued existence.

It is the response of the broad radical left, such as it is, that is the most frustrating. What did it learn from the debacle of Stalinism? That Stalinism grew out of Leninism, which grew out of Marxism that found its roots in the Enlightenment. The “task” of the left is to make a clean sweep of all these influences and start anew by renouncing “vanguardism”, “de-centering authority”, establishing “affinity groups” and networking these groups on the basis, not of democracy, but of consensus.

The socialist movement should become not a laboratory of struggle vying for power by offering an alternative social agenda and a framework through which organic leaderships can emerge and adapt or be replaced. Oh no, this would be elitism. It should rather be a large “study group” where no one opinion is more valid than another; a comfortable place where a fighting working class can repose on evenings and weekends.

But a radical left, no matter how cogent its critique of capitalism is — that renounces the struggle for power — that resists jumping into the fray for fear of substituting its voice for that of the oppressed, has, in the end, nothing to offer the working class. It contributes just as surely as liberalism and the Tea Party to the rightward lurch of American politics.

# A is for Alienation

## ABCs of Marxism

### By Tom Unterrainer

**Up until the recent student protests, sociologists would moan about “apathetic youth”: they were “selfish” and “uninterested” in the world. How much of this was “apathy” and how much an understandable reaction to a world where mainstream politics seems boring and irrelevant?**

The student protests came at a point when the political world shifted with the election of a government more clearly hostile to students and the young. The shift brought a hammer down upon the heads of school and college students. They could no longer hide their contempt for the political system. Their *alienation* from society — what others called “apathy” — has found a voice in growing militancy.

The same sociologists who are now dumping their theories are not immune from outbursts of anger themselves. Academics go on strike, they argue over their conditions and pay. They get tired and upset by the world around them and the lack of control over their working lives. Sometimes, they also do something about it.

Both students and academics are affected by alienation. How angry and active a certain group gets, and how often, is one measure of the level of alienation in society. Students and some groups of academics fit broadly into the working class but not every angry outburst has a positive working class character. Take for example the “fuel protests” against the Blair government or the outbursts of racism and nationalism that increase when society is in crisis.

Alienation in general comes in many forms but what interests Marxists is a particular form of alienation — one tied to the very nature of capitalism — which means workers

can never be free or happy under this system.

As capitalism grew and as technology made the production of goods and services faster and more efficient for capitalists — allowing them to make more money at a greater speed — the experiences of workers changed. Routine and repetition, specialisation and standards, monotony and the mundane came to dominate people’s physical and mental work. Opportunities for us to think for ourselves or take initiatives closed down.

This process intensified again with automation and the introduction of computer technology. As capitalists drive to extract more and more profit from more and more intensified work, alienation continues.

As Marx put it:

“... all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man”.

As we work, we put our “whole being” into the production of “things” — physical objects or otherwise — but have no freedom over what part we play in this process. When not at work we must spend time recovering from or preparing for the next day or week. In moments when we might truly be free to do exactly what we please, the grim reality of work, of alienation still hangs over us.

But alienation does not just produce unhappy people it can also produce angry people — it can also help drive resistance to capitalism. Marx described alienation as a “loss of self” of the working class. We can only truly be free and reclaim ourselves by overthrowing capitalism.

• Further reading:  
Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”;  
Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, Chapter 25;  
Marxist Internet Archive entry  
[www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/a/1.htm](http://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/a/1.htm)



## Seize the bankers' wealth

In the next four years, the Coalition government plans to cut £18 billion from benefits and £16 billion from education and other local services. The Tories and Lib Dems say this is unavoidable.

Yet in 2009-10 the richest thousand individuals increased their wealth by £77 billion. Bank profits were £15.5 billion for the first half of 2010, so probably about £30 billion for the full year. The loot is much bigger than the cuts. Maybe £7 billion will be paid out in bonuses.

The government's minimal — essentially cosmetic — bank levy will raise just £2.5 billion a year. After a period of "talking tough" they have now told the banks they are free to pay whatever bonuses they like.

These figures show how ridiculous it is when the Labour leadership claims that some cuts — less harsh ones — are necessary. Why should we accept any cuts to our jobs or services when the bosses are raking it in, and the bankers are splashing around wealth like confetti?

Seize the huge wealth of the banks to pay for what we need, and enable rational, democratic control of big investment decisions, currently dependent on the bankers' profit priorities! We should fight for a workers' government that will take the banks and financial system into public ownership and use their huge resources for social goals.

## Solidarity: your new weekly

This is the first issue of the new, weekly *Solidarity*, with a new look.

We are doubling the frequency of our paper because the pace of the class struggle is increasing — with the Tory government, the student revolt and the prospect of strikes against the cuts. And the activity of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty is increasing too — as we grow and our influence among workers and students spreads, we need a "collective organiser" that can keep up with the job we have to do.

*Solidarity* is a source of political ideas which you won't find in the mainstream (bosses') press — or in much of the left-wing press either.

If you read *Solidarity*, value the information it provides and like the ideas contained in it, we'd urge you to become a member of the AWL, the collective of revolutionary socialist activists organised around the paper.

If you're not yet ready to become a member, work and discuss with us — and make this your paper anyway!

Send us articles, reports, interviews... It doesn't matter whether it's a theoretical piece, or a short summary of what's going on in your workplace or school.

More than anything we want concrete information about the class struggle, about the campaigns that people are involved in, the disputes that are going on in workplaces.

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Unions such as the PCS should be encouraging and building on resistance wherever it is, now

## Strikes in April? Good. But now?

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the civil service union PCS, announced his "April Thesis" in an article in the *Guardian* on 30 December and an interview with the *Times* the same day.

His plan is that "by March 26, the date of the big TUC march with a million people on the streets... unions [will] have balloted or [be] balloting for industrial action... followed by mass industrial action" around the time of the royal wedding at the end of April.

Although "a general strike is illegal", said Serwotka, there is no legal ban on unions coordinating action for the same day.

The train drivers' union ASLEF (on the London Underground) and BA cabin crew have also talked about striking at the end of April.

The talk about industrial action, and *united* industrial action, against the Tory/Lib-Dem cuts, is good. But there is a telling difference between Serwotka's "April Thesis" and the famous "April Theses" of the Russian socialist leader Lenin, in 1917.

Lenin's "April Theses" were about what the Russian socialists should do there and then, in April. Serwotka's "April Thesis" is about what he may do in the future if the conditions are right, in particular if other unions concur.

Joint strike action in April will be good. But workers who conclude that we don't need snacks of industrial action now because we will get a banquet in April could go hungry.

One of the two unions which Serwotka names as likely to join his April scenario — the National Union of Teachers — is already reported likely to postpone its ballot. A joint New Year's statement from the leaders of the biggest unions, Unite, GMB and Unison, geared to "making the spring elections [local government, Welsh Assembly, and Scottish Parliament polls on 5 May 2011] the first referendum on the government's austerity programme", rather than industrial action.

Serwotka's call for an April perspective may serve more to "expose" the leaders of the big unions — who will be reluctant to focus strikes just before polling day — than to produce the promised banquet.

Serwotka's "April Thesis" is a bit like the call for a gen-

eral strike to bring down the government made in 1973 by Joe Gormley, right-wing leader of the then-mighty National Union of Mineworkers. Gormley said only a general strike would meet the case — in order to head off the miners from striking about pay.

As Gormley's 1973 call implied sidelining the immediate issue of pay, so Serwotka's 2011 call, focused on joint strikes against the government's cuts in public sector pensions, implies sidelining the immediate issues of cuts in jobs and services.

In fact, big cuts in local government jobs and services, and civil service jobs too, are already going ahead with the unions still focused on "write-to-your-MP" type opposition and negotiations to alleviate the impact.

Serwotka's union PCS is now balloting members on whether they are opposed in any way at all to the government's plans to cut civil service severance pay, although PCS was already *striking* against milder cuts in March 2010.

The problem with Serwotka's line is not that union members are pulling at the reins to strike tomorrow, or that the general secretaries could or should decree united strike action straightaway.

There are areas where workers, even with the best union leadership, prefer to go for alleviation (voluntary redundancies, redeployment, and so on) rather than resist.

But there are areas where they will resist. Indeed, in some areas more assertive workers have already made councils back down on some cuts.

The best way for the more combative unions, like PCS, to push the more sluggish unions into action, and make possible big united strikes in the coming months, is to encourage, nourish, publicise, cross-fertilise, and build on resistance *now*, everywhere that workers are up for it. That is what the unions are not doing.

The rail union RMT did the right thing by calling on all its London members to join the student demonstration on 9 December. It did the wrong thing by calling a "pause" in its industrial action over job cuts at the same time that the student mobilisations exploded.

Plan for united strikes in April? Good. But it is not a substitute for mobilising now.

## A workers' plan to fight back

By Sacha Ismail

With the new government, the bosses' offensive against our class is accelerating. Unemployment will be 2.7 million by the end of 2011, as 120,000 public and 80,000 private sector jobs are scrapped.

Billions are being cut from public services. VAT is up. Wages will rise, well below every measure of inflation, slashing thousands of most workers' incomes. University applications are up 20 percent, as young people scramble to avoid higher fees and the dole queue, but one in three — a quarter of a million — will get no place.

All this unless we do something to stop it! With the student protests and talk of massive strikes at Easter, our fightback is beginning. This is what the workers' and student movements should fight for:

- No cuts to jobs and services! The student revolt shows the way. We need a massive campaign of industrial and political action against the cuts, starting now. The unions should fight to win, not just to protest. Build rank-and-file movements across the unions to hold the leaders — including the "left" ones — to their rhetoric and organise the fight when they won't.

- Tax the rich! Last year the thousand richest people in Britain increased their wealth by £77 billion. Bank profits were £28 billion. These resources could pay for the jobs and services we need. Start by fighting to seize the huge wealth of the banks!

- Wages that match the cost of living! The unions should calculate their own, realistic inflation figure and demand that wages, pensions and benefits are inflation-proofed. Demand benefits you can live on.

- Jobs for all! Share out the work by reducing the working week to 35 hours — cut profits, not pay. Nationalise firms declaring mass lay offs.

- Free education for all! Fight the fee increase, scrap fees, no graduate tax — a living grant for every student. For student-work unity in action. Fight the NUS leaders, build the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

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

- Free the unions! Campaign to abolish the anti-union laws, so we can fight with both hands.

- Open the books! Workers need to know what the banks and corporations are up to and where their money is.

- Fight racism and the causes of racism! Unless we fight, it will be the far right that reaps the benefit from the Tories' attacks. Stop the anti-migrant drive — no one is illegal! Drive the BNP and EDL off the streets! Black and white, British-born and migrant, all religions and none — unite and fight for jobs, homes and services for all.

- Make Labour fight! The unions must demand that Labour promises to reverse the cuts and scrap the anti-union laws, and support workers' and students' fightback. Fight for democracy in the Labour Party.

To fight effectively we need to make our guiding aim a struggle to bring down the Coalition and win a workers' government — a government won and sustained through mass working-class struggle and accountable to workers' organisations, serving the working class as the Tories and Lib Dems, and New Labour before them, served the bosses.

# Anatomy of the cuts

Since the financial crisis began in 2007 "the cuts" have figured in the consciousness of labour movement activists as something we knew were coming and that we must fight against, but had yet to affect our day-to-day lives. But now, with the Tories and Lib Dems in power, "the cuts" are becoming a more formidable reality. As the new year begins, Darren Bedford surveys where and how the cuts are biting.

## HEALTH

The key cuts figure for the NHS is £20 billion (euphemistically couched as an "efficiency saving").

This will be made worse by a vast market-based restructuring of the system - called "Maoist" in its sweep by Vince Cable - which will dislocate and disjoint things. The precise impact these cuts will have on frontline health services depends largely on the budgeting choices of local trusts but, according to a Channel 4 News investigation, at least one fifth of them have already closed, or are considering closing, frontline services such as A&E facilities or maternity wards.

Countless Trusts have also been cutting back on more "minor" services which will nonetheless have a huge impact on patients' lives. For example, NHS Sheffield will no longer offer routine tonsil removal, varicose vein treatment, routine hysterectomies, or lower back surgery. NHS North Yorkshire and York will not be offering IVF to any new patients and, although it has stopped minor surgeries at GP clinics, it has also delayed all non-urgent hospital treatment. It has also closed two wards at Malton and Whitby hospitals.

Estimates on the extent to which cuts will affect NHS staffing levels vary, with some analysts suggesting that nearly 30,000 health sector jobs could be lost. However, cuts are already beginning to have a concrete effect on staffing levels (which have also been hit by new government restrictions on immigration); an A&E department at Queen Mary's

Hospital in Kent has already had to close due to staff shortages. Unions in trusts such as NHS Oxford are estimating nearly 4,000 job losses.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Of the £6.25 billion of cuts that George Osborne announced immediately after the election, around one third was borne by local government funding, including a £1.2 billion reduction in local government grants.

The burden now is even worse, with local councils facing an average 4.4% cut in their central government funding. The disproportionate impact of these cuts on working-class areas is well-documented, with poorer towns or districts such as Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Hull facing the maximum 8.9% cut, while richer areas such as Hampshire, Richmond-upon-Thames and Buckinghamshire face cuts of less than 1%. The six most deprived councils in the country are all facing the maximum cut.

Even the Tory-controlled Local Government Association has called the cuts "the toughest local government finance settlement in living memory". Many councils are closing down facilities such as libraries altogether.

Massive job cuts are on the way. Several local authorities, such as Sheffield, Croydon, Birmingham, Walsall, Neath/Port Talbot and Swansea, initiated mass redundancy procedures in late 2010, announcing plans to dismiss workers en masse and re-engage them on worse terms and conditions. The GMB union estimates that as many as 200,000 local government jobs could go in the 2011-2 budgets.

The GMB has already received notification of 90,000 planned full-time equivalent redundancies, and government figures show that up to 500,000 public sector jobs could be lost by 2014-15. Big job cuts are also planned across the civil service.

## New Year's greetings from RMT London Transport Regional Council

Secretary: Janine Booth - President: Vaughan Thomas

- Stop London Underground job cuts
- Stop victimisations - Reinstate our workmates on London Underground and DLR
- Fight for justice and equality
- Oppose tuition fees - Support the student fightback

[www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk](http://www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk)

dren whose parents have an annual income of less than £16,000). But the policy has been widely denounced as a con; it equates to just £430 per pupil in the first year and will only reach the promised total amount (£2.5 billion) in 2014.

Further education faces a 25% funding cut over four years, which lecturers' union UCU predicts will lead to job losses. Course cuts, especially to courses without a direct vocational application, have been a constant threat for some time in the FE sector; that threat will increase under the pressure of funding cuts.

That the cuts can be resisted is shown by the fact that the government has been forced to climb down on plans to scrap the £162 million Schools Sports Partnership (see elsewhere in *Solidarity*). The abolition of the SSPs would have meant that thousands of, predominantly working-class, children across the country would have been denied access to regular sporting activity, particularly in less mainstream sports that they might not otherwise have had access to. The Tories also climbed down on plans to scrap funding to Book Trust, a charity that provides increased access to books and reading.

## BENEFITS

**A series of substantial cuts to welfare provision were announced in both the Comprehensive Spending Review and in Iain Duncan Smith's white paper on welfare which followed it.**

Means-testing restrictions on Child Benefit will be severely tightened, and Duncan Smith announced at Tory party conference that the initial cuts were part of a plan to subsume Child Benefit, Income Support and Working Tax Credits into a single, heavily means-tested, benefit. The state pension age will also be raised (from 65 to 66), but only in 2020 rather than 2016 as first trailed. The Coalition has said, though, that a further rise to 68 (planned by Labour for 2046!) will be brought forward.

There are also a number of direct cuts to housing benefits, reducing the amount it is possible to claim. People on Jobseekers' Allowance who also claim housing benefit will now only be able to do so for a year. Even Tory mayor Boris Johnson described the likely effects of this as "a kind of Kosovo-style social cleansing of London", forcing people out of areas where rents are higher. Cuts to housing benefit will leave people in private rented accommodation, on average, £12 a week worse off (£30 in London).

Nearly three million people currently claiming Incapacity Benefit will be transferred (in April of this year) onto the new "Employment and Support Allowance". DWP estimates indicate that, under the new regime, 75% of them will be found fit to work and forced to stop claiming Incapacity Benefit and claim JSA instead (which, as previously mentioned, will effectively be abolished in 2013).

Under Duncan Smith's proposed changes, in 2013, as part of the same scheme that will affect Child Benefit, Income Support and Jobseekers' Allowance will be abolished and replaced with a single "universal credit". Benefits will be cut for a period of between three months and three years if Jobcentre Plus thinks claimants have breached strict stipulations around attending interviews and applying for vacancies.

As well as the cuts to benefits, the DWP announced a plan in June 2010 to cut a further 2,000 from job centre staff by March 2011.

## EDUCATION

**The government plans a threefold increase in annual tuition fees for higher education. Following a parliamentary vote on 9 December, universities will now be able to charge up to £9,000 a year for degrees.**

Other key cuts are a 75% cut to Higher Education (HE) teaching budgets and the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (a maximum of £30 per week for students aged over 16). That cut will have a huge impact on the lives of working-class youth. For anyone who wants to obtain a modicum of financial independence from their parents while in further education, or for those from "non-traditional" backgrounds (including single-parent backgrounds), a £30 reduction of the weekly budget represents a real squeeze.

In terms of the higher education budget cuts, there is a grim parallel with local government funding cuts as the hardest-hit universities will be those with higher numbers of working-class students. The Open University, Nottingham Trent and Sheffield Hallam face cuts of £109, £67 and £63 million respectively (nearly 90% of the total budget in Nottingham Trent's case).

Universities that offer only arts courses face 100% cuts,

leading to fears of job losses and closure. LSE, SOAS and Goldsmiths are among 24 higher education institutions set to lose 100% of their public funding.

As with local authorities, it will be up to the institutions individually to fill the funding gap, both through charging higher fees and increasing corporate funding. That will mean greater business control of research and curricula, as well as potential job cuts. 2010 saw a number of local disputes over job cuts and Unite, which organises non-academic staff in higher education, puts possible job loss figures in the sector as high as 22,000.

Although the budget for school funding did not face an immediate cut, the merging of a number of school funding streams has resulted in cuts in some places as the single stream is redistributed. Pupils at schools currently receiving funding from a number of the separate streams (which include specific funding for, for example, one-to-one tuition) could lose out. Money for new Academies and free schools will be sucked out of mainstream schools.

The "sweetener" for schools funding was the "pupil premium" — additional funding for every pupil schools took from poor backgrounds (defined by the government as chil-

# More on the cuts...

The TUC-run "Cuts Watch" website was an invaluable resource in the writing of this article:

[www.touchstoneblog.org.uk/category/cuts-watch](http://www.touchstoneblog.org.uk/category/cuts-watch).

For information on resisting the cuts, visit the websites of these campaigns:

● National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts:  
[www.anticuts.com](http://www.anticuts.com)

● Defend Council Housing:  
[www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)

● Keep Our NHS Public: [www.KeepOurNHSpublic.com](http://www.KeepOurNHSpublic.com)

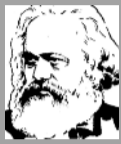
● Women Against the Cuts:  
[www.womenagainstthecuts.wordpress.com](http://www.womenagainstthecuts.wordpress.com)

● UK Uncut: [www.ukuncut.org.uk](http://www.ukuncut.org.uk)

## Oppose

# Sheridan jailing!

The left



By Alan Gilbert

**Former Scottish Socialist Party leader Tommy Sheridan is likely to face several years jail, after being found guilty of perjury on 23 December. He will be sentenced on 26 January.**

This is the latest in a long and sad story. In 2004 the *News of the World* published allegations about Sheridan's private life.

The *News of the World* was, and is, a foul right-wing scandal rag. The Murdoch press was after Sheridan because of his activity on the Scottish left.

Sheridan won a libel action against the *News of the World* in 2006. Then, very unusually, the police launched a perjury investigation into the person whose testimony had been accepted by the court — Sheridan.

Well over a million pounds were spent on the police investigation. Resources normally reserved only for the most serious of crimes were allocated to it.

We should oppose and denounce Sheridan being jailed as a result of his clash with the *News of the World*.

But there is more to the Sheridan saga.

It was Sheridan's choice to sue the *News of the World* after its 2004 article. He demanded that the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), of which he was then the best-known leader, back his legal action.

The SSP refused; and with good reason. Politically, it was much better just to let the scandal pass with minimal comment.

Sheridan went ahead anyway. That was the trigger for subsequent events. Whatever plot the *News of the World* or the police or New Labour had had against him, it was Sheridan's decision to sue that inflated a small irritation into a major cause of damage for the left in Scotland.

It split the SSP. It reduced an organisation which had won 10% of the vote in Glasgow for a period, and recruited a membership equivalent (in proportion to Scotland's population) to 30,000 in Britain, to two small rump groups.

SSP members were legally obliged to give evidence in the libel case. To win Sheridan had to persuade the jury that they were liars and motivated by personal malice. After the close of the trial Sheridan denounced them as "scabs".

In the perjury trial Sheridan's defence relied on accusations and attempted character assassinations of long-standing socialists which would hardly have been out of place in a 1930s Moscow show trial.

Sheridan's supporters, notably the SWP and the Socialist Party, insisted on "full support" for Sheridan, regardless of the collateral damage to the left, solely on the grounds that he was up against the Murdoch press and the police.

Sadly, many SSP members have responded to the perjury verdict with triumphalist denunciations of Sheridan. And worse.

SSP members in the 2006 trial could legitimately argue that they had been dragged into court against their will. Not SSP member Gordon McNeilage. He sold his videotape of Sheridan's confessions to the *News of the World* for £200,000 and signed a contract under which he agreed to write an article for the paper and assist the paper and the police in any subsequent legal proceedings.

An attempt to move an emergency motion at the 2006 SSP conference, condemning McNeilage for handing over the tape to the *News of the World*, was successfully opposed by the SSP leadership.

The SSP says it will now "draw a line under this sorry saga and move on". It is not doing that; but it should do it. And in doing so it needs to reverse the trend of recent years when, in the shadow of the Sheridan row, socialist politics in Scotland has been diluted into a mix of Scottish populism, catchpenny sloganising, and Stalinism.

### Debate: the left and anti-semitism

Clare Solomon and accusations of anti-semitism:  
[www.workersliberty.org/node/15722](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/15722)

# Best Oscar nominees

**Clive Bradley kicks off his series of reviews of Bafta and Oscar award nominees**

Last year's Bafta and Oscar awards (and the various others which run up to the Oscars, such as the Golden Globes) were dominated by the special-effects extravaganza *Avatar* and the supposedly more "indie" *Hurt Locker* (a contest given extra frisson by the fact the rival directors used to be married).

This year, sadly, there is no such obvious head-to-head that I can see, and no background gossip to liven things up. The big-hitters — Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island*, for instance — have underperformed.

Of course, awards go to various categories — best film, best director, best original screenplay, best actor and actress, and so on — but on the whole the nominees in these categories tend to be drawn from a small group of films; so in this series I'll concentrate on the films, not the categories. (In the Baftas there are three rounds of voting; in the first, members can choose the top 12 in every category from every film released in the last year. The overall top 12 becomes the short list for the next round, which reduces it to the five announced nominees). This week, the ones, for me, to watch:

*The Kids Are All Right* (dir: Lisa Cholodenko; written by Lisa Cholodenko and Stuart Blumberg). Annette Bening, Julianne Moore and Mark Ruffalo star in a surprisingly edgy film about the children of a lesbian couple who manage to find their sperm-donor father. It features tremendous performances. Hollywood's lighter lesbian and gay fare (think *The Object of My Affection* with Jennifer Aniston and Paul Rudd) tends to play either with stereotypes or with sexual identities as entirely fixed. Here, there's something more complex going on, where things aren't tidily resolved, though it still manages to be charming and enjoyable.

*Of Gods and Men* (*Des Hommes et des dieux*) (dir: Xavier Beauvois; written by Etienne Comar). A group of French monks in Algeria are caught up in the civil war in the mid-1990s. As Islamist violence increases in the area around the village where the monastery has lived peacefully for years, the monks must decide whether to stay or go. This is a marvellously understated drama about commitment, with some riveting performances and a great sense of time and place. It's a plea for harmony and tolerance, but made subtly and without any tub-thumping

*Winter's Bone* (dir: Debra Granik; written by Debra Granik and Anne Rosellini from the novel by Daniel Woodrell). In the bleak-as-hell Ozark mountains, a 17-year old girl, Ree, (a surely award-winning performance by newcomer Jennifer Lawrence), has to take care of her younger siblings and her mentally-ill mother. Then she's told that her father has put up their rickety shack as a surety against his bail: if he doesn't turn up to court, they'll lose it. But nobody knows where Daddy is, so she has to try to find him. Her journey takes her into deep and nasty local secrets. This, again, is an understated, well-observed, small-scale drama. It's beautifully shot, though the subject matter hardly makes it an advertisement for the remote American wilderness it takes place in. This is a place at the edge of civilisation, that part of American society which feels, I think, most alien to Europeans. Powerful stuff.

*The Town* (dir: Ben Affleck; written by Peter Craig, Ben Affleck, and Aaron Stockard from the novel by Chuck Hogan). Ben Affleck's acting career had been pretty decisively overshadowed by his friend and co-Oscar winner Matt Damon, but in the last couple of years he's reinvented himself as a director. Apparently he wasn't the original choice for *The Town*, but he's done a sterling job.

On one level, this is a mainstream movie with shootouts and car chases about a bank robber (played by Affleck) who seeks out the deputy manager of a bank he's robbed (played by British actress Rebecca Hall), who was terrorised during the robbery, because he needs to know if she can identify them, although they were all in masks. In other words, she doesn't realise who he is. And of course, they fall in love — until she realises he was one of the men in masks. But it's tense, gripping stuff, with some strong writing and good performances, including what was nearly his last by Pete Postlethwaite. If you expect *The Wire* in Boston you'll be disappointed, but if you think of it as a more-interesting-than-usual heist movie, it's not bad at all.

*The First Movie* (dir: Mark Cousins). This is a little documentary which I hope doesn't slip under the radar. Mark Cousins, who has presented quite a few TV programmes about film and is a documentarist by trade, took some cameras to Iraqi Kurdistan and gave them to some kids, asking them to film their own lives. The result is fascinating, lyrical, and very touching. It's a side of Iraq we rarely see; an experience often lost in the bigger stories of conflict and violence.

## The man who put the New in Labour

**Joe Flynn reviews Peter Mandelson's autobiography "The Third Man"**

**I've always been fascinated by Peter Mandelson.**

Those who thought Blair was a decent bloke, good for winning elections, right-wing only because he was led astray by the likes of Mandelson, were wrong. I personally found Blair repellent: shallow, self obsessed and, actually, not very bright. These are all impressions unintentionally confirmed in this book.

Mandelson, on the other hand, always appeared a much more stylish scumbag: intelligent, and with a genuine understanding of the Labour Party and how to move it rightwards. New Labour is *his* achievement.

His autobiography is interesting for several reasons. Perhaps most important, it confirms how close the left came to driving the right out of the party in 1981, and how, even much later, the hard New Labourite right was really only a tiny clique, dragging others along on the promise of election victories.

It also reveals the ongoing fear of the left felt among the Labour Party establishment; when Mandelson relays his time as a dissident councillor in Ted Knight's Lambeth, there is none of the humour which accompanies his later entanglements with opponents in the centre or the right of the party. His visceral dislike of Knight's policies comes through strongly, even 30 years later.

Mandelson nearly joined the SDP at the time of Tony Benn's deputy leadership campaign in 1981; "I believe that a Benn victory would have led to a kind of tectonic political shift. The moderate, sensible centre of Labour... could very well have left en masse for the Social Democrats, and reformed the Labour Party in that shell." This confirms how close the left came to reshaping the political landscape. With a much larger chunk of the right gone, the bourgeois "pole" in the party would have been greatly weakened. The Labour Party would have come closer to a real workers' party based on the unions. Instead, we got Neil Kinnock.

Mandelson relates that Kinnock later regretted not de-

nouncing the miners' strike altogether. He also writes that "the only benefit from his [Kinnock's] months of agony [!] was that he and those around him had used the period to plan for a fightback against the far left, and a determined effort to reposition the party". What better time to plot a witchhunt of socialists than while they are busy helping the working class defend itself against the most brutal of Tory attacks?

Links to the SDP remain strong in later years. Thatcher once famously said that her greatest legacy was New Labour. Roy Jenkins could perhaps claim the same thing, given his position as a mentor for Mandelson and others. Mandelson mentions in passing that Blair shared with Jenkins and Paddy Ashdown the view that Labour should never have split with the Liberals. This is not new, but still shocking in that it is tantamount to an admission that Blair was a Liberal who joined Labour only because it was big enough to help him fulfil his ambitions.

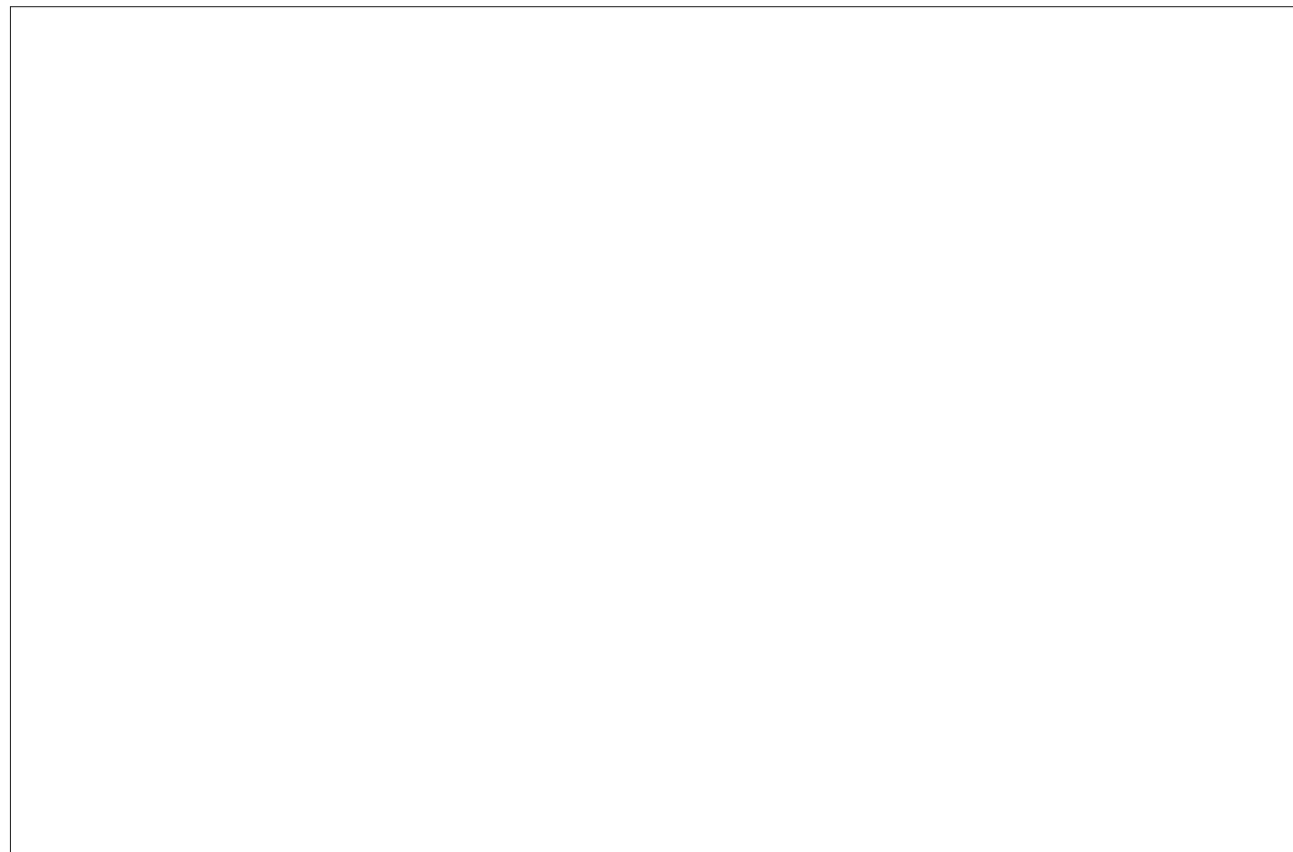
New Labour's rise to power is described without much reference to ideas or politics. The desire to win elections appears far more important than changing society for the better. In the workings of the party or, later, of government faceless, apolitical advisors and assistants play a much greater role in how decisions are made than Blair or Brown's elected colleagues.

Democratic defeats, such as when Mandelson himself loses in a battle with Ken Livingstone for a seat on Labour's Executive, merely provide evidence that the system needs to change. In fact, all democracy within the party and all social democratic policy needs to go in order for the country (i.e., the right-wing media) can see how much Labour has changed. According to Mandelson, Labour lost the 2010 election because it hadn't tapped into the nation's ideas of "fairness" in relation to benefit scroungers and migrants.

Mandelson expresses the hope that the future of the Labour Party lies in internal reform (read: reducing the role of unions) and future co operation with the Lib Dems. We can only hope that the obliteration of the Liberals puts paid to this cross-class right-wing dream once and for all.



## European right to strike



In France the right to strike is guaranteed by the constitution to each individual worker.

By Stan Crooke

**“Britain will remain with the most restrictive trade union laws anywhere in the western world”, promised Tony Blair in 1997. And he wasn’t far wrong.**

Britain is the only country in the EU, apart from Ireland and Malta, which does not have the right to strike written into its constitution or at least its laws.

For example, the right to strike in France is an individual right rather than a trade union right, meaning that two or more private-sector workers can strike at will.

In France courts have ruled in the past that strikes intended as a criticism of government policy are illegal and an abuse of the constitutional right to strike. But such strikes are now deemed a legitimate exercise of the right to strike.

Private sector strikes in France are not subject to any restrictions, either by law or by the terms of a collective agreement. There is no obligation to engage in pre-strike conciliation procedures, no requirement to give notice of a strike, and no requirement that strike action be taken only as the last resort.

French public sector strikes are subject to some limits: only trade unions can call strike action; at least five days notice of the strike action has to be provided; that notice must state the reasons, locations and duration of the strike; and there is an obligation on the union and the employer to negotiate during those five days.

Generally, European laws stating the right to strike also limit it “within the limits of the laws regulating it” (Italy), “in accordance with conditions and procedures established by law” (Bulgaria), “within the limits determined by the act regulating that right” (Hungary), “subject to limitations specified by statute” (Poland), or “except as otherwise provided by law or ensuing from an agreement” (Sweden), etc.

In Britain a strike is covered by “immunities” (in short: it is legal) only if it is about a “trade dispute” with your direct employer, as defined in very narrow terms (about pay, hours, other terms and conditions of employment, work allocation, dismissals and facilities for union officials).

So solidarity strikes, strikes in pursuit of a political goal, strikes to win trade union recognition, strikes to force suppliers to recognise a union, and strikes in support of anyone dismissed for taking unofficial (illegal) industrial action, are unlawful.

In most European countries, things are better. In Portugal, the constitution states: “Workers shall be entitled to decide what interests are to be protected by means of strikes. The sphere of such interests shall not be restricted by laws.”

Solidarity strikes are legal in most EU member-states, though sometimes with limitations. In some states, such as Belgium, Greece and Denmark, solidarity strikes in support of workers abroad can be legal as well. In Finland, Hungary and Sweden it is actually more straightforward to take part in a solidarity strike than in an “ordinary” strike.

In most EU member-states, explicitly political strikes are illegal. But there are exceptions: France; Denmark (provided the strike is “short” and for a “reasonable cause”); Finland,

Belgium (provided the strike concerns an employment-related matter); and Italy (provided that the strike is not aimed at subverting the constitutionally established democratic system).

Although political strikes in Norway are technically illegal, short stoppages have been “tolerated”.

Whatever theoretical restrictions apply to political and solidarity strikes in Spain, Portugal and France, however, recent months have seen general strikes in all three countries over cuts, and without any legal reprisals.

British laws also impose an obstacle-course to be run even before the most lawful strike is called. Except where fewer than 50 members are involved, the union must organise a postal ballot of all members liable to take part in strike action. The ballot paper must conform with set legal requirements. The employer must be given seven days notice of the ballot, and receive a copy of the ballot paper at least three days before the ballot opens.

The trade union must tell the employer how many people are being balloted, what grades they belong to, the workplaces of these employees, how many employees in each grade and each workplace pay union dues by check-off, and an explanation of how these figures have been arrived at.

The employer must be given at least seven days notice of a strike, which must be called within 28 days of the ballot result. Notice of the strike action must contain details about the numbers, categories and workplaces of those who will be striking.

Most EU states have some such obstacle-course, though usually less detailed. Roughly speaking, they fall into three groups: the ex-Stalinist states (even more restrictive than in Britain); the Scandinavian states (emphasising that strikes must be a “last resort”); and West European states. Belgium and France are least restrictive.

The police and the armed forces in Britain are banned by law from striking. Prison officers and staff at the GCHQ spy centre were also banned from going on strike by the Tories. Those bans were scrapped by the last Labour government, but replaced by agreements by the unions not to resort to strike action.

Many other EU states, especially in eastern Europe, have similar restrictions, or more.

For example, the Estonian constitution guarantees the right to strike in general, but excludes employees of governmental agencies, other state bodies, local government, the armed forces, courts, the firefighting and rescue services, and the civil service.

Some EU member-states, including Belgium, for example, require public service workers to maintain a minimum level of service while out on strike.

The coming cuts battles calls for a campaign across Europe to “level up” the right to strike to the best levels achieved across the continent, and to use solidarity action by workers who have won more freedoms to help those facing the worst restrictions, as in Britain and the ex-Stalinist states.

More details: <http://www.workersliberty.org/eu-rights>

## Uncut and confused

Sofie Buckland

Earlier this month anti-corporate-tax-dodging activist group UK Uncut promoted an action celebrating “mutual” companies and co-operatives. Not small-scale, localist workers’ coops but corporate behemoths such as John Lewis.

The aim of the protest was to “raise awareness among the public” that “another financial world is possible” — i.e. that instead of straightforward selling off of Royal Mail and Northern Rock to the highest bidder, alternatives such as co-operation have legs. Radical legs, it would seem, if UK Uncut is on board.

The first thing that struck me as odd is the strange amalgamation of Royal Mail (a public service), Northern Rock (a bank majority-owned by the UK Government, but held at arms-length and paying no dividends) and John Lewis. Was John Lewis seriously being proposed as a model for either organisation? Something the government already suggested for Royal Mail. The Coalition government.

This is clearly nonsense, but it’s nonsense tied up in a set of confused radical-sounding politics that needs to be challenged. Talk of “mutualism” and the co-option of the anti-capitalist slogan “another world is possible” sits side-by-side with pleas for “national conversation” among “the people”, and, worse, the statement that “all possibilities for our banks” (our?) should be “scrutinised and thought over”.

The logic goes something like: we at UK Uncut reckon the banking sector needs a change. We will educate “the people” about the different options. We have no opinion on these options. Equipped with knowledge “the people” will form a movement. We are the neutral facilitators of the movement, which just needs our spark of education to get going.

But there’s no such thing as neutral in politics. This method of “organising”, taking a supposedly un-ideological “educational” role comes across as at best naive and apolitical, and at worst, cynical and shadowy. Are we seriously supposed to believe the people organising this event don’t have their own ideas?

It’s disappointing, given the impressive tax protests UK Uncut has so far organised. They were straight-forwardly political — we’re protesting because we think rich people and businesses should pay their tax. They laid bare the hypocrisy of “we’re all in this together” and directly challenged the logic of the cuts. It played an old-school consciousness-raising role, sticking the bare facts of the class divide in people’s faces and equipping activists with new arguments.

Contrast that role to this new “protest” — what is it advocating? Who is it talking to? What is it saying?

The UK Uncut action also airbrushed out the role of the CWU and its anti-privatisation campaign. Royal Mail workers can bring the company to a standstill, not to mention the power they then wield over the economy as a whole. They can strike. The UK Uncut event had nothing to say about, or to, organised labour, particularly when it’s already active in this struggle.

Second, the focus for this education session is John Lewis. From the UK Uncut site:

“We will also distribute flowers and sweets to those who choose to shop... at John Lewis given, despite its numerous imperfections, that it represents a different way of doing business.”

There are a million problems with the idea you can change the world through your bank balance, and where you choose to spend it. But, particularly given it’s John Lewis, a corporation that prides itself on its upmarket image, the idea of congratulating consumers for their right-on ethical choice makes me uncomfortable.

Labour Behind the Label says John Lewis has “a disappointing approach to workers’ rights”, both of its direct employees and of those working for suppliers. It’s a co-operative, in the sense each employee gains a share of the profits, and has some (very) limited input into some decisions. But this doesn’t go very far — the “Partnership Council” appoints five directors (how they’re nominated isn’t clear) but the chairman gets to handpick five more.

Most in-store and support jobs pay a fraction over the minimum wage, just £6.60/hour in London. Add the largest ever worker dividend share, of 20% of gross earnings for each employee, and you’d take home around £2,500 extra, tops. It’s £15,500 p.a., before tax. That’s poverty pay.

Here’s what a real, political conversation looks like: take a group of activists, thrash out an agreement on what needs doing, and the political ideas that underpin that. Be clear, concrete and open about it. That’s your conversation. UK Uncut’s John Lewis action, on the other hand, was slippery and imprecise. The organiser of the protest called it off at the last minute, but UK Uncut, an organisation I (and many other revolutionary socialists) have a lot of time for, should reconsider the politics that led them to support it.

## Royal Wedding strike scare: refuse to know your place!

By Dan Ton

The tabloid press is outraged at the possibility that there might be some strikes at the same time as the Royal Wedding in April.

Both the *Evening Standard* and *Daily Mail* have run stories about strikers "targeting" the wedding. The substance is that ongoing disputes involving drivers on the London Underground (members of ASLEF) and British Airways cabin crew (members of Unite) may be balloting around that time. But the underlying political message is clear: "know your place." We should be deferential forelock-tuggers who should be thankful for the opportunity to marvel at the opulent wealth of our betters, not mar their celebrations with selfish demands for better lives for ourselves! How dare we?

**Tories want to make it easier to sack workers.**  
[workersliberty.org/sack](http://workersliberty.org/sack)

**Heinz solidarity**  
Email solidarity messages to Unite members in a pay dispute with Heinz  
c/o Ian Wright  
[wrightian5@sky.com](mailto:wrightian5@sky.com)

## Civil Service Compensation Scheme: fight for levelling up!

By a PCS activist

PCS members are balloting against Coalition threats to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme, defended from the Labour government with strike action as recently as March 2010. The ballot period ends on January 14.

This is not a ballot for industrial action; it is merely a ballot to reaffirm support for the union's existing opposition to Government

plans. This is hardly the approach one might hope for from what is allegedly one of Britain's "fighting unions."

AWL and Independent Left are voting yes, but are critical of the Left Unity leadership's slack attitude to the "NUVOS" pension scheme members — those who have joined the Civil Service since 2007 and are therefore not entitled to the compensation that this dispute centres around. This is due to the leadership making compromises

that preserved pension rights for existing workers but did not ensure that those rights continued for members of staff joining from that point onwards. The massive recruitment since then means that a vast swathe of staff being balloted are not affected in the same way by these threats but are largely "footnotes" in the PCS literature.

When challenged, the leadership say that they are looking to get "the best possible deal" for NUVOS

members but refuse to add to their demands that all staff be brought up to the level they are campaigning to retain for longer-standing members of staff.

Unsurprisingly, those on the NUVOS scheme are largely a younger group of staff, and despite pressure from AWL members in the PCS Young Members Network, the National Young Members Committee has not used this opportunity to demand the leadership take on this important cause.

## Jobcentre Plus benefits workers to strike against casualisation

By a PCS activist

After over a year of prevaricating, the PCS leadership are finally expected to call strike days around the Jobcentre Plus (DWP) "TPIP" (Telephony and Processing Implementation Project) in the next fortnight.

This affects seven "TPIP" sites across the country, in Sheffield, Springburn, Newport, Norwich, Chorlton, Macclesfield and Bristol, which were compulsorily trans-

ferred from October 2009 (some sites have yet to "transform") which has led to a huge reduction in terms and conditions for hundreds, even thousands of low-paid, largely grades A-C\*, staff.

In Sheffield, 450 staff were compulsorily transferred into a call centre, de-skilled and put under an intimidating management regime and very strict working patterns.

Absence through ill health due to stress and other mental health prob-

lems has rocketed. Case-load has increased for the union branch, and local management have begun a huge intimidation campaign against reps including blanket bans on facility time, disciplinary cases against reps for carrying out their duties, and trying to ban the Branch Secretary from going into the call centre office without the permission of the local manager.

Whilst some gains have been made through talks, such as 30 minutes "flexi-

bility" on start and finish times for staff, this is wildly different to the full flexibility stated in their contracts and experienced up to May last year.

Talks ended on 10 January and an announcement from the union is expected shortly.

● More on the dispute: [www.workersliberty.org/node/15304](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/15304)

● PCS DWP Sheffield: [pcsdwpsheffield.wordpress.com](http://pcsdwpsheffield.wordpress.com)

## Unison opposes NHS pay freeze

By Todd Hamer

Unison's Health Service Group Executive (SGE) on 10 January voted down a miserly offer from NHS Employers.

NHS Employers offered a no compulsory redundancies deal in exchange for a two-year freeze on pay increments, on top of the pay freeze imposed by the government. Initially, Unison officers had described this as a "hard choice" for health workers, but the SGE (a body of elected lay representatives) rejected it.

This is an important victory for several reasons. NHS Employers could not guarantee that local Trusts would abide by the deal.

The government has already expressed its commitment to destroy the NHS and replace it with a system of private firms competing with autonomous Foundation Trusts. FTs are already free to set their own pay and conditions outside of national agreements. To get around this, the NHS Employers wanted to set up a national framework which could then be negotiated locally. If the union leadership agreed to this then it would have been a huge capitulation.

Bosses would rather avoid compulsory redundancies because they are expensive. Most NHS employers will try to reduce

staff levels through "natural wastage". But understaffing in the health service is already severe. A recent survey by the *Nursing Times* found that 25% of nurses would take strike action, and 67% action short of a strike, if there were further attacks on staffing levels.

The rejection of this deal means that the union now has to organise for industrial action to save jobs and services. An organising drive around the issue of job security will be an important next step in preparing healthworkers and community activists for the strikes and occupations that will be necessary to save the NHS.

## London fire dispute

By Darren Bedford

An agreement to end the London firefighters' dispute over shifts is due to be signed on 13 January.

In December, FBU members voted by 84% on a 58% turnout for new shift patterns of 10.5 days/13.5 nights, one of the options arising from the fire service arbitration process RAP. A London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority meeting on 13 January was expected to agree the basis of a settlement, although some issues from the dispute are not resolved and Tory chair Brian Coleman has continued to look for ways to attack firefighters. There are more battles ahead for the capital's firefighters and the FBU.

## Scottish anti-cuts campaign

A Scotland-wide anti-cuts federation will be launched at a conference being held in Glasgow on 29 January.

In the weeks following the conference, councils across Scotland will discuss budget proposals to slash £1 billion from spending on services and jobs. This will be the first phase of cutting a total of £3 billions over the next three years.

All Scottish councils have signed up to a "deal" with the SNP government in Holyrood under which the SNP claimed that cuts in local authority funding would be "limited" to 2.6%, in exchange for councils maintaining the council tax freeze and maintaining police numbers.

But Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council is claiming that despite having agreed to the SNP "deal" last December, its funding is being cut by 3.6%. And cuts of 6.4% would have been imposed by the SNP on any local authority which refused to sign up to this "deal".

The 29 January rally and conference are being held at the initiative of the "Defend Glasgow Services" campaign, which organised an initial meeting last November to begin to bring together trade union branches, local anti-cuts campaigns, and local and national community groups.

**Saturday 29 January**

**Rally: "No Cuts! No Privatisation!"**

Assemble: 11.30am, George Square, Glasgow

**Conference: "Fight the Cuts! Defend Jobs, Services and Pensions!"**

1.30-4pm, Unison offices, 18 Albion Street, Glasgow

# Labour democracy task force launches its plan

By Martin Thomas

The Labour Democracy Task Force has put out its draft response to the Labour Party's review of structure, arguing that Labour conference must become a place of real debate, rank-and-file input, and decision-making.

The Task Force is now offering speakers to constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) and union branches, and appealing for sponsors.

The Labour Party's influx of new members since

May 2010 has reached 50,000 — more than one-third of the (very low) old membership figure before May. Although, by all reports, few of the 50,000 are hard left-wingers, the influx has increased life in many constituency Labour Parties.

At the top of the "post-New" Labour Party, however, things are not so good. Having been elected as leader by union votes on a promise of reconnecting to the labour movement, Ed Miliband has been retreating ever since then, under fire from dis-

appointed diehard-Blairites.

He has tried to placate the Blairites with things like appointing Alan Johnson as Shadow Chancellor. He has trimmed anti-cuts agitation to agitating only against police cuts.

Voters in Oldham, said Ed Miliband on 8 January, "can show the government what they feel about police cuts [sic] both here and across the country".

Presumably Ed Miliband has been told by Blairite officials that if he speaks up for disabled people, or students on EMA, or hous-

ing benefit claimants, or NHS users, that will associate him with "losers". To appeal to the "squeezed middle" he should stick to "broad" issues like police cuts, VAT rises, and means-testing of child benefits.

So long as there is no real pressure on Ed Miliband from the left, he will continue to drift under pressure from the right. In fact, criticism and pressure from the left is probably the only way to head off a move by the diehard-Blairites, before too long, to oust Ed

Miliband and replace him by one of their own.

CLPs can start to build that pressure. But the unions will be decisive.

In the run-up to May 2010, the unions showed a little more life, forcing the Labour leaders to concede the restoration of contemporary motions to Labour Party conference and direct election of CLP representatives on the National Policy Forum. Len McCluskey has talked militant since being elected as Unite general secretary.

Inside reports, however, are that TULO (the consor-

tium of unions affiliated to the Labour Party) is minded to respond to the Labour Party review by proposing only small changes in structure, some maybe even counterproductive, and none amounting to the restoration of a real, live Labour Party conference.

Pressure is needed inside the unions.

● Labour Democracy Task Force, initiated by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy: [labourdemocracy.wordpress.com](http://labourdemocracy.wordpress.com)

## London Underground: “Strategies driven by the rank and file”

AWL member Janine Booth has recently become the first woman ever to hold the London Transport regional seat on the RMT’s Executive. She won her election by 2,062 to 947 for Lewis Peacock, a well-respected Socialist Party member (also supported by the SWP and the right wing) who campaigned on a platform of backing the RMT leadership. Janine spoke to *Solidarity*.

**Your election victory was pretty resounding; tell us about the campaign.**

I think that my win was quite decisive because lots of people worked hard campaigning for their workmates to vote for me; because lots of members already know me as a fighter for workers against management and a champion of rank-and-file concerns; and because members responded to what I said in my election address and campaign materials.

The key theme of my election campaign was that, facing job cuts, bullying management and attacks on our pay, conditions and pensions, we need a more effective union. That means a more democratic union, with less bureaucracy; imaginative campaigning strategies that members support; strike pay where appropriate; and uniting with working-class communities, other trade unions, and socialist politicians.

**What do you plan to do as an Executive member?**

It is a full-time post with a three-year term of office, and the General Grades Committee (that section of the Executive that represents members in rail and other industries, but not shipping) meets regularly to make decisions about

our continual battles with the employers to defend jobs, pay, conditions, pensions etc. I plan to propose (and support other Executive members’ proposals for) strategies for the effective defence of workers — strategies that are driven by rank-and-file members and which have their support.

I also plan to argue for effective organising — better communications, increasing membership, training and supporting reps — believing that workers will join, and will get active in, a union if it fights effectively in their interests, and if it is democratic enough that they know they and their workmates can effect what the union says and does. I plan to improve the union’s work on equalities. While RMT is better than many other unions in many respects, in the area of equalities it is weak. I am only the third woman ever to be elected onto the Executive, and the first for the London Transport region. I think the best way to improve work on equalities is to make sure that our “advisory committees” (for women, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender, black and ethnic minority and young members) have their issues taken up and their ideas acted upon, rather than being seen as ineffectual talking shops.

RMT is already working hard to build for the TUC demonstration in March, and I think that everyone on the Executive is committed to the union being part of the general fightback against the ConDem government’s cuts. We would certainly want to co-ordinate action with other unions. I aim to ensure that everything I propose — whether on industrial issues or political campaigns — has the support of the members I represent, and that we involve rank-and-file members in campaigns on these issues. Finally, I would like to see us make real progress towards achieving the goal of one union for all rail and transport workers.

**What’s the status of the battle against London Underground job cuts?**

LU is pressing ahead with the job cuts, but the unions’ resistance to it has faltered. RMT and TSSA had four 24-hour strikes, the most recent at the end of November, but then did not name any more. This left members wondering what was happening, and made it look like the fight was over. There is a review taking place, where management and union reps will discuss some aspects of the job cuts, but I doubt that anything significant will come from that unless the unions name dates for further strikes. The majority of our branches have also taken this view, so I have proposed a 48-hour strike later this month, with strike pay: this has been agreed.

With momentum having waned, and not everyone convinced that we can fight on and win, we need to get officials and reps out round workplaces, to keep everyone informed of how the

talks are going, and step up public and media campaigning. This has been agreed too.

As the company posts new rosters, issues displacement letters and reveals plans to further cut jobs, it is important that Underground workers know that their unions have not given up the fight to defend jobs.

**What are the main struggles London Transport workers will face over the coming year?**

All the employers within the Region (which is not just London Underground!) will doubtless attack jobs, conditions and pensions — and none will willingly put their hands in their pockets to give us a decent pay rise without a fight!

RMT members on Docklands Light Railway are currently balloting for industrial action over a series of attacks by the company; we could soon see the first ever strike in the DLR’s history!

The Olympics are looming, and I believe that employers will use the Games as a pretext to introduce casualised forms of working that they will then keep in place afterwards. In order to weaken opposition to their attacks, employers regularly try to pick off union reps and activists. At present, we are fighting the unjust sackings of Tube drivers Eamonn Lynch and Arwyn Thomas, and a stations rep, Peter Hartshorn, may also soon face the sack.

These are mostly defensive struggles, but I would like to see us go on the offensive for the sort of public transport system we would like to see, based around a workers’ and passengers’ plan.

## Kirklees pushes back cuts

**By Stuart Jordan**

**With over 100,000 local government jobs under threat, both council bosses and council workers are preparing for war.**

Budgets need to be set at council meetings before the start of April and local politicians are slowly revealing the detail of the cuts.

Kirklees Unison branch recently balloted members over plans to cut non-school staff from 11,200 to 9,500. On a poor turnout (due in part to the snow) the branch got a slim majority for action. Branch officers kept their nerve and planned five days of action to start Monday 10 January. At the last minute management made an offer of no job losses before 1 April and an agreement that sickness absence will not be used in redundancy decisions. At a meeting on 8 January, 85 stewards voted unanimously to call off the action. These are just the opening scuffles in what will be a long battle, but Kirklees Unison will go into the next phase of the dispute from a position of strength.

Cuts can be fought; but often unions are not fighting.

In Wirral, the Tory-Lib Dem council issued offers of voluntary redundancy to their 6,000 employees in November. Workers who did not accept the deal were threatened with statutory minimum severance pay if their post was cut in the future. Consequently, 1,100 workers accepted the deal.

First indications suggest that large number of care staff and librarians have taken the voluntary redundancy package. This means

the residents of the Wirral can expect the closure of half their libraries, five care homes for older people and a day centre for people with learning disabilities.

This anarchic way of making cuts is very destructive. But it finds some support in the unions.

According to the official Unison guidance, this deal should be considered as a victory as it has avoided any compulsory redundancies. If they follow the guidance, local union officers should now busy themselves with negotiations to sort out the finer details of closures and re-deployments.

But the deal still means an increased workload for the staff left behind and the loss of services for the community. The Labour opposition on the council are considering a legal challenge because the Tory-Lib Dems “have not followed due process”. The anti-cuts battle will not be won through negotiations with management or legal challenges (important though these may be) but through mobilising for a campaign of industrial action.

As well as having a terrible policy on voluntary redundancies, the Unison bureaucracy is playing its traditional role in withholding strike ballots. But some branches have made progress in building enough grassroots pressure to force the bureaucracy into action.

In Notts County, a series of demonstrations, workplace meetings and an indicative ballot in favour of action has secured a strike ballot. It looks likely that Nottingham City Unison will soon follow.

## “People know hard fights are coming but are cynical about fighting back”

### My life at work

#### Rob Ottway is a railway worker in eastern England

**Tell us a little bit about the work you do.**

I work on the railway as signalling technician in a team of three. It’s shift work — 24/7, 364 days a year. We sometimes have quiet times, but these are becoming rarer as management cut staff and don’t fill empty posts. The work is safety-critical and there is a lot of pressure on us to

get faults solved quickly.

**Do you and your workmates get the pay and conditions you deserve?**

Not really. The pay is regarded by most as adequate but no more. The amount of overtime on offer was huge but lately this has come down. I should point out that this is a historic thing. The railway was, until recently, a very low-wage industry and you worked your basic hours, then worked any overtime which was

available almost as a Pavlovian response. This is now, thankfully, falling off as a younger generations come into the job.

**How has the recent political situation, both in terms of the economic crisis and the new government and its cuts, affected your work?**

It has had more of a threat value than any real effects so far. Management have recently forced through huge changes to our terms and conditions along with a re-allocation of staff. The threat was “accept this or get much worse later on”.

**What do people talk about in your workplace?**

**How easy is it to “talk politics on the job”?**

It’s very mixed. People know that there are hard fights coming up but are cynical about how we can fight back and more important, win. The older hands keep harking back to the good old days before privatisation but keep forgetting just how bad it was. All in all, the government is thoroughly hated and people are looking for a change.

**What are your bosses like?**

Bad, and getting worse. With the new terms and conditions coming on top of a re-organisation, they are stressed out like never before, along with some

newer whiz kids with no idea about how we work but who still want to make a name for themselves. Again, the older ones have rose-tinted specs on with regard to the old managers. A manager’s bonus and pay is determined by things like sickness and accident figures and they have taken to organising taxis to get people into work even though they cannot do anything when they get there. Lower management forget that they are just numbers like us.

**Is there a union in your workplace, and does it do a good job?**

Yes, there is — the RMT. The staff reps are doing OK but fighting with one

hand tied.

The recent changes in terms and conditions were allowed to go through with very little organised fight at a national level. I get really angry about how the dispute was handled.

We are trying, as a union branch, to get better at recruiting and organising. It is a long job. My department is better organised than others and we are trying to spread the best of what we do to other sections.

**If you could change one thing about your work, what would it be?**

Get control over management’s abuses of power.

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Jail used to intimidate protesters

Edward Woollard, the student who threw a fire extinguisher off the roof of Tory party HQ at the 10 November student demonstration, hurting no-one, has been sentenced to 32 months in jail.

For a foolish but harmless act, an 18 year old will have key years of his whole life blighted.

And the cop who bludgeoned Alfie Meadows on 9 December, so that he had to have emergency surgery to save his life? Nothing.

The three security guards who killed Jimmy Mubenga in October? They have been interviewed by police, but not charged.

The cops who killed Jean Charles de Menezes? Nothing.

On Sunday 9 January, school students in Witney, Oxfordshire, joined a protest against privatisation organised by the post and telecom union CWU at David Cameron's constituency office.

Among the speakers was 12 year old student Nicky Wishart, who was threatened with arrest and even shooting by the police, when he used Facebook to organise a protest outside Cameron's office late last year.

Many other school students across the country are still dealing with the threat of expulsion for participating in last year's walkouts.

And as students plan another day of walkouts on 26 January and 29 January, they may meet a violent police response. They will be planning ways of staying safe on their demonstrations.

The Right to Resist campaign has been set up to mobilise the student movement and the labour movement to fight politically against police powers of repression. We want to end the practice of kettling. We will co-ordinate protests against victimisations of student protesters.

Right to Resist is producing activist briefings on how to fight victimisations, stay safe on demonstrations and know your rights in case of arrests; and collecting stories and images of police violence and repression.

Please pass the Right to Resist model motion in your trade union branch, Constituency Labour Party, anti-cuts committee or student union.

•righttoresist.wordpress.com

## Students restart the movement

**Walk out on 26 January!  
Protest on 29 January!  
Students and workers unite!**

**By Ed Maltby**

**26 January will be the first protest of the new year, a walkout from schools all over the UK. The next protest will be three days later, on Saturday 29 January.**

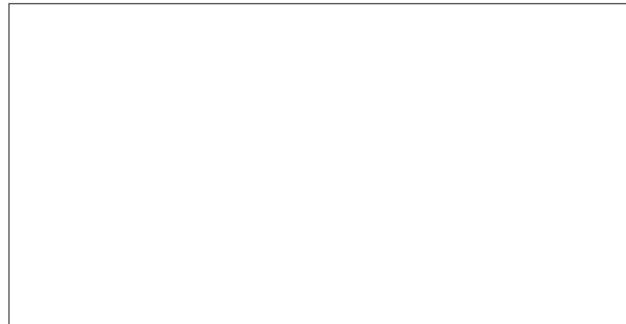
The student movement against tuition fees and cuts to the teaching budget and Education Maintenance Allowance, which shook the country last month, is regrouping after Christmas and the January exams.

Trade unions should send delegations to join the protests on 26 and 29 January.

University students should occupy where possible, and join the walkout demonstrations if they can't occupy.

University activist groups should get in touch with school students and give them help in organising walkouts.

The student movement



needs structures that can act fast, draw in new people, sustain the mobilisation if there is another dip or pause, and link up with the trade unions.

School students need to organise regular meetings in their schools, and also meet regularly with students from other schools in their city or borough. University anti-cuts groups need to do the same. University occupations should offer to host these organising meetings.

At the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts conference on the 22nd, the way ahead nationally will be planned, and the NCAFC will decide on structures that can help it sustain itself as a durable organisation.

NCAFC has already called for National Union of Students (NUS) president Aaron Porter to resign, and for a special NUS conference. On the 22nd it will plan for intervention

at the regular NUS conference in April.

The rail union RMT in London called on its members to back the 9 December student march. We can build on that.

Students should assist unions in their disputes with collections, demonstrations and action, and trade union activists should invite students to speak in branch and workplace meetings, and go to demonstrations.

And we should fight to make the leaders of the trade unions and the Labour Party support the student movement.

• Details and leaflets for 22, 26 and 29 January: [www.anticuts.com](http://www.anticuts.com)

**The student revolt, class struggle and socialism 12-6pm, 26 February Highgate Newtown Community Centre, Bertram St, London N19 5DQ Followed by a benefit gig for Palestinian trade unions**

## Organising at school

**Robin Coleman from Cherwell School spoke to Solidarity**

**EMA [Education Maintenance Allowance] is very important to many students. You have to pay adult bus fares once you are in the sixth form. If the government cuts EMA, we can expect attendance to fall. It would just be a stupid thing to do.**

We have mostly had support from teachers. They fear showing public support for our campaigns because they are not allowed to condone absence from school. Many of them have decided to not take any action against us if we protest. Some have even been on the demonstrations.

I have been trying to learn as much as possible about the proposals to change EMA and tuition fees, and then help explain these in literature and meetings. It is very difficult when you have government ministers on television every other day claiming that students will be paying less under the new system.

Friends have been talking to local trade unions to try and co-ordinate the wider

anti-cuts campaign. This is important because we can collectively build momentum for protests. The student movement has died down a bit since the tuition fees bill got through parliament, but I am confident it will pick up again.

The school system at the moment is designed to guide young people as to how to fit in to society, rather than how to change it. You have to have more of a balance between teaching people how to simply fit in, and teaching people how to influence the world around them. This is probably why there is a lot of political apathy at the moment. Schools have to inspire people that they can bring about change.

My friends are generally "left wing". Some are more socialist than others. I am a Green. I support the Green party because I think that the current generation of mainstream politicians have completely misdiagnosed today's economic problems. They will keep trying purely financial solutions, until the economy is bankrupt. What we have today is really a crisis of resources rather than a crisis of money.

Obviously there are also many socialists who think that the politicians have the wrong priorities at the moment.

## Pakistan: stand up for secularism!

**By Chris Marks**

On Monday 5 January Salman Taseer, governor of Punjab (Pakistan's largest province) and a former Pakistani People's Party MP, was shot 27 times by his bodyguard Mumtaz Qadri in Islamabad.

Farooq Tariq of the socialist Labour Party Pakistan said: "The blood of Salman Taseer should not go in vain. Pakistan People's Party should abandon all policies to please the religious fanatics. There should be a resolute fight back against the mullahs who want Pakistan to become another Taliban-control country."

Taseer was killed by Qadri because he wanted to reform Pakistan's blasphemy law, which has led to people being incarcerated for insulting the prophet Muhammad.

The shooting is the latest symptom of the rise of religious conservatism and right-wing radicalism in Pakistan, and Islamist attempts to rid the country of what they call "Western extremism". In fact Pakistan already has some of the world's most draconian laws regarding religious freedom and the right of expression.

Last November a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, was sentenced to death for "blasphemy" (the sentence has not yet been carried out). Taseer went to visit her to express solidarity; on his return home he was met by an Islamist mob, burning an effigy and calling for his death.

Qadri has been hailed as a martyr. Facebook groups

and blogs praised him and Pakistani news featured supportive vox pops of young Pakistanis, some going as far as to say that they wished they had done it themselves.

Some right-wing religious leaders claimed that Taseer got what he deserved.

President Zardari had already backed down, under pressure from the mullahs, on an earlier suggestion he might pardon Asia Bibi.

Taseer was a wealthy businessman who made a lot of money out of the exploitation of Pakistani workers.

The growing support for Islamism within Pakistan can and will only be curbed by a working-class alternative. This means defending secularist politicians like Taseer against the religious right, but simultaneously fighting the class struggle and for socialist solutions to the chronic poverty and exploitation exploited by Islamism.

Our first priority must be solidarity with socialists, secularists, women's rights activists and the labour movement in Pakistan.

## Britain trains Bangladeshi death squad

**By Sacha Ismail**

**US embassy cables leaked by Wikileaks reveal that the UK government has been training a paramilitary death squad in Bangladesh — in the name of "counter-terrorism".**

The Rapid Action Battalion is estimated by human rights activists to be responsible for 1,000 murders since its establishment six years ago, in addition to a record of kidnapping, extortion and torture. Last year, it was used against garment workers during their huge strikes.

Since three years ago —

under the Labour government — Britain has been training these killers in "areas such as investigative interviewing techniques and rules of engagement".

The Foreign Office has responded by saying that the UK provides "a range of human rights assistance" in Bangladesh!

The leaked documents reveal that the US and British governments want to step up support for the RAB. The British labour movement must raise its voice in protest.

• For more on Bangladesh, including workers' struggles there, [www.workersliberty.org/world/bangladesh](http://www.workersliberty.org/world/bangladesh).