

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Support the Vita Cortex factory occupation!

By Liam McNulty

Workers at the Vita Cortex factory in Cork, Ireland, have been occupying the plant since 16 December.

They are refusing to leave without the €1.2 million compensation promised in September when Vita Cortex management announced plans to move production to Athlone, County Westmeath.

They rejected a subsequent offer of €1,500 each, calling it "Scrooge-like", and vowed to continue occupying the foam rubber plant until they received the payments, amounting to 2.9 weeks per year of service for each worker.

The factory occupation has caught the imagination of local workers, and hundreds of supporters held a solidarity demonstration on 2 January. It has also caught the imagination of Occupy Cork activists who have occupied an unused building on Oliver Plunkett Street in the city, with plans to turn it into a community resource centre.

Speaking to *Solidarity*, Occupy activist Eoghan MacMahon said: "The Occupy movement in Cork is fully behind these workers. We were thrilled to see direct action like this happen, as it shows that the Irish people are beginning to wake up and say no, this isn't right."

He also expressed scepticism about the professions of support from trade union leaders, noting that "Ireland's trade unions have been far too resistant to actually mobilising people in the last few years and resisting the cuts...Too many people are

too comfortable in the union bureaucracy to really rock the boat yet."

The workers have received support from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) general secretary, David Begg, and from the president of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), Jack O'Connor, who visited the factory on Christmas Eve and promised to "mobilise" the SIPTU's members in the new year.

Begg and O'Connor have been central to the social-partnership "Croke Park Agreement". As the general secretary of the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants, Dave

Thomas, gushed recently to the *Irish Times*, social-partnership has meant that "for almost two years — despite the sacrifices that have been made, the cuts endured and the impact of previous reductions in pay and entitlements — the Republic has, in large part, enjoyed industrial peace." It is a tragic commentary on the state of parts of the Irish labour movement that he saw this as a good thing (!) rather than a disastrous shackle on the labour movement.

Workers should not take the assurances of Ireland's union bureaucrats at face value.

If workers really want to help the Vita Cortex workers they should establish a campaign based, of course, on the trade unions but more importantly, on rank-and-file structures independent of the bureaucracy.

• Abridged from: bit.ly/zMdoMA

Drive out cosmetic surgery business!

By Vicki Morris

The French state is offering to remove the breast implants of 30,000 French women who got implants from Poly Implant Prothèse (PIP).

The company has folded after revelations that it used industrial-grade instead of medical-grade silicone in its implants.

Around 40,000 UK women also have had PIP implants. The UK government has said that it will remove implants for those women who want it only if they had the implants as part of treatment on the NHS. These women will be cancer patients who have had reconstructive surgery.

This only accounts for 5 per cent of those affected. For the 95 per cent of women who got their PIP implants from private companies, overwhelmingly for cosmetic reasons, the government is offering little. They say there is no clear proof that there is a clinical need for removal, and that women should discuss the issue with their private provider if they want removal.

The government will not force private surgeons to remove implants, but has simply urged the private companies to "step up to the plate", and perform their "moral duty" to provide aftercare to patients. In

many cases, the government knows, this simply will not happen, in a few cases because the surgeons have gone out of business, in most because the companies will not accept liability.

Much of the cosmetic surgery industry does not act in a moral fashion. This burgeoning industry is unregulated. The growing number of prosecutions by customers who have been badly advised or had procedures bungled demonstrates that most of the providers are simply in it for the money and not because they care about their clients/patients.

Immediately, the government should offer to women who have had private procedures the same options they are giving NHS patients: consultation and removal of implants should the women want it. The government should hasten their investigations into the safety or otherwise of PIP implants. It should move immediately to regulate the cosmetic surgery industry.

On the broader issues raised by this scandal, socialists should fight against all the conditions that lead women and men to decide to undergo medically useless, and potentially dangerous, cosmetic surgery procedures, including but not limited to breast enlargement.

New Unionism: how workers can fight back

Saturday 18 February 2012, 11:30-5:30 at Highgate Newtown Community Centre, London N19 5DQ

Creche available — cheap food — bookstalls

book tickets online: workersliberty.org/newunionism

In the late 1880s, workers (often unskilled or semi-skilled, often migrants and often working in casualised and precarious environments) organised militant industrial unions to fight back against their bosses. Socialist activists like Eleanor Marx, Tom Mann and Will Thorne were crucial to the struggles.

Faced with increasingly similar conditions today, can we build a New Unionism for the 21st century that transforms and revolutionises the modern labour movement?

Speakers/sessions include:

- Louise Raw, author of *Striking A Light*, on the Bryant & May matchwomen's strike of 1888.
- Colin Waugh (Editorial Board, *Post-16 Educator*, and author of a pamphlet on the Plebs League) on independent working-class education
- New Unionism and the fight for working-class political representation
- New Unionism 2012?
- *The Troublemakers' Handbook*: reading Labor Notes' guide to organising at work

Tickets: £15 (waged), £8 (low-waged), £4 (unwaged)

80% of homes unaffordable by 2016

By Patrick McCabe

In London, the Government's cap on Housing Benefit payments means social cleansing, akin in its severity to the Highland Clearances.

Large areas of the city will become unaffordable for working-class people, and whole boroughs will be gentrified to the detriment of affordable housing.

Under the government's proposals, 80% of privately rented houses will be unaffordable by 2016. Around 360,000 households are on council waiting lists, and rents are rising about 6 per cent a year because of increased demand for renting.

A two-bedroom flat in London now costs £1,600 a month on average.

Research by Shelter which shows that almost seven million people are relying on credit in some form to help pay their housing costs — payday loans, unauthorised overdrafts, other loans, or credit cards. And as work-

ers are forced into "benefit ghettos", their chances of getting a well-paid, or any, job decline.

This month the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) of Housing Benefit, already applying to under 25s, will be extended to all those claiming housing benefit between the ages of 25 and 34. Benefit payments will be set at the rate for a single room in a shared house, as against the rate that would be payable for a self-contained one-bedroom property. Anyone living in a self-contained property will have to make up the shortfall.

Since 2010 there have been significant rises in youth homelessness.

The charity Homeless Link published a survey of charities and local authorities in December 2010, showing that nearly half of homelessness services (44 %) and councils (48%) have seen increases in young people applying to them as homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Margaret Thatcher: the real story

Thursday 25 January, 19:30, Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8QZ

The film *The Iron Lady* presents Margaret Thatcher as smashing barriers of class and sexism to make her way to the top. But the real story of Thatcher, and Thatcherism, is one of class war by the rich against the majority of people in Britain, with disastrous consequences for workers (and women).

What are the lessons for the labour movement and the left as we fight the Tories today? Did Thatcher, as she claimed, defeat socialism for good?

Speakers: **Sean Matgamna** (editor of *Socialist Organiser* newspaper in the 80s); **Jean Lane** (Tower Hamlets Unison assistant secretary, working-class activist during the Thatcher years, pc)

Inequality facts

- On current trends, only one-third of people will retain good health until 68 (soon, on Government plans, to be pension age). Some will not live to see that age while others will be suffering from a life-limiting physical or mental disability.

- The average gap in disability-free life expectancy between the poorest and the richest neighbourhoods is 17 years. In other words, top managers have a good chance of reaching 68 disability-free; few workers do.

- Average gross earnings for full time workers in all occupational groups fell

by 5.9% in real terms between April 2007 and November 2011. In 37 occupational groups the decline was over 15%. bit.ly/wagefall

- Directors of the top 100 companies saw their average total earnings jump 49 per cent to almost £2.7m in 2010-11. bit.ly/xSxWKE

- Average earnings of top-100 bosses have risen from 47 to 102 times average earnings since 2000.

- British companies are holding cash on their balance sheets worth 5 per cent of gross domestic product (about £70 billion). on.ft.com/70bill.

Landlords should be forced to make rent cuts

Tory benefit cuts could mean a million evictions

By Chris Reynolds

Gradually, and in large steps, the Housing Benefit changes introduced by the coalition government are making big areas of Britain's cities unaffordable for all but the well-off.

With the labour movement preoccupied by pension revisions and cuts to jobs and services, these steps have passed with little in the way of grass-roots resistance. A new phase of the changes started on 1 January 2012, and should be the signal for building local campaigns.

Where tenants are willing to defy, campaigns should mobilise to stop them being evicted, as they stopped poll-tax defiers having their property seized by bailiffs in Scotland over a decade ago. Such mobilisations can win; landlords, who are prospering now, can be forced to make cuts in rent matching the cuts in benefit.

We should demand that the Government stops, or at least freezes, the cuts in benefits. Three facts add up to an emergency:

- Rapidly-rising private-sector rents, as people who might otherwise have bought homes rent instead;

- Rapidly-rising unemployment;

- Declining real wages

Cuts in benefits should not even be discussed until that emergency has passed.

The whole labour movement should add urgency to its long-standing campaign for more council housing to be built. Instead, the coalition government is moving to remove security of tenure from council tenants, and to raise council rents further.

It should also demand the reintroduction of publicly-set limits to the rents landlords should charge. Those limits existed in Britain from 1915 until they were almost abolished by Thatcher's Housing Act of 1988: rent controls now apply only where the tenancy agreement was made before 15 January 1989.

The Labour candidate for London mayor, Ken Livingstone, has promised to introduce a "London Living Rent" ceiling. That is a good move, but it is not clear that the mayor has any legal powers to make rent ceilings more than a voluntary target. The next Labour government should be committed to introducing proper rent controls.

Instead, Labour leaders have supported the "principle" of the Housing Benefit

cuts and quibbled only about "detail". Labour spokesperson Liam Byrne said: "The government has got get the detail right otherwise it will simply clobber the poorest and put families on the street". Byrne's objection seems to be mainly that the financial cost of dealing with more homeless people could be large.

From 1 April 2011, the level of Local Housing Allowance was reduced so that in each area about three in ten properties for rent should be affordable to people on benefit, rather than five in ten properties as previously.

Maximum rates of Local Housing Allowance were also introduced (without any maximum on rents!) This especially affects claimants with large households.

The total effect is to put about 800,000 homes out of the reach of benefit claimants, or to put 1.3 million tenants in a position where they have to move, run up debt to pay their rent, or get evicted.

People making new claims since 1 April 2011 have been affected straight away. Existing claimants have had "transitional protection" for nine months — expiring on 1 January 2012,

or nine months after their last annual benefit review.

Also on 1 January, the "shared accommodation rate", a special lower rate of Housing Benefit, was extended from under-25s to cover all single people under 35. They can get benefit based only on cost of a room in a shared house. The change kicks in after their local authority's yearly review of Housing Benefits.

The effects are enormous. In Newham, east London, there will be twice as many claimants as there are houses or flats affordable on benefit. In Croydon, 17,000 claimants will be chasing 10,000 properties. These are not posh areas.

There is a further time-bomb in the Government's plans. Housing Benefit will be increased in line only with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), not with rent levels, which historically have risen much faster than CPI. Research by the housing organisation Shelter shows that this change will make increasingly large areas of Britain's cities unaffordable as the years go by.

People seeking jobs will be able to afford to live only... in depressed areas where there are no jobs available, and so rents are lower.

all of us wish we did not have to make".

Decoded: Miliband plans for the next Labour government to continue the Tories' and Lib-Dems' cuts, only more softly. And Labour's objection to the current cuts — "too far, too fast" — will become even more muted.

The coalition's cuts, by pushing down overall economic output, have increased, not reduced, the budget deficit.

Even within the parameters of bourgeois economics, the argument which Ed Balls made when running for the Labour leadership, that the crisis calls for government spending to boost output, not cuts, has been confirmed.

Yet Balls himself is now putting that argument only in a barely-audible mumble.

Even in the crisis, there is plenty of "money to spend". The question is,

who has it? While workers' real pay was pushed down, and social spending was cut, the directors of the top 100 companies saw their average total earnings jump 49 per cent to almost £2.7m in 2010-11.

The unions should call Miliband to account on his servile acceptance of Tory calculations, and demand a Labour policy which taxes the rich to rebuild social provision.

Miliband waves white flag on cuts

By Martin Thomas

Labour Party leader Ed Miliband has taken the sagging of the public sector unions' fight on pensions as a cue to flag up an even weaker Labour stance on cuts.

On 10 January he declared that: "Whoever is the next prime minister will not have money to spend. We will have to make difficult choices that

Bolsheviks, Kronstadt and democracy



Letters

Bolsheviks could have granted Kronstadt demands

Paul Hampton is wrong in his analysis of the events which took place at Kronstadt early in 1921 (*Solidarity 228*).

Bloodied, exhausted, half-starved, facing a ruined economy and the defeat of the Revolution in Europe, the Bolsheviks had retained state power. They could have negotiated and compromised with Kronstadt. But an offer of mediation by the anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman was rejected.

The revolt had been sparked off by the brutal suppression of strike by freezing and hungry Petrograd workers, itself a grave error. The Bolsheviks continued to be guilty not only of arrogance and ineptitude, particularly on the part of Kalinin, chair of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and later Stalinist apparatchik and Kuzmin, the Commissar in charge of the fleet and the army, but also of deliberate fabrication. The stories about the White general Kozlovsky commanding Kronstadt were deliberate lies!

On 1 March, 1921 a mass meeting of 16,000 Kronstadt sailors, soldiers and workers passed a motion which called for new elections by secret ballot to the Soviets, freedom of speech and the press for workers and peasants, freedom of assembly for trade unions and peasant organisations, liberation of Socialist political prisoners, equalisation of rations and abolition of the militia which prevented workers from foraging in the countryside for food. These demands could have been granted by the Bolsheviks. If they had retained the support of the majority of workers they would have won the new elections.

Instead on 4 March, misled by disinformation, the Petrograd Soviet proposed a motion proposed by Zinoviev that Kronstadt surrender or be crushed.

On 7 March the assault on Kronstadt led by Trotsky began. Among those who marched across the ice were delegates to the 10th Bolshevik Congress. Among them were Dybenko, a former Left Communist, Bubnov, a leader of the Democratic Centralist opposition, and supporters of Kollontai's Workers Opposition, all of whom had made criticisms and demands for change similar to those made by Kronstadt.

Kronstadt fell on 17 March. As the sailors, soldiers and workers died with the words "long live the world revolu-

tion" on their lips. Many of those who slaughtered them realised they had been duped. Few would survive the purges of the thirties.

On 18 March the Bolsheviks celebrated the anniversary of the Paris Commune as the Cheka shot prisoners.

The bloody suppression of Kronstadt, something which could have been avoided, was the first step on the road of counter-revolution which led in less than a decade to the triumph of the totalitarian Stalinist Thermidor.

Terry Liddle, south London

Bolsheviks and democracy

What puzzles me most about Martyn Hudson's polemics on the Bolshevik regime is his apparent assumption that the Bolsheviks' problem was a lack of concern for democracy which we, retrospectively, could easily set them right on. If only they had valued democracy more, everything would have been fine.

That makes no historical sense. The Bolshevik cadres of the civil war years had spent decades battling the Tsarist regime under the banners of "social democracy" and "consistent democracy".

Until 1917, most of them believed that radical democracy was the most their efforts could win in Russia, in the foreseeable term. Socialism could follow only after a democratic revolution and a span of bourgeois-democratic rule.

Bolshevik activists had to give up family, job prospects, and any sort of security. They had to operate underground, and would almost certainly get arrested and exiled.

Why did they do that? The prizes for which those Bolshevik activists fought, and most of the political demands for which they fought, were democratic. They had a passion and commitment for democracy much outstripping that of anyone brought up in the conditions of stable, stodgy bourgeois democracy in Britain.

The Bolsheviks were democrats, but revolutionaries, not advisers or constitutional lawyers. They had become convinced in the course of 1917 that the only realisable form of radical democracy in Russia in 1917 was soviet rule, workers' democracy, rather than the nebulous "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" which they had previously advocated.

And they knew that soviet rule could be won and consolidated only by combat. With much misgiving, the civil war convinced them that the workers' rule could be defended, and the chances kept alive of a Europe-wide workers' revolution which would enable workers' democracy to flower and stabilise, only by vigour and ruthlessness.

The civil war started with a mini-Kronstadt. A general with troops on the outskirts of St Petersburg planned to overthrow the new Bolshevik-led government, which as of then lacked any regular state machine or armed defence.

He was forestalled by two Bolsheviks infiltrating his barracks in the middle of the night, waking up the troops, haranguing them, and winning them over to the workers' cause. If their harangues had been less effective, those two Bolsheviks would have been killed.

Dozens such episodes happened during the civil war. The Red forces would approach a railway junction, a village, a group of deserters. They would send emissaries to try to win the people over. If they failed, the emissaries could be killed, and the Reds would have to fight.

By the end of the civil war, 14 million people had been killed in that and in the previous world war; many more millions had been maimed or displaced, or lost their families. The stresses pushed Bolsheviks towards impatience, brusqueness, use of the language of military command where patient persuasion was needed.

By all accounts, that is what happened with the Bolsheviks' emissaries to Kronstadt. It was a serious mishap. It makes no sense to condemn the Bolsheviks' subsequent measures to stop that mishap from spiralling into full collapse by complacently declaring: "Oh, if only they had understood democracy properly, as we comfortable citizens do today, then they would have dealt with it better".

In the broad historic overview, the workers' regime succumbed because its defence required more in the way of energy, ruthlessness, indomitability than even the amazing human material of the Bolsheviks could provide — not because the workers' party had too much grip, but because it eventually lost its political grip, being smothered by the bureaucracy.

Martin Thomas, Islington

Kronstadt demands were revolutionary

Paul Hampton concedes (*Solidarity 228*) that the Kronstadt sailors had no links to the White Guards and that they supported the Bolsheviks in the Civil War.

He also concedes that the sailors "wanted equal rations instead of privileges for soviet bureaucrats and concessions to the peasantry"; demands any left-winger could sympathise with, and demands which Paul states were introduced "shortly after with the New Economic Policy". If the Bolsheviks agreed with these demands then what is the justification for militarily oppressing them? The demand for fair rations at the expense of bureaucratic privilege is a demand the Bolsheviks should not only have supported, but they should not have allowed a situation to develop in which the demand would be necessary.

Paul describes the harshness of the sailors' repression as "essentially secondary in retrospect". Why? The harshness of the repression reflects the Bolshevik desperation in finding left-wing opposition to their rule in a time immediately after war; repression of demands that they agreed with, and later granted! This newspaper would not look upon any other form of harsh political repression as "accident"; the violence of the repression demonstrates the violence of the Bolshevik desire to retain power.

The Bolsheviks abolished the Constituent Assembly in favour of soviet democracy, which is consistent with the demand for workers' democracy. The Kronstadt rebels opposed Bolshevik party rule within the soviets; that is an anti-Bolshevik, not anti-revolutionary, demand. The Kronstadt rebels weren't counter revolutionaries, even if their dissent would have led counter revolutionaries to act against the workers' government. The sailors fought on the side of the Bolsheviks, so why could they not have their demands granted?

Political and tactical arguments among comrades fighting on the same side in the same interests must and be won by reasoning and democratic decision making. The Kronstadt sailors' demands were consistent with the working-class politics that brought the 1917 revolution about. This "blunder" is just a demonstration of Bolshevik hypocrisy.

The rebels used a "strategically important base...with other armed rebellions simmering to the south", indicating that they had a lot of bargaining power with which to have their demands met: arms, and the possibility of triggering other discontented workers to rebellion. The political justification for crushing the sailors then also becomes the justification for Bolsheviks preventing further dissent; they smash the power of these politically "un-strategic" workers in order to secure...the rule of the people? On what democratic basis does the Bolshevik party then rule?

Russia in 1921 was a workers' state, but the political licence that Leninists often offer the Bolsheviks is out of sync with the criticisms we levy at any other government. If armed force is what it takes to suppress demands for workers' equality, then the "unravelling" of "tenuous forms of workers' self-rule" has already happened.

Hannah Thompson, Hackney

More on Kronstadt, page 10

Labour: more to do than "looking"

Dave Osler (*Solidarity 228*) reckons that the "search for life on Mars... will reach fruition long before anyone ever discovers signs of life in the Labour Party".

Oddly, though, Dave himself is a member of the Labour Party, and concludes his column by "we should keep looking" for that elusive "life in the Labour Party".

Dave is not untypical of Labour leftists here. If you really want a downbeat picture of life in the Labour Party, don't ask an "ultra-left", ask a Labour leftist. Often what distinguishes Labour leftists from SWP or SP types is not so much that they are pursuing or recommending campaigns within the Labour Party, but that they are downbeat about left-wing life *everywhere*, inside the Labour Party or outside.

They're partly right. When the SWP and the SP talk as if a general strike is round the corner, they are unrealistic. The number of people interested in reading left-wing papers, attending left-wing meetings, or joining activist-left groups, has risen since the crash of 2008, but there is still no large "left milieu". The local anti-cuts campaigns which emerged in 2010 have in many places (not everywhere) shrunk to cabals of long-time left-group activists.

And, speaking soberly, many of the people who are interested in the left are as yet cautious about their leftness. That the Occupy movement has not demanded expropriation of the banks and big business, but rather things like "an end to global tax injustice" and "regulators genuinely independent of the industries they regulate", reflects not a special unmilitancy of that movement, but a general mood.

Beyond a point, however, "sobriety", "realism", and caution in assessment can become more part of the problem than of the solution. Dave notes that there has been an influx of new members into the Labour Party, but shrugs: "no

attempt seems to have been made systematically to integrate this layer".

No attempt by whom? Of course the Blairite apparatchiks who still dominate the Labour machine will not integrate members into activity. But what did we expect? The problem is that mostly Labour leftists, sunk as they are in gloom, have generally made little effort to organise those new members.

"Oh well, most of the new members are not very left wing". "Oh well, a lot of them come to a couple of meetings and then vanish". "Oh well, many of them won't renew their membership after the first year".

There can't really be a compact influx of combative left-wingers into the Labour Party (as in the early 70s, and again after 1979) until a large-ish pool of combative left-wingers is formed in society more broadly. That doesn't mean there is nothing to be done in the meantime. Labour Party conference 2012 was the liveliest, in terms of reactions from the floor, for many years; but there was little left-wing organising in the conference hall. There could have been.

"If it is radical youth and students you are after", Dave continues, "the Labour Party is just about the last place you will find them". Young Labour is feeble, though showing a tad more life recently, and that type of young person who is or wants to be an MP's aide, a union full-timer, or an NGO or think-tank office worker, is horribly over-represented in its thin ranks. But there was a walk-out at Young Labour conference 2011 in protest at undemocratic manipulation.

There are things to be done, and things that go beyond "looking".

Alan Gilbert, London

Pensions: what's gone wrong?

As *Solidarity* goes to press on 10 January, the public-sector pensions battle is in the balance.

Many unions have expressed dissent with the "final" Government proposals of 19 December. In fact, it seems that the only actual union signatures on a document are the signatures of Unison, GMB and Unite on a joint document with local government employers, and Unite has withdrawn that. Aside from that, even the union leaders keenest to put a lid on the issue are saying no more than that they will negotiate with the Government on its new terms and suspend action in the meantime.

Trouble is, that is enough for the Government. If the union troops are stood down, even with declarations that unions "reserve the right to take further action" such as the civil-service union Prospect has made, then the Government will impose increased pension contributions for teachers, health workers, and civil service workers from April 2012. Over the next months it will nail down measures consolidating the four things it wanted from the start:

- Pensions increased as prices rise only by the CPI index, on average 0.8% a year less than the RPI index by which they were previously raised, and thus reduced by 15% after 20 years. (This was enforced from April 2011).
- Increased pension contributions by workers.
- The age at which workers can claim full pensions raised to 66 by 2018-20, to 67 by 2026-28, and to 68 by 2044-46. (The Government's plans on this have got worse, not better, since the union campaign started).
- Pensions changed from "final salary" to "career average", with the method of calculating "average" and the accrual rate (fraction of career-average, or final-salary, won by each year's contributions) set so that this means a big drop in pensions.

CLOUT

The chances for shifting that depend on the more defiant unions, like PCS and NUT, moving from general talk about possible further action to definite plans for action, and soon.

Even PCS and NUT have enough clout, on their own, to budge the Government somewhat. The battle is not over. It has suffered a setback sufficient to call for discussion on how we got here. What went wrong?

The union response was too late and too slow. The Government said that it planned to "reform" public sector pensions soon after the May 2010 general election.

It legislated the RPI-CPI change, cutting the value of pensions, in June 2010, and implemented it from April 2011.

It announced that it would take about 3% of workers' wages in pension-contribution increases in October 2010.

It put forward its full package, more or less as it is now, in March 2011.

Pensions strike demonstration, 30 November 2011

Unison leader Dave Prentis said that Tory pension-cut plans would be met by a "big national strike", "militancy", and "social dislocation", back in April 2010, even before the general election.

Mark Serwotka, leader of the PCS civil service union, predicted in December 2010 that there would be "mass industrial action" by April 2011.

In fact, aside from two days of strikes by the lecturers' union UCU in March 2011, the unions organised no action until 30 June 2011, and most of them not until 30 November 2011.

To call the union leaders' campaign "snail's pace" would be too generous. Snails at least keep moving. Both on 30 June and 30 November the strikes were organised with no clear plans for follow-up. Workers were called out on strike, then told to go back to work with no further perspective other than to wait and see if the union leaders might summon them to a further one-day strike some months later.

Between 30 June and 30 November the "campaign" amounted to little more than waiting to see when, or indeed whether, the union leaders would call the next one-day strike. There was little action even on the level of demonstrations or meetings or leaflettings. Proposals from Workers' Liberty and other left-wingers for strike levies and rolling and selective action between the one-day "spectaculars" were rejected by many others on the left as well as by the union leaders.

That made the campaign also too narrow. The National Union of Teachers decided to run a campaign for "Fair Pensions for All", linking the public-sector issues with the simultaneous and linked attacks on the state pension and private-sector pensions. But the campaign existed only on paper, and not much even there. No union made an effort to rouse the whole working-class public on the broad issue of pensions.

The campaign was too vague. The union leaders called on workers to strike "about" pensions (and PCS on its members to strike also "about" pay and jobs), but stated no clear demands.

Even the most militant of the main union leaders, Mark Serwotka of PCS, constantly stated the aim as "to get the Government to negotiate seriously". Since everything the Government had put on the table was a worsening of the pension schemes, the demand for "a negotiated deal" meant that *from the start* the unions were demanding a worsening of pensions, only not quite such a bad one as the Government wished.

Then, month after month, the union leaders complained that the Government was not negotiating seriously, but did not tell their members what they, the union leaders, were saying in those negotiations. Did every session consist of the union leaders saying "we want to negotiate something not quite so bad, please", the Government say "no, forget it", and everyone going home after two minutes? Really?

PICKLES

Eventually, in December 2011, the local government unions told their members that they had signed a deal with the local government employers — but "could not" tell their members what the deal was, even after it had been signed, because government minister Eric Pickles had not yet approved it.

Union leaders complain that organisation is often weak, and so the unions could not attempt the more militant tactics which Workers' Liberty and other left-wingers advocated. But the leaders' method of running the campaign ran directly counter to revitalising organisation.

There was no self-controlled, rank-and-file action, only one-day "spectaculars". On the days of action, union officials organised rallies rather than proper meetings where strikers could debate their action and propose their ideas about the next steps.

The unions were weak about even informing their members on the issues. Even now it is common to find union members, union activists even, who are vague about what an accrual rate is, or how the "funded" local government pension scheme differs from the others, or how CPI varies from RPI.

Evidently the union leaders' assumption was such matters "go over the heads" of members, and are best left to the officials, though many of their members deal with more complex ideas, or teach them to teenagers, every day of the week.

Lack of union democracy and scope for rank-and-file has been the core weakness of the dispute. If that can be remedied, it will make the means to cure the other weaknesses.

Help the AWL to raise £20,000

From time to time someone asks us: "Why do you charge for your paper? That's not very socialist."

It should be obvious that, in a capitalist world where everything costs money, it's expensive to produce a newspaper — but the point is easy to forget when it comes to the broader day-to-day functioning of a socialist organisation. Without money, we cannot do what we need to do.

The AWL is growing. We now publish *Solidarity* weekly, setting up new branches and expanding all areas of our activity. If we are going to continue this, we also need to expand our sources of funds. That's why we're launching an appeal to raise £20,000 by the end of August. A donation from you, or a regular standing order, will help.

We need money to:

1. Continue publishing *Solidarity* as a weekly;
2. Establish a fund for publishing high quality books and pamphlets, starting with a book on the politics of Antonio Gramsci;
3. Improve our website;
4. Organise events such as our socialist feminist conference last November, our New Unionism dayschool next month, and our Ideas for Freedom summer school;
5. Organise study courses to educate a new layer of Marxist thinkers and activists, particularly among young people;
6. Build on our work as one of the main forces fighting for rank-and-file democracy and control in the labour movement, and against the accommodation of much of the left to the trade union bureaucracy;
7. Build on the development of a broad, democratic student movement against fees and cuts, in which our role has been irreplaceable;
8. Pay the rent on and finance the staffing of our officeto

make all of the above and more possible.

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

- Taking out a monthly standing order to the AWL. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and on this page. (Even a few pounds a month really does help.)

- Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL") or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

- Organising a fundraising event.
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.
- Getting in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

For more information on any of the above, contact us: tel. 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, SE1 3DG.

Total raised so far: £3,930.



Donations include £65 from Traven, £200 from Rosie, £25 from Matthew, £500 from Jean and a very generous £3,000 from Dan.

We also raised £140 at the London AWL Christmas social. This is a great start, let's build on it!

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

.....

..... (its address in full)

Account name:

..... (your name)

Account no.

Sort code:

Please make payments as follows to the debit of my account: Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20 (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

Lessons of the Stephen Lawrence murder

By Rosalind Robson

That Gary Dobson and David Norris have been jailed for the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence was for the people who loved him, some sort of justice. But as Doreen Lawrence has pointed out it cannot be the end of the matter.

The details of the Stephen Lawrence case and the inquiries and investigations which followed have been thoroughly revisited recently but the lessons of this terrible story bear repeating. Two things stand out.

The police have not — as some pundits would have it — made “good progress” since Stephen’s death. They are still incompetent, racist, corrupt, thuggish and a bureaucratic imposition on society. Backed up by the criminal justice system, the police marginalise, alienate and if necessary repress working-class people, both black and white.

Violent racist attacks have not decreased. According to the Institute of Race Relations, there have been 96 deaths by racially motivated violence since 1993, the most recent the murder of Anuj Bidve in Salford. Yet there is very little media analysis about what leads to these killings. It is as if, racist killings, stabbings, beatings and arson attacks... just happen. And there is very little social or political intervention can do to stop it.

Yet the roots of most violence in society is very *understandable* and linked to the stress on and brutalisation of individuals caused by the effects of inequalities. The more unequal the society, the more violent it is. The police and criminal

justice system are there to both mop up the mess caused by inequality and prop up the system of inequality!

All of this was graphically highlighted by the Stephen Lawrence case.

At the time the police said they had met a “wall of silence” from the community where the killing took place and this hampered the investigation. That was a lie. The police had good information given to them by local people, but they squandered it. People in Eltham wanted to see the small group of thuggish youths who they knew must be responsible for the crime brought to justice.

But what working-class people understand and experience counts for virtually nothing in society. The police are “in charge” and they need to stay in charge. To the police ordinary people are either “criminals” or “law abiding citizens” or other “types” — there to be processed by a badly functioning bureaucracy made up of people who are often more aggressive and narrow-minded than the communities they say they “serve”.

RACISM

Black and Asian people are especially likely to be treated as “types”.

Duwayne Brooks, for instance, was treated as a suspect at the start of the investigation. Duwayne’s character was maliciously smeared and he was even prosecuted (for a minor public order offence) in order to discredit him. This was both racist, and also, if the police were ever actually interested in prosecuting Stephen’s killers, moronic.

The police are never accountable except under political pressure.

“Modernisation” of the capitalist state bureaucracy has brought a tick box culture of fake accountability to the police service. But according to the National Police Racism website the police massage the figures just as much as they used to “massage” confessions out of suspects. The police continue to do what they do best — treating their “customers” like scum.

The routine and racist use of stop and search policing — an invasion of private space tantamount to harassment — exposes this reality perfectly.

According to 2007-8 research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the UK (excluding statistics associated with anti-terror legislation) black people are at least six times as likely to be stopped (and maybe searched) as white people; Asian people, around twice as likely.

The disproportionality was affected by the high London rates in areas with large black populations.

Other research (including that of a House of Commons Select Committee)

show stop and search to be ineffective in pushing up detection rates.

Why do they do it? To harass us all, and black and Asian people in particular. But mostly because the police want to “stand above” society as a visible force to be reckoned with. Stop and search has the appearance of busyness, it is day-to-day enforcement of police power on the streets.

RACIST ATTACKS

According to recent research by the Institute of Race Relations there have been 96 lethal attacks involving some racially motivated element since 1993.

The IRR highlighted certain risk factors:

- 52 percent of attacks were random events by young men individually or in gangs under the influence of drink.
- Most of the victims are young or relatively young.
- Workers in late night street trades — taxi drivers, restaurant workers — are particularly vulnerable.
- Refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and overseas students are also vulnerable.
- A high proportion — 44 per cent — were from

Muslim backgrounds (explained in large part, but not completely by victims being refugees and workers in “night trades”).

- Areas where settled BME communities are relatively new are to a certain extent “hot spots” for racial violence.

Such statistical information should give political people pause for thought. It should be obvious that anti-immigration rhetoric generates a fatal hostility to migrants. It ought to prompt fresh ideas about how to talk about and tackle racism in schools. There should be a public debate about how to create safer urban environments.

But even a thoughtful liberal response is hard to come by when the reality of racial violence is not reflected in the criminal justice system.

According to the IRR “racial aggravation” in crimes of violence (which brings higher sentence if it can be proved) has become a bargaining chip in the bureaucratic criminal justice system. The extra charge is often dropped in order to secure convictions.

SOCIALISTS

What do socialist advocate?

Something radically different to Macpherson Inquiry panel member Richard Stone’s solution (*Guardian*, 5 January) — more black police officers! Socialists say to young black people: don’t join the police force!

We say that not just because black and Asian police officers are slapped down and discriminated against and in the abstract the police could reform to make life just about tolerable for black and Asian po-

lice. We say this because if people think they can change the police system this way, then they are wrong!

We want and demand something much more radical. The right for working-class people to democratically control the police. The right to sack corrupt police who derail investigations — as may have happened in the Stephen Lawrence case. Don’t leave big policing decisions to Teresa May, or policing enquiries to government appointees.

If there had been an elected committee of local people in Eltham in charge of policing operations there would have been an immediate debate and conflict over what the police did and didn’t do instead of 18 years of slow to happen public inquiries — a process which had some grip on events.

If there were such committee in London there would now be conflicts over the levels of stop and search with the potential to put real political pressure on the police and help young black people create and shape their own political responses independent of to the workings of bureaucratic political systems.

The fight for such democratic accountability would not change the character of the police. But any changes forced by political action might restrict the state’s ability to act against us all, push back routine harassment, questioning the batoning and controlling of our protests.

The struggle itself could reveal to millions just how undemocratic, dishonest, incompetent and racist the establishment really is.

“Anti-white racism” is a myth, but don’t defend Abbott’s politics

By Sacha Ismail

Shadow health minister Diane Abbott’s comment on Twitter (4 January) that “White people love playing ‘divide and rule’ We should not play their game #tacticasoldas-colonialism” cannot meaningfully be described as racist.

We should oppose right-wing attempts to cook up an “anti-white racism” and equate it with the anti-black and other forms of racism which pervade British society.

That does not mean that Abbott is a left-winger, or that her comments were unproblematic.

It seems highly unlikely that Abbott is prejudiced against white people. But in any case racism is not

just a matter of individuals’ prejudices. It is a question of oppression and power relations deeply structured into really-existing capitalist society. As *Guardian* journalist Dorian Lynskey puts it on his blog 33 Revolutions Per Minute:

“I can imagine a world in which Diane Abbott’s tweet... would be racist. In this parallel universe Britain is dominated, politically and economically, by an unshakeable clique of black, working-class women and two black men have just been convicted, several years too late thanks to an institutionally racist black police force, of the murder of white teenager Stephen Lawrence. But in this world? Not really.”

Shortly after the

Lawrence verdict, there seem to be right-wing attempts to use Abbott’s comments to “balance things out”. Their implicit message is: “yes, there is anti-black racism in society, but what about anti-white racism?”

And as for Ed Miliband’s rush to give Abbott a “severe dressing down”, it is typical of his bent towards grovelling at the slightest right-wing pressure.

At the same time, we should not be uncritical of Abbott.

She was specifically using the “divide and rule” trope to attempt to silence another black person who disagreed with her — journalist and blogger Bim Adewunmi, who had objected to use of the term “the black community” as a

lazy generalisation in the press.

Abbott replied: “I understand the cultural point you are making. But you are playing into a ‘divide and rule’ agenda”, followed by her comments about “white people” and concluding with “#dontwashdirtylineninpublic”.

Dismissing political disagreements as racism or, since that was obviously not possible in this case, accusing her critic of playing into a white divide-and-rule agenda is typical of Abbott. But a similar approach (on various different issues) finds expression across much of the left. It is the opposite of the culture of open, honest debate we need to effectively fight racism and all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Abbott’s substantive comment was opportunist and politically illiterate. Whatever the limitations imposed by the Twitter format, a presentation of colonialism as if it was about “white people” in general rather than the white-racist drives of British imperial capitalism is nonsense. The same goes for racism in Britain today (which is not to deny working-class, as well as ruling-class, racism, of course).

Lastly, who is this oh-so-radical Abbott, who talks about colonialism and presents herself as representing the “black community”? She is a bourgeois politician, rich enough to send her son to a top private school, who from a socialist point of view cannot possibly be considered to “rep-

resent” any of her working-class constituents (of any ethnic group, but many of the poorest and most oppressed of them black). Moreover she is a loyal member of a Labour front bench which is committed to anti-working class policies.

Workers’ Liberty advocated a vote for Abbott in the Labour leadership election because she was the candidate most distinct from the Blairite-Brownite spectrum of the others. But she remains what she was.

Fighting right-wing attempts to downplay the reality of racism is an essential and central task for the left.

It should not mean defending the politics of Abbott.

Nigerian workers rise up

By Jonny Keyworth

Protests in Nigeria over the removal of the fuel subsidy have spread throughout the country with labour unions starting to make a strong presence on the streets.

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) represents over 8 million workers and launched an indefinite general strike on Monday 9 January. An articulate movement has started to evolve on the streets of the main cities of Nigeria, yet police violence is already making the development of the movement very difficult. It is also yet to be seen whether traditional forms of workers' organisation can complement the Federation of Informal Workers of Nigeria (FIWON), which represents a large number of workers in the informal sector.

The NLC has a checkered past, often acting in collusion with elites, but is also joined on the streets by the Joint Action Group (JAG), the umbrella body of pro-labour civil society movements who have a much more militant streak than the NLC. The NLC's

claim that "our people are prepared for a revolution." seems rather overstated at the present moment.

The call to national identity and cohesion seen in Tunisia and Egypt is less likely to be a mobilising force in Nigeria due to the deep religious and ethnic divides, but organised (and unorganised) labour is a thread running from North to sub-Saharan Africa.

DISRUPT

The NLC is threatening to shut ports and disrupt output from Royal Dutch Shell Plc and Chevron Corp.

Owei Lakemfa, (NLC secretary-general) has said: "The objective is that the government must reverse the fuel price increases before we end the strike".

Strikes have shut down Lagos, Ibadan and Kano, and in Abuja, and most gas stations have also been shut down. The removal of the subsidy does not only mean the tripling of the price of fuel, but also the increase of the price of food due to the increased cost of distributing food. It is for this reason that protests have been relatively widely supported.

SECTARIAN

The protests come at the same time as attacks from Islamist group Boko Haram, yet the sectarian divisions within Nigeria have not magnified.

In fact in Kano, which is in the predominately Muslim North, the protests have forged a unity between Christians and Mus-

lims. Christians have been seen protecting Muslim protesters whilst they prayed, with Muslims returning the act of solidarity. It will thus be interesting to see how a protest movement could work to quell these historic hostilities.

How will the government of president Goodluck Jonathan respond? The police repression seen in the Ogba suburb of Lagos shows that the threat of Boko Haram to security, coupled with a growing protest movement, means the Jonathan government is backed into a corner and is retaliating in force. The rest of the Nigerian political elite are now turning on the government; the House of Representatives voted for a resolution calling for the restoration of the subsidy.

Yet repression of protesters is increasing and shows that the Jonathan government is intent on crushing the movement in its tracks, as issues beyond the fuel subsidy are being sewn into the subsidy dispute and are accumulating into a direct confrontation with the Nigerian state.

Europe: cuts or democracy?

By Rhodri Evans

On 6 January, the elected but obscure European Parliament intervened into the discussions on the new treaty under discussion after the 9 December euro-summit to ask that it include a "roadmap" towards introducing the Parliament's favoured policy of eurobonds.

Eurobonds would be a mechanism for eurozone states to borrow, in euros, with a guarantee of creditworthiness based on the whole EU's resources.

The Parliament's initiative was a proof that if there were even a quarter-democratic political system uniting the whole of Europe, the current course of trying to work through the economic crisis by imposing harsher and harsher cuts on the continent's poorer people could not happen.

Many years back, the Indian economist Amartya Sen wrote: "Famines are easy to prevent if there is a serious effort to do so, and a democratic government, facing elections and criticisms from opposition parties and independent newspapers, cannot help but make such an effort. Not surprisingly, while

India continued to have famines under British rule right up to independence... they disappeared suddenly with the establishment of a multiparty democracy..."

Europe's cuts today are not at famine levels. But the same principle holds.

A democratic government of a federal united Europe, facing an informed Europe-wide public opinion, could not get away with the idea that the answer to the credit crisis is to squeeze the poorer people of Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, and Italy harder and harder.

DEMOCRATIC

The European Parliament has no say in this crisis. The dominant powers of the EU will not agree to eurobonds.

Eurobonds would allow countries to escape the vicious circle which they currently face in the financial markets, where they have to pay high interest rates, and run some risk of eventually not being able to borrow at any price, because financiers fear that they may not repay; and they run a risk of not being able to repay because it is difficult and expensive for them to borrow fresh

funds. They are not a cure-all, if only because if by some shift the dominant powers do come to agree to them, that will be only if linked to harsher cuts; but the Parliament's proposal is an indication that even a quarter-democratic discussion of the crisis is compelled to come up with answers different from those being imposed now.

The dominant powers of the EU are going for years of 1930s-style depression for the worst-off countries, and maybe for the better-off ones too, and the blighting of millions of lives, on the assumption that eventually all the cuts in social overhead costs will persuade profiteers to launch into large productive investments again and revive economic life.

The priority, as Angela Merkel put it in December, is to "show [footloose global capital] that Europe is a safe place to invest".

Both troubled European governments and European banks need to borrow vast amounts of money in 2012 to cover repayments due on previous borrowing.

There is a serious risk that one or another eurozone state will become unable to borrow enough at any price, and thus unable to meet its promised re-

payments. That could crash the eurozone and bring down major banks.

Economically, it will be like the Lehman Brothers collapse of 2008, only on a bigger scale. Politically, it is unlikely to destroy the European Union, but it will set back and obstruct the whole process of reducing the barriers between countries in Europe, a process which the labour movement should value and defend even while we oppose the current policies, structures, and methods of the EU.

Socialists should work for unity of the labour movement across Europe, around a common programme of making the bankers and bosses pay for their crisis and of a united democratic Europe.

Scotland
By Dale Street



Defend Labour-union links!

Johann Lamont MSP has been elected leader of the Scottish Labour Party, winning 52% of the electoral college vote.

Ken Macintosh MSP came second with 40% and Tom Harris MP a poor third with 8%.

Lamont's lacklustre platform said little about her record (as deputy leader of the Labour Group in Holyrood) and had only empty platitudes to offer about her proposals for the future of the party.

Even so, Lamont ended up as the default "supporter-to-keep-even-worse-out" candidate of the left and the unions: Ken Macintosh is a right-wing "moderniser", and Tom Harris an unashamed ultra-Blairite.

Lamont won amongst parliamentarians and even more so among the affiliated trade unions. But she came a poor second, to Ken Macintosh, among individual party members.

The result has revived arguments about the involvement of trade unions in the Labour Party.

Proposals to reduce the trade unions' share of the vote in the electoral college were voiced by some Scottish Labour Party right-wingers in the months preceding the election campaign, but not energetically pursued at the time.

Late on Tom Harris called on trade unions to be "prevented" from having a say in leadership and deputy leadership elections.

After the election Macintosh made thinly disguised calls for a "review" of the electoral college: "Some of our structures look perhaps a little bit out of place these days..."

This was followed by an article in the *Scotsman* by former Glasgow Lord Provost and Glasgow Central CLP chair Michael Kelly, according to which:

"The attitude of the unions is a Rubicon of despair all on its own. They continue to pick, as Labour leader, politicians who have the least chance of winning... They compound the Miliband mistake by doing the same thing in Scotland."

"Their huge unfair slice of the electoral college ensured that Johann Lamont won and blocked the change that ordinary party members — and, more importantly, voters — wanted."

"She'll be pursuing their

[the unions'] policies despite the evidence that they are not the policies that will restore Labour in Scotland or the UK. They weren't in 1979 ... and they are not now."

Right now the anti-union right wing in the party will feel emboldened to attack the party's links with the unions in the name of "democracy".

The fact that the Party is now led at both national and Scottish levels by two singularly lacklustre figures will only encourage the right-wingers to argue that giving the unions a say in party leadership elections undermines Labour's chances of beating the Tories and the SNP.

The left in the party and the unions need to tackle arguments against the union link head-on:

- Trade unions set up the Labour Party, are its main source of income, and provide additional human and financial resources at election times. That's why they have a say in Labour Party affairs.

- The real undemocratic element in Labour's electoral college is that 300 plus parliamentarians have the same share of the vote as millions of trade unionists and the entire individual membership of the party.

- The real threat to democracy in the Labour Party does come from the unelected party officials who manipulate selection contests and party conferences in order to stifle dissident voices in the party.

- Labour has loses elections because of its poor performance in power.

- The leadership contest provided an opportunity for candidates to campaign against current trade union input into the party. Only Tom Harris chose to do so — winning a derisory share of the vote as a result.

- It is true that SNPers (and the Tories) attack the Labour's links with the unions. But that does not mean that there is a problem with such links. What it does mean is that the SNP (and the Tories) have an anti-trade-union agenda.

- **Rather than the scrapping or weakening of Labour's links with the unions, what is needed is to restore closer links between the unions and the party at all levels — from local branch level through to the Parliamentary Labour Party.**

“New” pensions deal:

By Martin Thomas

Public sector union committees, branches, and workplace groups should call emergency meetings to reject the sell-out on pensions outlined at the TUC public sector group meeting on 19 December.

So far, only the PCS, Northern Irish public service union NIPSA and Unite (after initially signing up to a “Principles Document” with Unison, GMB and the Local Government Employers) have decisively rejected the deal.

Unison’s Local Government Service Group Executive voted by 24-10 on 10 January to accept the deal. Its Higher Education SGE also voted to accept, and its Health SGE voted to consult (but not formally ballot) members on the issue. In advance of the meeting, Health SGE member and Workers’ Liberty member Alison Brown was bureaucratically prevented from attending and voting, showing the Unison leadership’s desperation to hamstring opposition to the sell-out.

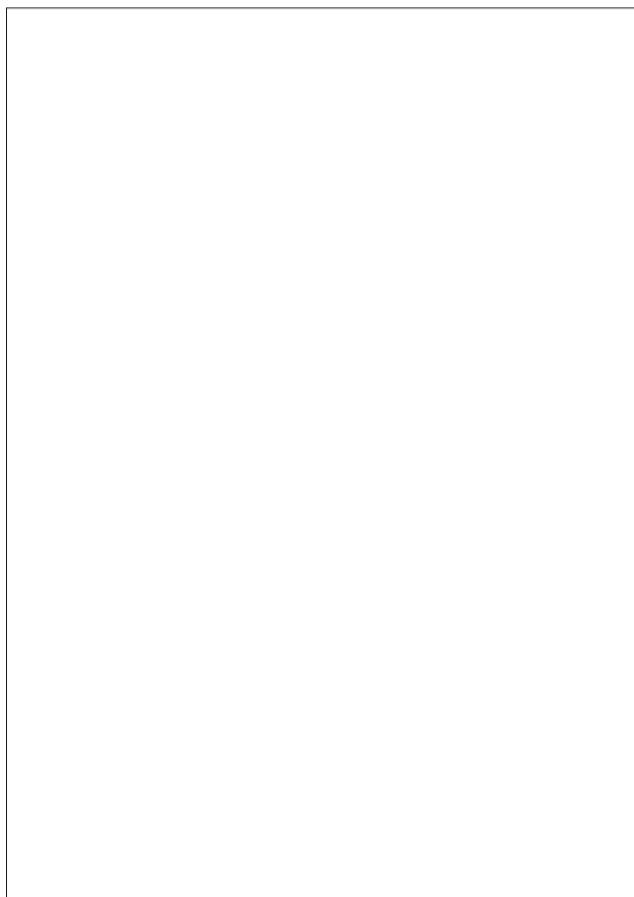
Teaching unions NUT and NASUWT have said they will not “sign up”, but have stopped short of a decisive rejection and have not called further action. An NUT Executive meeting on Thursday 12 January could change that.

Unions should reject the deal because the Government has not shifted a millimetre on any of its main plans for public sector pensions.

- a 3.2 percentage point increase in contributions by 2014/2015: the Government has already announced that the increased contributions will start for teachers and civil servants from April 2012;
- pegging the pension age for public sector employees to the state pension age, which will increase to 67 by 2026 and then on to 70, faster than was planned when the talks on public sector pensions began;
- switching the uprating of benefits from the RPI rate of inflation to CPI, which runs about 0.8% lower, reducing the value of a pension by 15% after 20 years. The Government has already introduced this shift, from April 2011.

The RPI-CPI switch gives a twist to the fourth main Government aim: switching all public sector workers to career-average from final-salary schemes.

A switch to career-average is not necessarily bad. But it all depends on the details of the inflation rate at which bygone years’ wages are upgraded to calculate the average, and on the “accrual rate”, the percentage of career-average acquired by each year’s contribution.



The civil service union PCS points out: “Career average salary is calculated by taking a percentage of each annual salary and up-rating it by inflation. By cutting the inflation indicator from RPI to CPI, the government at a stroke reduced the value of... [career-average] scheme[s]”. Only with a *much* better accrual rate can a career average scheme be as valuable as a final-salary one.

In short, public-sector workers will:

- have more taken out of their pay in pension contributions — £100 a month more for even middle-range workers, on top of the continued cuts in real wages recently announced by the Government;
- have to work longer for their pensions, often much longer: workers who can now retire at 60 may have to work until 67 as early as 2026;

- get worse pensions.

What’s new? On 19 December a number of union leaders, without consulting even their union executives, effectively, via the media, told the principal personages of the pensions drama, the rank and file workers and the Government, that the campaign was over. Why?

The Government had rearranged some of the detail, not improved it. On 2 November it had already conceded no immediate contributions increase for the lower-paid and protection (though not from the RPI-to-CPI shift) for workers retiring within the next ten years.

On 19 December its main shift was to better “accrual rates” for the health, civil service and teachers’ schemes, balanced by a worse method of calculating “career average”.

The accrual rate is the fractions of career-average pay you earn for each year’s contributions. These are to be 1/54 for the NHS, 1/44 for the civil service, 1/57 for teachers. The improvements are not sufficient to “balance” the move from final salary to career average as the amount of which you “accrue” fractions, and methods of calculation of career average which ensure a low figure. Past years’ pay will be inflation-adjusted for inclusion in the average only by CPI (civil service) and CPI plus a bit (health, teachers), not by the pay inflation rate.

The Government is explicit about that: “the accrual rate has been improved. This has been offset by lower revaluation of accruals...”.

SHIFT

In local government, there seems to be a bigger shift. The joint employers/unions document promises no contribution increases before 2014, or only small ones.

Local government pensions work through funds (workers and employers pay into the funds, fund managers invest the money, and pensions are paid out of the fund). In the civil service, teachers’ and health schemes, contributions go into, and pensions are paid out of, general Treasury revenue.

Consequently, the government is not directly bothered by contribution levels for local government workers, and has no direct power to raise them. The funds are regulated by three-yearly expert evaluation of their assets and liabilities, the next one due in 2013.

The Government is happy so long as it can cut the amount it pays from central funds to local authorities to cover the authorities’ contributions to the funds. The December deal gives the Government that cut by worsening pensions (only

How increasing retirement age hits our pensions

Unite health sector executive member Gill George has circulated a sharp analysis of un-noticed twists in the Government’s December 2011 formulas for public sector pensions. Her analysis focuses on the NHS scheme, but most of what she writes applies in large measure to the other schemes, too.

The real shocker here for me is how raising the retirement age will clobber our pensions. In the future, if we want to (or have to) retire at age 60, it’ll cost us a third of our pensions.

[According to a *Financial Times* article], a third of us will make it to 68 without significant illness or disability (and that’ll be mostly rich people). The “work longer” nonsense is just a trick to rob us of our pensions. Very, very few of us will be fit enough to work through to 68.

A couple more snippets worth thinking about... Here’s a key quote from Danny Alexander, in the House of Commons statement on 20 December: “Because we have agreed to establish new schemes on a career average basis, I can tell the House that we have agreed to retain the fair deal provision and extend access for transferring staff. The new pensions will be substantially more affordable to alternative providers, and it is right that we offer workers continued access to them”.

The pensions attack and the Tories’ privatisation agenda are inextricably linked...

I’ve seen academic research that shows that career average pensions are typically worth 40% less if the accrual rate remains the same; even with the new squeaky clean 1/54 and a (truly rotten) revaluation rate linked not to earnings or RPI, but to CPI — i.e. the stingiest possible approach — we will lose out big-time...

Look at Annex B of the Heads of Agreement. There’s an employer “cost cap” of 2% above the employer contributions — we’ve had a similar concept in the last revamp of the NHS scheme. This is to deal with ‘unforeseen events and trends that significantly increase scheme costs’.

Any of us who have done pensions meetings will have

seen the way people’s jaws drop when you tell them how much extra they’re going to be paying by April 2014. I’ve found that a lot of younger staff — with retirement feeling a long way off, and juggling a pay freeze and high inflation already — are just saying they’ll leave the pension scheme.

If this does happen, the costs will mostly get passed on to us (because of the employer cost cap). The Government will very kindly offer a “period of consultation... before changes are made”. If we don’t agree to a new way of screwing our members even more, the accrual rate will be automatically adjusted to devalue our pensions even more. This is quite serious — I’d put money on this happening (if I had any left).

The only real “concession” is protection for health workers within ten years of retirement, and the very poor transitional protection. People of my age are told that we “only” have to pay more and get a typical 15% or 20% loss of pension through the switch to CPI, and we’re asked to sell the futures of our younger colleagues on this basis.

The Unite pensions expert described this yesterday as “very significant in dividing the workforce” — a sharp analysis of the Tories’ divide and rule games.

He also noted that there are 500,000 members of the 1995 pension scheme, with a current retirement age of 60, who will fall completely outside the protection arrangements. If this is protection, it’s shockingly inadequate.

same as the old deal

1/60 accrual rate, despite a shift to “career-average”; and no commitment on valuation of past years’ pay for calculating “career average”), and bringing the worse pensions in early (2014, while it is 2015 for the other schemes).

No union leader claims to have an actual agreement. The local government “Principles Document” endorsed by Unison and the GMB (and, until 9 January, by Unite) is a framework for further talks (in fact, a framework that gives the government everything they wanted) rather than an actual deal.

The headline media reports — that is, the story as received by the big majority of public sector workers — are that most unions have accepted the Government terms, quit the campaign, and settled down to negotiate fine detail.

A closer look at union statements indicates that most unions have not quite accepted the Government terms. That means the sell-out can be stopped. It also means something else, though.

A firm stand by just a few combative unions could push the Government back even if every other union drops out. PCS and NUT alone have enough clout for that.

If a few unions take a firm stand, then they will probably rally others. But if they only demur from full-scale capitulation, have their officials weaselling that they haven’t really accepted the Government terms yet, and simultaneously but silently signal doubt about further action, then the weight of media and Government pressure will demobilise workers.

From that angle, even the stand of the PCS leaders is too weak. PCS declared that “the offer on the table in the civil service is not good enough and... the union believes further industrial action should be organised as early as possible in the new year if the government continues to refuse to negotiate on the core issues”.

WEAKER

“Believes further action should be organised” is much weaker than “will organise further action”, or even “proposes further action”.

And, rather than the action being necessary until the government concedes decent pensions, according to the PCS leaders it is necessary only until the government “negotiates on the core issues” (even if it negotiates without giving substantial ground?)

If this sell-out goes through, it will give a go-ahead signal to the Government to redouble attacks on pay and jobs which are going through with minimal resistance, and probably to supplement them with outright attacks on union organisation, of the type seen with the dispute at Langdon School in Newham and with the victimisation of Northampton NUT secretary Pat Markey (see page 15).

Those attacks can only be fended off with the sort of ongoing, self-controlling campaign conducted by the NUT members at Langdon School, scaled up to national level.

No fight unless someone else goes first?

A caucus of members of the National Union of Teachers at the pension activist conference called by PCS Left Unity on 7 January agreed to press NUT Executive members at their meeting on 12 January to commit the union to name a date for a further strike before 11 February and explicitly to reject the Government's 19 December formula.

The main conference session, however, 450 strong, failed to press the PCS leadership to take an initiative for continued action against pension cuts.

PCS Left Unity (in effect, the PCS leadership) presented the meeting with a statement which called for the TUC public sector committee on 12 January to organise a further strike, but was silent about what PCS will do if the TUC committee doesn’t do that (which it won’t).

PCS vice-president John McNally said in a speech that if the TUC committee calls no action, then PCS will organise a meeting of unions which do want to fight on. That meeting, he said, would discuss further action; but beyond that he would not go.

He, and conference chair and PCS president Janice Godrich, refused to allow conference to vote on an amendment (moved by East London NUT activist and SWP member Paul McGarr) demanding PCS propose further strikes to such a post-12-January meeting, and also refused to allow any debate on a motion including similar demands and more brought to the conference by PCS Independent Left, Lambeth Unison, and other trade unionists.

The conference, unfortunately, was heavily dominated by the Socialist Party (which has hegemony in the PCS leadership), to the point that a number of obviously preset speeches were straight recruiting pitches for the SP and its TUSC front.

It started with nine platform speeches, one after the other, and allowed little scope for debate. However, the NUT caucus at least was significant, and the conference will have exerted some pressure on the SP to budge from its “no-fight-unless-someone-else-goes-first” line.

The bulk of the platform speeches were given over to celebrations of the action on 30 June and 30 November last

year, and denunciations of the leaders of the TUC and right-wing unions like Unison.

Briefing on the details of the 19 December Government formula — and the “sideways shifts” in cuts which it involves — would have been useful, but was offered only in a short floor speech by Unison Executive member Jon Rogers.

The best platform speech was from UCU Executive (and SWP) member Mark Campbell: “Come next Thursday [12th], those unions that are saying no should announce a national strike day before half-term” [11 February].

The SWP has been all over the place in the pensions campaign in the last year and more — sometimes opposing picket lines and recommending strikes be made into “fun days”, sometimes opposing rolling and selective action, blathering that the answer was for everyone to “stay out” spontaneously after 30 November — but it was on the button at this meeting.

Hopes now rest on the members of the NUT Executive’s nominal left-wing majority winning their union to fight at their 12 January meeting.

If they do that, the battle of left-wingers in PCS to budge their own SP-dominated leadership will be greatly strengthened, and almost certainly other unions can be drawn in to the continued struggle.

Above: PCS leader Mark Serwotka. The bureaucracies of so-called “fighting unions” are still bureaucracies!

Victor Serge and the question of Kronstadt

By Martyn Hudson

The question of Kronstadt defines much of the debate between anarchism and Marxism in the 20th century. On the one hand apologists for the Bolsheviks cheerlead the destruction of the naval garrison at Kronstadt retrospectively, whilst those in an anarchist tradition see it as the final nail in the coffin of soviet democracy and the consolidation of the dictatorial rule of the central committee of the Bolshevik party.

Certainly anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman abandoned the October revolution and argued for the destruction of the newly instituted workers' state. For nearly a century their followers have led a campaign against those who situate themselves in a pro-October Bolshevik tradition. As recently as the 1990s anarchists produced a journal called *We Remember Kronstadt* specifically aimed at "outing" those who follow Trotsky — remembered by the anarchists as the architect of Kronstadt's destruction.

This isn't the place to uncover the real history of the Kronstadt rebellion and its suppression. There is much good work on this by Israel Getzler, Ida Mett, Paul Avrich, Abbie Bakan, and others.

Certainly the left of both traditions need to do some serious historical work on the risings in the early soviet period. Frustratingly the anarchist harangues do not take on board the complexity of economic catastrophe and civil war and neither do they understand the agony of a Bolshevik party at war with its own conscience about what to do with the rebellion. Pro-Bolshevik apologists at the same time repeat the same tired old clichés about Kronstadt: the sailors of Kronstadt 1921 did not have the same social composition as those of Kronstadt 1917 (illiterate, uneducated peasants rather than the heroic workers' battalions of October).

For those who would retrospectively smash the rebellion today the case is clear that even if the rebellion was not in secret negotiation with the White counter-revolution, they were "objectively" opposed to the revolution because they were standing full against the Bolshevik central committee, who, of course, were the physical incarnation of the spirit of October and in possession of a monopoly on revolutionary truth (ruling in the name of a working class that had already, largely been eliminated in the course of the civil war).

ANARCHIST

Victor Serge himself during this period had defected from the camp of anarchism to Bolshevism whilst at the same time retaining the respect and friendship of his erstwhile anarchist comrades.

He had sympathies with the Workers' Opposition of Kollontai and Shlyapnikov which already perceived the corruption and a nascent dictatorship in the closing down of soviet democracy and trade union power — blaming Trotsky himself for this.

Certainly Serge was under no illusions about the problems of the revolution — but he was no restorationist. He was fully committed to extending the best gains of October. But he was also clearly aware of the profound problems that the Bolsheviks faced. When Kronstadt issued its demands he sympathised with them and was horrified by the lies and slanders that the official party press issued against the workers and sailors in the garrison. Rumours of White counter-revolution were everywhere in Petrograd and the party itself pointed to Kronstadt as the origin of this, including wholesale inventions about White generals leading the Kronstadt mutineers.

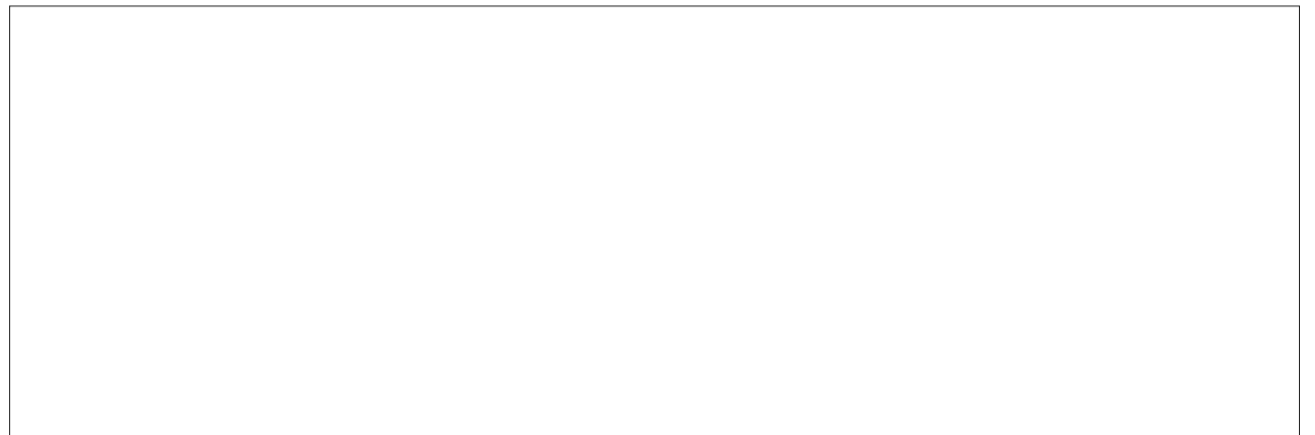
The Bolshevik delegation to Kronstadt was treated dismissively and returned; the Kronstadt delegation to the Bolsheviks found themselves in the prisons of the Cheka and were subsequently executed.

Offers of mediation by hitherto pro-October anarchists such as Goldman and Berkman were not taken up. Debates within the party, however, finally led Serge to side with the party against Kronstadt: sympathising with their aims, he simply saw them as unrealistic in a country exhausted by civil war, even when those problems were exacerbated by an arrogant and often ineffectual leadership within the party. Without the Bolsheviks the revolution was doomed.

The idea of further negotiation was rejected and the scene was set for the termination of the rebellion and the potential mass arrests by the Cheka of pro-Menshevik leaders and workers who were seen as egging the rebellion on. At the same time as they were being condemned by the party, Workers' Oppositionists, left communists, and others such as Serge "went to join battle on the ice against rebels who they knew in their hearts were right." (*Memoirs*, p131) The Kronstadt rebellion was smashed, its personnel destroyed — executed in the cellars of the Cheka or dispersed in Finland as they fled. It was the darkest day of the revolution.

For the first time in those terrible times the spectre of Thermidor was raised: the month in the French revolutionary calendar when the great revolutionary period ended and dictatorship was instituted ending in the rise of Napoleon.

The Bolshevik most versed in this history was Trotsky and



Red Army infantry advance toward Kronstadt across the frozen ice of the Bay of Finland, 1921

he viewed the October revolution constantly through the lens of the French and would do so until the end of his life.

Unfortunately, as the later Stalinist bureaucracy arose, and because of Kronstadt and his role as military supreme of the revolution, the surviving anarchists, left communists, workers' oppositionists, Mensheviks and, most crucially, the old Bolsheviks viewed Trotsky as the most likely candidate.

As Lenin and Trotsky saw Kronstadt as the beginnings of counter-revolution and Thermidor, so many others saw Lenin and Trotsky as incipient dictators. Serge himself recounts Lenin having said exactly this: "This is Thermidor. But we shan't let ourselves be guillotined. We shall make a Thermidor ourselves." (*Memoirs*, p131). And it was certainly an anticipation of an emergent totalitarianism, as Serge notes: "The truth was that emergent totalitarianism had already gone half-way to crushing us. 'Totalitarianism' did not yet exist as a word; as an actuality it began to press hard on us, even without us being aware of it. I belonged to that pitifully small minority that realised what was going on." (*Memoirs*, p133)

More chilling was that the coming totalitarianism was not a counter-revolution from without but from within, born of the workers' movement. If Bolshevik thinking was grounded in the possession of the truth and the party is its repository "then any form of thinking which differs from it is a dangerous and reactionary error. Here lies the spiritual source of its intolerance. The absolute conviction of its lofty mission assures it of a moral energy quite astonishing in its intensity — and, at the same time, a clerical mentality which is quick to become Inquisitorial." (*Memoirs*, p134). Lenin and "Leninization" then takes on a darker hue — particularly when viewed retrospectively by what happened next.

As a defender of Kronstadt's suppression Serge was very aware of its ironies. As Suzi Weissman notes, the 18 March 1921 saw Kronstadt sailors meeting their deaths as counter-revolutionaries declaring in their last breath the oncoming victory of world revolution. It was 50 years since the end of the Paris Commune (Victor Serge: *The Course is set on hope*, p47).

AFTER

After Kronstadt, Serge became an agent in Germany and then went into the ranks of the Left Opposition and into prison in the camps.

On his release he made his way to France and into the ranks of the Trotskyists in exile. Amid great hopes for revolution in the west Serge opened a correspondence with Trotsky — part of which was on the subject of Kronstadt (*The Serge-Trotsky papers*, edited by David Cotterill, 1994).

Certainly Serge was aware that raising the issue of the uprising and its suppression was going to be uncomfortable for Trotsky, assailed as he was on all sides by enemies and the slanders of Stalinism. But if the Trotskyists were truly to take on board speaking truth to the masses and facing reality squarely, then the true history of Kronstadt had to be uncovered.

Unfortunately, it led to the unravelling and destruction of their relationship and to the expulsion of Serge from the ranks of the Trotskyist camp.

Suzi Weissman has pointed to the hand of the NKVD in their parting, but it is also clear that Trotsky was unable to face the reality of Kronstadt with basic political honesty. As Suzi says, "In 'dredging up' this ignominious chapter in Bolshevik history, Serge had not changed his position of siding with the party, but he wanted the party to understand how it came to be executing workers. The libertarians and anarchists in Europe were quick to point to the similarities between the Moscow trials and the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion. The Kronstadt debate served as a foil for the larger argument that Stalinism was the natural outgrowth of Leninism. Serge did not share this view nor was its construction his purpose in intervening in the debate about Kronstadt." (*The Serge-Trotsky papers*, pp152-153)

Serge did, however, see that Stalinism and totalitarianism were prefigured by Kronstadt and made it easier for the victory of the despotic bureaucracy.

He directed fire against those on the right who saw a clear mandate for dictatorship in Kronstadt and argued that a fully nuanced and historically accurate account would actually support Trotsky and his current position. Trotsky disagreed and continued to present a vision of Kronstadt as a virtue and a high point of a revolution fighting for its life, rather than a tragedy and its lowest ebb.

Trotsky replied to Serge's critique of Kronstadt by condemning him for talking about a Marxism in crisis whilst he should be talking about a "Victor Serge in crisis", irredeemably condemning him as a centrist and a moralist. As Trotsky says: "What do people of the Victor Serge type represent? Our conclusion is simple: these verbose, coquettish moralists, capable of bringing only trouble and decay, must be kept out of the revolutionary organisation, even by cannon fire if necessary." (*The Serge-Trotsky papers*, p154)

HURT

The issue raised by the "petty bourgeois" Serge about Kronstadt and the issue of revolutionary morality and Trotsky's response hurt Serge profoundly — but it hurt the libertarian core of Bolshevism even more.

An inability to account for the darkest moments of the Bolshevik past and an unwillingness to address mistakes of the most tragic grandeur led undoubtedly into the worst aspects of 20th-century orthodox Trotskyism, including those who were about to dispute Trotsky's incorrect analysis of the nature of the Soviet dictatorship and develop a new analysis of the USSR which considered it more akin to fascism.

The central issues of the debate rested on the following. For Serge no limit was set to the truth-telling about the early history of the revolution — and anybody who wanted to limit debate and truth was, like Trotsky, capitulating to unreason. Serge also reminded Trotsky that even in those dark days of 1921 the Bolshevik party did not see the destruction as a virtue but as a necessity to destroy "armed Kulaks". The Trotsky of 1938 saw it both as a virtue and a necessity.

Serge also castigated the Trotsky who refused power in 1924-45 because he would not be the representative of decree, dictatorship and Thermidor against Stalin but who now in 1938 ruled his own clique by decree and arrogant disdain. Perhaps this is the great finding of the Serge-Trotsky debate on Kronstadt: that the Trotskyists in exile had already consolidated themselves into what Orwell would describe as a "smelly little orthodoxy", a small, bureaucratic clique that felt it, and no other group or human, possessed the truth — and in the case of Kronstadt a monopoly of a truth that Serge was only too happy to dispute.

Certainly the debate about Kronstadt was almost entirely destructive. Trotsky's ire against Serge was totally unwarranted, and although they remained as part of the same broad movement it was only after Trotsky's death that Serge again worked with the old man's widow Natalya Sedova — ironically, on the dictatorial nature of the Soviet Union and the hopes for a new libertarian revolutionary politics. But the lessons for Marxists are still there to be learned.

As Serge says in his letters to Trotsky: "To keep calling one another 'petty bourgeois', instead of coolly studying the events of 1921 will get us nowhere. Rather let us bring our sanest faculties to bear upon reality. The precious lessons which the Russian Revolution could bring are obscured, muddled and compromised by the bureaucratic counter-revolution which has got hold of the old banners; we shall only retrieve those banners by liberating our minds from exhausted formulas, discredited clichés, the resentments of sects or individuals, and above all from the insupportable claim to have a monopoly of the truth."

Whatever the truths of the uprising and its elimination, Kronstadt remains a symbol of a broken revolutionary tradition — a libertarian and a Bolshevik rift that Serge hoped to heal. The lessons he had to teach us are still there to be learned.

• This article is part of a debate begun in *Solidarity* 218, "Victor Serge: a life in revolution" by Martyn Hudson, and continued in letters in subsequent issues.

Egypt: workers must organise against the army and Islamists

By Clive Bradley

The winners in Egypt's first free election since World War Two are, in the words of prominent commentator Juan Cole, "the equivalent of the Tea Party": conservative religious parties, of which the largest is the Muslim Brotherhood's "front", the Freedom and Justice Party. The even more conservative Nur Party, only recently set up by the Salafist movement (which hitherto has been opposed to political involvement, and opposed the January 2011 revolution), came second. Secular parties have done badly.

Cole comments, rather dispiritingly, "But until [the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces [SCAF], which has ruled Egypt since the fall of Mubarak] can be sent back to the barracks... they do prevent the Brotherhood from instituting a theocracy." (*Informed Comment*, 7/1/12). In other words, the main thing standing in the way of an Islamic fundamentalist state is military rule.

Cole puts forward other factors, too. But the general point raises the central question posed by the "Arab Spring", which has now resulted in two Islamist victories — in the two elections held as a result of it, Egypt and, earlier, Tunisia: is rule by Islamist parties the inevitable outcome of these revolutions? And what does such rule mean?

In many ways the bigger shock of the Egyptian elections is the strong showing for the Nur Party — which has clearly rattled the Brotherhood itself. Commentators have long supposed that the Muslim Brothers were likely to win free elections in Egypt. Prior to the last — outrageously (as opposed to routinely) rigged — election, which the Brothers boycotted, they had 80 MPs in parliament, despite being technically illegal. They are a movement which has been organising for decades, and at the time of the revolt last January were, unarguably, the best-organised opposition in the country.

The Salafists — who consider many Egyptian Muslims to be heretics, and who have deeply conservative attitudes on matters such as women's rights — had no organised political presence at all, indeed eschewing the very idea. The mosques allied with them told people not to participate in demonstrations. Yet they won nearly 25% of the vote in the first two rounds (behind the Brothers' 45%).

DECISIVE

The revolution in January was spearheaded by secular youth. A decisive factor, if not the decisive one, in the fall of Mubarak was a general strike by Egypt's militant working class, which has, in the past year, organised a new, democratic trade union movement.

The Brotherhood itself, though not as passive or hostile as the Salafists, was slow to involve itself in the revolution. Yet they are harvesting the results.

In part this must be simply a matter of organisation. The radical youth organisations have no history or experience at all of ground-level campaigning: their forte is Facebook. The bourgeois liberal parties, too, have had very little presence on the ground — certainly not in the fashion of the Brotherhood, whose mainstay over decades has been "good works" in poor neighbourhoods.

The new workers' movement has concentrated on workplace organisation, strikes and so on, and has no political expression. The recently-formed, important but small Democratic Workers' Party chose to boycott the elections. The Revolution Continues Coalition, which is dominated by a split from one of the chief components of the DWP, got 4% in the first round, which is, by the standards of such things, impressive. This fell to less than 1% in the second round. (Note that the "rounds" here are due to a complex combination of votes being staggered in different areas and both first-past-the-post and party list systems; they are not "rounds" in the manner of, for instance, French elections).

The Salafists, too, have a history of "good works" in local neighbourhoods (which is one of the obligations of Islam). They are the local "ulema" — mullahs — whom people, especially in rural areas, are likely to vote for.

The Nur Party's success, too, doubtless reflects a constituency which is tired of unrest, and perhaps never supported it anyway: throughout the events of January and February, the regime was anxious to point to the "silent majority" — and, demagoguery aside, there is for sure some truth in the idea that many Egyptians were at best passive regarding the upheavals. The Nur gives them a chance to express that general conservatism.

Also, of course, Egypt remains a country mainly of Muslims (though there is a very large Christian minority). The Islamic parties appeal to a broad sense of Muslim identity.

The weakness of the left is hardly surprising. With the best

will in the world, no small and beleaguered radical group can transform itself into a mass movement overnight. Indeed, it is testimony to those on the left who chose to concentrate on trade union organising that they have managed to build a mass movement in just a few months.

More significant is the terrible weakness of the secular liberal parties, which have come a poor third in these elections — despite having the most prominent opposition spokespeople this time last year. Rivalries between liberal secular parties probably didn't help: efforts to establish a single electoral coalition floundered very quickly.

But the fundamental character of the "Egyptian Bloc", the main secular coalition, is revealed by this: its leader, Naguib Sawiris, is a billionaire.

The most pressing problems facing ordinary Egyptians are social and economic: very low wages (where wages have even been paid), poverty, poor housing, terrible education standards (a recent survey found that most Egyptians pay for private tuition for their children, stretching their already-inadequate incomes). When the chief opponent of the Islamists, supposedly offering an alternative to them, is led by a billionaire, it is less surprising if people vote for the Islamists.

Moreover, the secular liberals have, over the course of the year, become very hostile to workers' struggles — strikes, sit-ins, and so on — echoing the military's attitude, which has declared them *fi'wa*, or "sectional", "special interest" struggles. The argument is that trade unions are selfishly taking advantage of a revolution which was simply about freedom...

This is an attitude which, of course, completely ignores the dire circumstances in which most people live. The Islamist parties, which routinely call for social justice, at least address these concerns even if what they say is next to meaningless.

SALAFISTS

In fact, very many people did not vote at all. The turnout in the first round was 59%. The second round saw a higher turn-out — 65%; but in the subsequent run-offs this had fallen to 43%. The figures for the third round have not been released. It's hard to know exactly what this shows — but for sure voters were not much inspired by the mainstream political parties.

The high vote for the Nur Party will put some pressure on the Muslim Brotherhood, or rather its Freedom and Justice Party. There were signs of this during the election. The FJP had chosen, earlier, to drop the Brotherhood's habitual slogan — "Islam is the solution" (for one thing because this is highly provocative to the Christian minority, and there have recently been fatally violent sectarian clashes). This slogan, however, re-emerged during the campaign, presumably in order better to compete with the Salafists.

But the Brotherhood is very unlikely to form any kind of alliance with the Salafists. Its general orientation in the last year has been to support the military government. Army sluggishness regarding the democratic transition forced a turn in this policy towards the end of the year; but the Brotherhood will remain anxious to keep on good terms with the SCAF. The Brotherhood has been extremely concerned not to appear radical and dangerous, both for fear of the army's reaction, and because it has no desire to alienate the United States (which provides the army with \$1.3 billion in aid every year).

A more likely political partner would be the old-style nationalist Wafd Party (with whom they have had electoral coalitions in the past). The Brotherhood, which has worked hard to develop as a modern political movement, sees the Salafists as dinosaurs.

In any case, as Juan Cole points out, winning the election is not the same as forming a government. The SCAF still holds power. The first job of the new parliament is to appoint a 100-strong body to draft a constitution, and the army will maintain control over that process. Presidential elections are to follow soon — and it remains to be seen if the Islamist parties will do so well in them.

Military control, then, is certainly one factor holding back the Brotherhood. The other, for now, is their own political ambitions, fear of alienating the US, and fear also of an instability which would give the army an excuse to clamp down further. The Brotherhood kept away from recent protests, apparently, for precisely this reason: the fear that their involvement would be unnecessarily provocative to the ruling junta. If this is true it suggests a considerable degree of "nous" which may be reflected in other aspects of policy.

There seems to be no immediate threat of a heavy clamp-down — by the Islamists — on workers' organisations and other democratic movements (which is not to say the army won't continue to harass them, which it almost certainly

will). The transition to some kind of "bourgeois democracy" — with a constitution, a parliament, a president, and with the army withdrawing (at least on the surface) to its barracks, seems likely.

The army's recent return to severe repression is, on one level — given their dependence on the US, which is not for now sympathetic to the gunning down of demonstrators — surprising. Perhaps they calculate that the US has no option but to continue to support them, and the Islamists' showing in the elections is strong evidence for that. But for the moment it does not seem likely that the military will launch a coup. They have introduced much repressive legislation in the last year that on the whole remains unused; at the same time as denouncing and attacking Tahrir Square demonstrators they bowed to popular pressure and removed an unpopular prime minister (although, ominously, replaced him with a man from the Mubarak gerontocracy).

TASK

Still, the SCAF is allowing elections, has brought forward the presidential vote — again as a result of popular pressure — and shows no imminent signs of a root-and-branch crackdown. The popular movement is still much too strong, and Western eyes are still watching.

In that case the task facing the left and the labour movement is the painstaking building of a movement, on the industrial and political fronts, which can challenge the Islamists locally — in the working-class districts, the slums and the villages. It will be a hard struggle, and the victory for the Islamists — Brothers as well as Salafists — will make life difficult. But so far this victory does not mean that the revolution has been lost.

On the contrary, there is growing impatience with the SCAF, and the last months of 2011 saw renewed popular struggle. This is still a revolutionary period, in the sense that things can move and change very quickly. Our job — that of left activists and the labour movement internationally — is to make sure we help.

Arab Spring impacts on Palestinians

By Dan Katz

Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group which runs Gaza as a one-party religious state, has moved three quarters of its staff out of Syria.

The Syrian regime has been the main external sponsor of Hamas and provides the group with a safe haven for key leaders. But Damascus is now in chaos, shaken by opposition protests. Hamas have now opened an office in Cairo where its political co-thinkers the Muslim Brotherhood are on the rise.

Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas Prime Minister of Gaza, is on tour looking for regional political backing. He visited Tunisia on 5 January and has also been welcomed in Turkey and Egypt.

The political and economic situation for Hamas in Gaza is improving. In contrast the situation on the West Bank, run by the Palestinian nationalist organisation Fatah, is worsening. The EU states have cut back on donations, and the US Congress has frozen two-thirds of its \$600m aid to punish Fatah for asking the UN to recognise a Palestinian state.

Talks are taking place between Hamas and Fatah. The aim is to create enough political stability to allow Palestinian elections across the West Bank and Gaza in 2012.

In September the Quartet (the EU, US, Russia and UN charged with Israeli-Palestinian mediation) demanded Israel and the Fatah-run Palestinian Authority submit maps for a Two State deal.

The PA complied within the three month deadline; the right-wing Israeli government is prevaricating.

Higgs ahoy!

Science

By Les Hearn



These are exciting times for followers of CERN and for those who believe that more knowledge about our universe is better than less. Forget faster-than-light neutrinos. The Higgs boson may have been discovered! But what is the Higgs and why was it predicted?

FOR EVERY FIELD, A BOSON

The current explanation of matter and space, the Standard Model, developed in the 1960s, is one of the most successful theories of all time (and space!).

It explains all the approximately 200 elementary particles that exist and how they interact with each other. Some of these particles, the Z and W vector bosons, were predicted by the model and subsequently produced in CERN in the 1980s. Their masses were predicted with 99.99% accuracy using the modification developed by Peter Higgs and others in 1964.

A major failing of the early Standard Model was that it could not predict the observed masses of these particles. Indeed, it seemed to predict that they would be massless, as if you and I were as solid as we in fact are but as light as ghosts. It also can't explain dark energy and dark matter, which seem to make up about 90% of the universe. Their gravitational effect is evident but they can't be observed.

The Higgs mechanism explained the masses of particles. In the 1960s, Higgs and others proposed that space is permeated by a field, the Higgs field, that clings to particles, giving them the property that we call mass.

Now, it is a truism in physics that for every field there is a particle called a boson, so it was predicted that there would be a Higgs boson. Bosons transmit the field, carrying some of its energy from one place to another. The prime example of this is the photon, and the discovery of its nature shows why physicists are so keen to discover other field bosons.

In the mid 19th century, building on the discoveries of Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell showed that a changing magnetic field could induce an electric field and vice versa. And, crazily, when he multiplied the two constants associated with the electric and magnetic fields*, he got the speed of light!

This means that the electric and magnetic forces are not different but are aspects of each other. Changes in each are mediated by photons of light or, conversely, light is produced by changes in electromagnetic fields. This led to the discovery of many invisible forms of "light", such as radio waves, microwaves, and X-rays, with an enormous influence on our lives.

This is an example of the unexpected consequences of much scientific research. Physicists are trying to repeat the triumph of Maxwell in uniting two forces and discovering the particles associated with the force field. This has already been done for the electromagnetic and weak forces, the par-

The CERN Large Hadron Collider

ticles transmitting the electroweak force being the W and Z vector bosons. So far, there has not been any influence on our lives from this unification, and there may not be, but we cannot know where a discovery may take us.

WHY USE A COLLIDER TO HUNT FOR THE HIGGS?

The electromagnetic (EM) force is very strong and infinite in extent: its associated particles, photons, are massless.

They are quite easy to produce and are therefore all around us. The weak force, though responsible for a type of radioactivity, is ... weak! It's about 7,000 times weaker than the EM force and only operates over a very short range — less than the diameter of a nucleus. Its bosons, W and Z, have a lot of mass, about 100 times a hydrogen atom, and they are very rare and short-lived. They can only be produced where there is a lot of energy, such as in a particle accelerator.

They were predicted back in 1968 and produced at CERN in 1983 in the Super Proton Synchrotron. Like the Large Hadron Collider, this smashed protons together at high speeds, converting them into pure energy, which then in a few cases "condensed" into W and Z bosons. These decayed into more stable particles in a characteristic way, enabling scientists to deduce their existence.

It wasn't just luck that W and Z were discovered at CERN. The Higgs mechanism predicted particular masses for W and Z and it was only with the SPS that sufficient energies would be available to produce particles with these masses. CERN's 1983 experiments were therefore a test for the Standard Model, which it passed.

The Higgs theory predicted a field and a particle, the Higgs boson. Predicting the mass of the Higgs was not straightforward but eventually most estimates settled on a value about 50% higher than the W and Z masses. Sufficient energy was not available from the SPS or from the Large Electron-Positron collider (LEP) that followed it. This had to wait for the construction of the Large Hadron Collider.

So, has the Higgs been found? If a Higgs is produced, it is predicted to decay immediately into two Z particles, which will then decay into two muons each. These are easily detected because they behave like electrons, but 200 times heavier.

So far, there have been four "events" at the predicted energy that match the predicted behaviour of the Higgs. This is not enough for the required certainty that these are not just coincidences. After all, other processes produce Z bosons, and it is not impossible for pairs of bosons to be produced at about the same time on four occasions.

After the LHC's scheduled restart early this year, much more evidence will need to be found before the Higgs can be confirmed (and Nobel prizes awarded!). However, if it is not confirmed...

* then took the square root and divided the answer into 1. For those who want to try it themselves, $c = 1/(\sqrt{\mu_0\epsilon_0})$, where $\mu_0 = 4\pi \times 10^{-7}$ and $\epsilon_0 = 8.85 \times 10^{-12}$. You should get $c = 3 \times 10^8$ m/s approximately.

- Report on possible discovery of Higgs boson: <http://public.web.cern.ch/public>
- More: bit.ly/vlGBj1

- Animation of production and decay of Higgs: <http://bit.ly/xAbC24>
- The CERN rap! Explains the LHC in verse: <http://bit.ly/182AIS>

Thatcher and the Higgs boson

Back in 1993, the Conservative Science Minister, William Waldegrave, challenged physicists to come up with an analogy for the Higgs mechanism.

Professor David Miller of UCL produced the following: "Imagine a room full of Tory party workers. Mrs Thatcher walks in and the workers near her are attracted and cluster round her, giving her a greater 'mass' and making it more difficult to get her moving. The party workers are like the Higgs field.

"Now imagine a rumour passing through the room. The party workers cluster round the source and as the rumour passes the cluster also moves.

"Since the clustering gave Thatcher her 'mass', the clusters also have mass: they represent the Higgs boson."

- www.hep.ucl.ac.uk/~djm/higgsa.html

Stop the War disgraces itself

Left

By Clarke Benitez



The Stop the War campaign, led by Stalinists and former SWPers, is disgracing itself again.

StW mobilised against the Western bombing which helped the Libyan opposition overthrow the deranged regime of Muammar Qaddafi.

Now StW is campaigning against Western sanctions against Iran and Syria, quoting right-wing journalist Simon Jenkins to justify its stand. Jenkins says sanctions are "idiocy" and a step towards open war. In fact war on Syria looks unlikely; some sanctions may be bad, but why would socialists bother opposing sanctions such as travel bans and freezing the corruptly-gained fortunes of the Syrian leadership?

Not a single word is said in support of the democratic opposition in these countries. Not a single word indicates StW opposes the vicious regimes in these states.

What is a boson?

All fundamental particles possess a property called spin (though no one can understand how).

Spin can only have certain values — it is quantised. Fermions, the particles that make up matter, possess spin values of $\frac{1}{2}$; bosons have whole number values, usually 1 (though the Higgs is predicted to have zero spin).

The direction of the spin can be clockwise or anticlockwise: this gives rise to the possibility of polarisation of light, as exploited by Polaroid sun-glasses; magnetism, caused by unpaired electrons; and MRI scanning, due to the spin of the proton in a hydrogen atom.

Fermions and bosons behave in different ways. No two fermions can be in exactly the same state, resulting in the structures of atoms and hence their particular chemical behaviour (though two fermions make a boson).

Bosons can be in the same state, giving rise to the possibility of lasers, superfluid helium and superconduction of electricity. Bosons are force carriers for fields.

Personal, not political

Matt Cooper reviews *The Iron Lady* (director: Phyllida Lloyd)

Don't think for a second that this is a political film. It is not.

The majority of the story is told in the present about an aged Margaret Thatcher, brilliantly played by Meryl Streep, descending into dementia.

Isolated from her family by her previous single-mindedness and ambition, she is portrayed as a woman who cannot let go. This is expressed in her continued dialogue with her eight years dead husband Denis (a miscast Jim Broadbent), but it is life without power that she really cannot bear.

This second dialogue, with her road to and time in power, is told in flashback.

It would be possible to criticise this as a poor and partial history, but what we are seeing is filtered through the old woman's memory. Recollections of the 1970s seem deliberately to conflate the Conservative and Labour governments. The Conservative Prime Minister from 1970-74, Edward Heath, is played by John Sessions, who appears to be reprising his portrayal of the Labour prime minister Harold Wilson from the film "Made in Dagenham".

The representation of the miners' strike and three-day week that brought down Heath's government in 1974 is clearly conflating the public sector strike wave in the dying days of the Labour government and the Winter of Discontent of 1978-1979. In Thatcher's mind, and this is clear in the film, both Heath and Wilson failed to confront and defeat the organised working class.

This selective memory is also evident in Thatcher's sense of her isolation as a woman.

Meryl Streep as Margaret Thatcher

When Thatcher arrives in the House of Commons in 1959 it is as if she were Lady Astor arriving as the first woman in 1920. No woman is seen on the green benches. This reflects Thatcher's belief that she had to succeed in a world of men for herself, not to transform that gendered world.

Thatcher delivers a declaratory speech to the American Secretary of State Al Haig, at the time of Falklands, comparing war against Argentina with her battle to succeed in a man's world, but this is all about herself and her ambition, not any dubious "Conservative feminism".

Any history of the politics of the 1980s serves only the pur-

poses of the film. Thatcher's recall of her time in power becomes a rather thin "greatest hits" — standing down the moderate "wets" in her Cabinet at the time of the riots of 1981; the Falklands war in 1982; very briefly, the start of the Miners' Strike in 1984; and the Brighton bombing of the same year. And then nothing until her ejection from power in 1990.

This constitutes the falsest note in the film, with Thatcher appearing to have a breakdown and capturing neither the real conflicts nor her sense of betrayal and rejection, from which she never recovered.

There are occasional barbs in the film. In the opening sequence the old and confused Thatcher wanders off and buys milk. "Expensive," the milk snatcher complains, and she is pushed aside by her own creation, a suited, self-centred, mobile-phone-talking executive. But such themes go undeveloped, and the core of the film is of a latter day Lear, centred on power and its loss, of ambition and its effect on Thatcher's personal relationships.

The film suggests that she neglected her family, pushing her children away and ultimately Denis too in her pursuit of power, and after power paying the cost. Again, there are no deeper underlying politics here, either feminist or anti-feminist, just a personal story.

The producer, Phyllida Lloyd, directed Streep in "Mamma Mia", and the screenplay is by Abi Morgan, best known for her stage play "Tender" and drama exploring the internal world of emotions. The result is really a vehicle for Meryl Streep to act her socks off and to meditate on ambition, power and loss, which this film does very well.

But anyone looking to understand Thatcher as a class warrior for her class in the 1980s, or our class's response to her, will have to look elsewhere.

Christopher Hitchens

(13 April 1949–15 December 2011)

By James Bloodworth

In the 1940s, George Orwell wrote that "every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic Socialism, as I understand it."

Today, many right across the political spectrum like to pick and choose from Orwell according to taste, stressing either the democratic, socialist or anti-totalitarian aspect of his work at the expense of the whole — the resulting "legacy" depending very much upon the political persuasion of who is doing the accounting.

Christopher Hitchens, the one-time darling of the left, in recent years uncomfortably skirted this same political dividing-line: at once attracting the scorn of former comrades for his alleged shuffle to the right, while in the process gathering a substantial number of followers whose admiration rested almost entirely on the premise of him having "come to his senses".

BLUSTER

The nature of Hitchens's politics depended, in a similar fashion to Orwell's, on who one was talking to.

Were Hitchens alone in rejecting the conventional left/liberal, post-9/11 perspective, his bravado and bluster would likely have been much less potent. (Hitchens's politics were never about posture alone; but one should not underestimate the importance of showmanship to the Hitchens brand). As it happened, there were others on the left who viewed the attempt on the back of 9/11 to conflate John Ashcroft with Osama Bin Laden as crass moral equivalence; or as Orwell put it 70 years before, "the argument that half a loaf is no different from no bread at all".

The problem with the notion that Hitchens, after 9/11, simply did the obligatory shuffle to the right, or as David Horowitz put it (underwhelmingly, considering his own political trajectory), had "second thoughts", is that a substantial proportion of the left really did climb into bed with reaction during this period, and continues to do so whenever a group points AK47s in the direction of the United States.

This was not confined to the debased remnants of Stalinism, either. The editorial of the liberal-left *New Statesman* of 17 September, 2001, written by the then-editor Peter Wilby,

Christopher Hitchens

appeared to blame Americans themselves for the 9/11 attacks — for "preferring George Bush to Al Gore and both to Ralph Nader". A few weeks later, the Oxford Academic Mary Beard wrote approvingly in the *London Review of Books* about the "feeling that, however tactfully you dress it up, the United States had it coming".

Hitchens's understandable rejection of certain trends within conventional left politics, however, eventually led him down the blind alley of support for American adventurism — not unrelated, perhaps, to his increasing distance from the genuine struggles of the working class. In his essays on Iraq, as Jonathan Freedland put it, "the absence [of WMD was] deemed not to be evidence of absence but, on the contrary, evidence of the presence of WMDs in the immediate past."

While it would be simplistic to put the shift in Hitchens's politics in his later years down to a banal and clichéd shuffle to the right, it did begin to appear, if only via omission, that interventionism was not the only consensus Hitchens came to uncritically accept.

In a 2008 interview with *Prospect* magazine, Hitchens, a man who lived by then in comfortable surroundings in Washington, showed a thinly-veiled contempt for those whose lives were made bearable by the welfare state, dismissing it as "little more than Christian charity".

Similarly, in an article for *Slate* in the aftermath of the London riots, Hitchens took the establishment line that the unrest was "sheer criminality" (as one Tweeter put it at the time

— "yes, we know it is sheer criminality; the question is why are our youngsters sheer criminals?"). While much of the British left mobilised against the biggest cut in living standards in a generation, in the same article Hitchens glibly put "the cuts" in brackets and dismissed the term as an "all-purpose expression... used for all-purpose purposes".

Going back to Orwell, in a reply dated 15 November 1943 to an invitation from the Duchess of Atholl to speak for the British League for European Freedom, Orwell rejected the invitation on the basis that he didn't agree with their objectives. Acknowledging that what they said was "more truthful than the lying propaganda found in most of the press", he added that he could "not associate himself with an essentially Conservative body", that claimed to "defend democracy in Europe" but had "nothing to say about British imperialism". His closing paragraph stated: "I belong to the left and must work inside it, much as I hate Russian totalitarianism and its poisonous influence in this country."

SHADOW

Hitchens, like many British journalists of his generation, undoubtedly spent much of his career in the shadow of Orwell.

He also perhaps spent a certain amount of it waiting for his very own Orwell moment — a moment where he could take on his own side in the way Orwell took on the left over the appeasement of Stalin. The problem for Hitchens, however, was that despite the bluster and fear-mongering (not to mention the genuinely repulsive politics of the Jihadi movement), Islamism was not Nazism or Stalinism; and Hitchens, however good his prose might have been, was no Orwell. In defending the gains of liberal democracy against its totalitarian enemies, Orwell never dumped his politics.

The most important message that Hitchens left behind is perhaps the most basic one: to think for one's self. The reason large numbers of people admire Hitchens is the same reason so many detest him — attacking orthodoxy, whether of left or right, is never likely to win a person as many plaudits as clinging to the shore like a *Daily Telegraph* editorial.

We will all be worse off without the raffish demeanour, whiskey and cigarette in hand, belligerently arguing a point when others have long ago given up the ghost.

While many of the left were predictably quiet at the news of his passing, they will be the ones who will miss him the most, they just don't yet know it.

This is *Dystopia*, lady!

What world is this, sir?
This is *Dystopia*, lady!
World of hallucogenic sights
And waking nightmares;
Realm of Dire Remembrances
And of things seen in our Bleak
Imaginings.

Strange ancient worlds still are threaded
in
This ending-time of mankind's long pre-
history:
See it through the lenses of its parts,
Its smaller, true and fancied,
Past and present, parts,
And of its pasts,
If you would see it plain,
And know what centuries this is:
Here old and new combine;
Progress and regress intertwine.

II

This is the *Great Dalek Civilisation*,
Run by little shrivelled, dishrag things,
strutting
Inside a big, relentless blind machine.

This is the *Western Town*
In the cowboy picture: robbers rule here,
The sheriff and the hangman work for
them;
Crooks make and break the Law.

This is the village in the "*Seven Samurai*":
Bandits force tribute
From starved and half-starved people,
Indifferent to the hunger cries.

Here, the educated, knowing, clever
Thinkers, teachers, writers, philosophers,
Pundits, seers, prophets,
Humanity's recusant effete elite,
Gang with the bandits
To rob the hungry villagers:
To the bandits' primal theft and force
They add their own anointing weasel
cries.

III

Here, *Freedom and Equality* thrive:
The poor as well as the rich are free
To sleep out in winter city streets.

All alike are barred by law
From robbing banks,
Save only those with wealth enough
To pay the licence fee
For stark impunity,
To loot and rob within the Law.

Those who rob banks with guns are jailed;
Those who use banks like guns
To rob and ride the people, rule
The jails, the Cortes, Senates, Commons,
Assemblies, Reichstags, Dumas, Knessets,
Dails.

New little thieves are jailed
Or have their hands cut off
By the Thieves Who Rule
Heir to the greater thieves of old,

IV

This is a place that *Thomas More*,
Lord Chancellor of England knew:
Government is a "perpetual conspiracy
Of the rich against the poor".

This is *Imperial Rome*:
Here, the *Presidency of the World*
Is sought and sold and bought, auctioned,
And, four years on, is sold again,
(Democratically) by the very rich,
To the very rich, for the very rich.

This is a *Henry Ford Democracy*:
You can choose the colour of your rulers,
Provided it is a shade of the colour
bourgeois.

This is a world ruled by *Public Opinion*,
Where Public Opinion is ruled by venal
Journo servitors of the ruling rich.

V

Lady, this is the place of *Swift's imagining*,
Babies, millions from every crop,

Are staked out on the unhealing,
Unsustaining, stark, barren rock, die
To feed the Lords of Money, Law and Life.

Ours, is a world rich
In its *Doctors Mengele*,
Experimenting endlessly,
Generation upon generation,
To find how much
In food and medics' care
Children can lack, and live.

Here, *Citizens Procrustes and Moreau*
Run the schools: children are maimed,
Have hopes, propensities, aspirings
Hacked away,
As once they broke the limbs of beggar
kids

And re-set them, all awry;
Are shaped and schooled
To make them fit to live
In their allotted place,
To fill and till their social slot
And let their lives be filched
By the ruling lout elite

Lady, this is *Bram Stoker Territory*:
Here, if they can, they drink your blood.

VI

Here, *God serves Satan*:
The priests of the high Morality go in
lockstep
With the brigands, hangmen, bagmen,
murderers and *Thieves*.

Commerce and its Conveniences,
Are fountain alike
Of Law, Morality, Art;
The Stockholder, his priest,
Lawyer, spin-liar,
And his hacking journalist,
Are Moses, Marx, Mohammed, Christ.

The *Money-Changers* own the *Temples*:
Usurer-scourging Christ is jailed
As a hooligan, and crucified
For lèse Majesty, and lèse God.

Not "Do to others as you
Would have them do to you",
But "do to them as they
Might do to you, and do it first".

Thievery, robbery, chicanery,
Grown old and blindingly familiar,
Nest deep within the social seed:
Few now will call the Great Thieves,
"thieves"
Or name Big Thievery, "theft".

Falling fine acidic rain,
The moral culture eats
At the ties and fabrics of the society
That makes, remakes, sustains and
poisons it.

VII

Lady, this is a world ruled-over,
By *Conquistadors*:
Entrenched, still looting predatory victors,
And their victims, vanquished
In savage old class wars,
That change in form, but do not cease:
A war of social worlds rips and rages.

This is the world of *Spartacus*:
Freedom and slavery entwine, symbiotic
still;
The pitiless chains,
Less visible, and longer now,
Are forged and reformed, relentlessly.

The means of life,
The work of nature,
And of the generations,
Are held by a few,
Run by mercenaries,
Guarded by scribblers, lawyers, prattlers,
cops:

The rest must pay eternal dues
To the Lords of Life, who make the Law.

You must work, wage slave,
Unpaid for part of each long day
For masters of land, bank, plant,
Or they won't let you work at all.

Most hire out their labour power,
A few sell body parts outright,
Many sell their own starved red blood.

Here they treat most of the people
Most of the time
As farmers treat their beasts.

This is the *Theatre of the Absurd*:
Here the rich and their ticket-touts
Have pre-booked all the good surveying
seats.

This is the *land in the cowboy picture*
Held by the half-mad cattle baron
Against diggers of the soil
And their need
To grow food and people.

This is the world of the *lotus-eaters*,
The Realm of Amnesia:
Here you are induced to forget
Who you are, and what,
And what you and yours might be.

Humankind is snared
In a world-enmeshing web
By the busy, spid'ring bourgeoisie:
Lives are drained, reduced, shrivelled,
Made senselessly arid, emptied, numbed.

This is the planet in *Star Trek*
Ruled by *Doctor Frankenstein*,
Here, they steal your kidneys,
Your hands, your eyes, your heart,
For spare part surgery on prospered
citizens.

VIII

Here we pray to *The Three Malignant Gods*,
Hope-of-Wealth, Wealth, Profit,
And Their anointed Saints and Holy Souls,
In whom the quest for wealth
Ended with their birth.

Here footballers and singers
Athletes, musicians, models,
Disc-jockeys, psychics, gurus
Are adored, are amongst the richest of the
Age,
Our spiritual out-reach; our epitome.

Here live olympian *Hero-Drones*
Of *conspicuous consumption*
And their attendant swarms
Of addled *Cargo Cultists*.*

Here, too, reign *Pearly Kings and Queens*;
Shimmering tinsel is worn,
Not with shame but pride:
The cherished wealth is glittering
nothingness.

A Princess Di is Queen of Hearts,
A Paris Hilton Queen of Heaven
To mesmer'ed, would-be clones
Who browse, voyeur, gawp and gasp,
eternally
Wishing, hoping, lusting, longing,
Imagining, miming: helpless
Before the *Great Shop Window*
And its mincing manikins.

IX

This is the world and this the Age

Of humankind's *Great Fear*:
Of immanent, close-crowding doom
And all-pervading guilt;
The dawning, gnawing sense,
That humankind has fouled its nest;
An Age of surging, burgeoning Fear
Before the looming shadow
Of the Tsunami Times coming;
Engulfing tidal nature waves,
And waves of man-made social
devastation.

This is an *Aztec* world, Lady,
Moored and mired in blood-drenched
Faith:

Here beating human hearts
Are ripped out of the living flesh,
And sacrificed to the ravening *Market-God*,
Without whose favour nothing moves.

Humanity's heavy-dragging tail
Rises up, again, and again, to strike
At its all too-slow-advancing head.

This is the world of *The Big Sleep*:
Of murk, enshrouding fog,
And deep, self-multiplying mystery:
Even the authors lose the shape of this
mad tale!

X

This, Lady, is *Caveman Planet*:
Here bones and toxic dung and dirt
Pile up over the years; except,
We have no other cave to move on to.

And this... Lady... This is...
Sir, it is all these things, you say,
Metaphorically — but what is it,
Beyond analogue and metaphor?

Why, Capitalism, Lady, *Capitalism!*

This is a state of society
In which the process of production
Has the mastery over humankind
Instead of being controlled by us.

Relentless mills of commerce grind:
In a world of finite things,
In-built, *Incessant Waste*
And pre-set built-in early obsolescence,
The ruin-price we pay
Our all-devouring, all-deciding,
Humankind-deriding
Paramount God: Profit.

Lady, this is *Animal Farm*:
The pigs rule here!

But, sir, will things always, here, be so?

No, lady. No. Hell, no!

And, sir, what should I do in Dystopia?

Sean Matgamna

* Cargo Cult: during World War Two, the setting up of a US south Sea island base kept in supplies by planes, produced amongst the stone-age level native people of the island a cult of the cargo. Supernatural, the planes disgorging their wonders seemed to them; and so they ceased economic activity and instead took to aping the behaviour of the in-comers and praying and sacrificing to the God of Airborne Supplies, looking for the magic that would bring cargoes to them too...



"The Treason of the Intellectuals, and other political verse" by Sean Matgamna

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Private sector pensions fight

By Sam Greenwood

The ongoing pensions battle in the public sector has now spilled over into the private sector.

The Association of Consulting Actuaries (ACA) has reported that pensions in the private sector face "seismic collapse". Nine out of ten private sector defined benefit schemes are close to new entrants, and four out of ten schemes do not allow existing staff to build up further benefits. Last week, Shell closed its final salary pension scheme to new workers, despite the pension pot being in surplus and Shell reporting profits over £4.5 billion in the last quarter of 2011.

Unilever is attempting to change workers' pen-

sions to a less generous career-average scheme. 5,000 of the 7,000 workers employed nationally by Unilever are affected; the changes could see workers pensions reduced by £2,500 a year. Unite, Usdaw and the GMB unions struck on 9 December and have called further strike action on 17 January.

Workers at the Mini car plant in Cowley, Oxfordshire have also threatened to take industrial action against BMW, because of changes to the rights of agency workers and the company seeking to close the final salary pension scheme for new entrants. Changes to the hiring of agency workers will mean that they earn 20% less than workers employed through BMW for doing



the same work. In addition, new staff employed by BMW will not be eligible to join the final-salary scheme. BMW profits rose by 66% in the first half of 2011. The factory employs over 3,000 full time staff.

General Electric (GE), the world's largest aircraft engine manufacturer, announced last year that it was closing its final salary

pension scheme for new members, and increasing contributions for the existing workforce from 5% to 9%. Unite has announced that strike action now looks very likely as talks have broken down between the GE and Unite. Ian Waddell, Unite's national officer for aerospace said: "Doubling contributions for our members is unjustifiable for a global company that made \$14.2 billion profit last year and awarded its top five executives \$10 million in salary and \$24.5 million in pension payments. We will consult our members, but it is now almost inevitable that industrial action will follow."

The coalition government has been attacking public sector pensions with glee, and claiming

that public sector workers get a golden deal compared to workers in the private sector.

Workers should not let the labour movement be split; workers from both the private and public sector should link up their struggles, through local trade councils and rank and file controlled strike committees.

Every worker deserves a decent pension, every attack should be fought, and the labour movement should argue that pensions in the private sector are derisory and need to at a minimum be raised to match public sector pensions, whilst defending existing pensions in the public sector from government attacks and union sell-outs.

Sparks' fight goes on

By Padraig O'Brien

The seven construction contractors planning to unilaterally impose their own new agreement ("BESNA") set 9 January as the new date by which electricians must sign up to the new terms or face the sack.

Unite, the union representing the majority of organised workers in the industry, called off a planned strike in December following the mere threat of a legal challenge and is now emphasising the possibility for members who lose their jobs to pursue tribunals. The abridged article below is by the rank-and-file committee which has been coordinating the resistance to the attack, and is available in full online at bit.ly/w6fgZ5. See jibelectrician.blogspot.com for details of direct actions in the campaign.

The methods of the BESNA seven are outrageous and a disgrace. It is absolute utter blackmail. They say "sign up to BESNA and face a drop in wages by £240 a week or you will be sacked." Unite officials wouldn't allow it to happen to themselves, so why are they so lacklustre in fighting for us?

Unite should be giving 110% backing to their members at the coalface, not hiding behind tribunals, which, as we and Unite know, have no powers of reinstatement in the event of wrongful dismissal.

To give ourselves a chance of defeating BESNA, rank-and-file sparks and others have to respond by withdrawing our labour and drawing tools. If we don't, we are finished and the JIB agreement will be gone forever as other firms are sure to follow the rogue seven

(who have got all the big work).

Agencies will drop the rates as well. Then other trades will have their wages slashed and NAECI [National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry] will be next for the chop. Then it may spread into other industries like the railway maintenance, road works and factories.

We stand at a crossroads, and there are only two directions to go. 'The road to hell' or 'the road to victory'! We face the biggest challenge to construction workers in our living history.

Unite must wake up soon and support their members in a meaningful way (strike action!). Until they do, the rank and file must take on the BESNA seven.

Our class and livelihoods need us more than ever!

Reinstate Pat Markey!

By a NUT activist

A long-serving humanities teacher at Duston School, Northampton, is facing victimisation and possible dismissal at a disciplinary hearing this week.

Northampton National Union of Teachers (NUT) branch secretary and Duston School NUT Rep, Pat Markey, has been suspended from his teaching post since September 2011.

It is clear that Pat Markey is being victimised because he is a trade union

representative who remains opposed to the loss of local democracy and accountability as a result of Duston School attempting to become an academy. Despite making promises that academy status would not affect teachers' terms and conditions, management chose to end Pat Markey's one day union facilities even though Duston School has not yet become an academy — and then suspended Pat following a protest outside the school in July 2011, despite the fact that Pat was not present at the protest.

Pat Markey is totally committed to his teaching at Duston School where he has worked for 18 years, and wants nothing more than to get back to teaching his pupils in the classroom. The case is a gross injustice, and further evidence of the anti-union mentality in academy schools, or would-be academy schools. Pat should be reinstated without further delay.

Please show your support by signing the online petition: www.ipetitions.com/petition/re-instate-pat

M&S warehouse workers strike

By Darren Bedford

Workers at a Marks & Spencer distribution centre, operated by logistics firm Wincanton, struck on 22 December against a plan by management to create a two-tier workforce by linking a new pay scheme to the introduction of worse terms for new starters.

The new deal would cut the hourly rate from £8 to £6.45 for new employees. The new package would also drastically lower shift premiums and overtime payments.

As well as the one-day strike, workers also launched an indefinite work-to-rule.

Unite regional officer, John McGookin said: "Our members have consistently indicated to Wincanton that their pay should not be linked to the introduction of inferior terms and conditions

for new starters. This is a blatant attempt by Wincanton, on behalf of Marks & Spencer, to circumvent the Agency Workers Directive.

"Wincanton is not just content with getting its agency staff to sign all of its workers up to the Swedish Derogation — the loophole that thwarts pay parity progress — they are forcing colleagues to work alongside each other on inferior terms, while they reap the rewards in profits."

Langdon strike wins concessions

By Stewart Ward

Teachers at Langdon School in Newham, East London, voted to suspend their strike action following concessions from the school management and the council.

Members of the National Union of Teachers at the school voted unanimously

to suspend the action after council commitments to reign in the school's scabherding, bullying management. However, their strike ballot remains live should they decide the concessions are not being properly delivered.

Messages of support for the workers can still be sent to nutlangdon@aol.co.uk

Essex NUJ strike

By Darren Bedford

National Union of Journalists members working for newspapers owned by the Newsquest company have voted to strike in a dispute over pay.

Workers face a pay freeze, meaning that if no pay awards are made in 2012 it will be the third year out of the last four of standstill for Newsquest journalists. Management also want to impose a single pay "anniversary" (the point in the year at which pay is renegotiated) for all editorial staff, meaning some workers would not even be considered for a wage increase until June 2013.

Will Lodge, Father of the Newsquest North Essex chapel, said:

"After two years of a pay freeze and a paltry two per cent rise last year, members are feeling the squeeze on their wallets.

"Wages are now 13 per cent below what they would be if they had matched inflation, equalling a £2,670 real-terms pay cut for someone on a £20,000 salary in 2008. This is without taking into account other factors such as increased tax contributions.

"Members are not opposed to standardising their pay dates, but are extremely concerned that people with a pay review in the second half of the year face waiting until June 2013 to be considered for a pay rise.

"The threat of a pay freeze now or a possible pay rise in June also feels like a carrot being dangled in front of our noses, with no guarantee it won't be snatched away to help plug holes elsewhere in the budget.

"When we see reports of how much top Newsquest and Gannett executives are being paid, it makes us wonder how much of a hit profit margins are taking compared to the hit on our wages.

"To deny those on the ground making the company profitable a pay rise to line the pockets of a faceless executive is bordering on the criminal."

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Organise next pensions action now!

By Ira Berkovic

The decision of Unite's local government committee to follow the lead of its health committee in rejecting the latest pensions offer is a significant development in the fight to defeat the government's attacks.

Unite says only that its local government members will "now consider their next steps", rather than definitively committing to further action. In Unite now, the battle for activists is to ensure that the union organises further strikes, and quickly.

A proposal from AWL member Patrick Murphy to the National Union of Teachers (NUT) Executive on 12 January could commit the NUT to joining the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), Northern Irish union NIPSA and now Unite in explicitly rejecting the deal and, more importantly, committing to further strike action. Even on the NUT's notionally left-led Executive, however, many senior trade unionists are cautious about committing to more action.

A *Financial Times* article



quotes PCS leader Mark Serwotka talking about more strikes. But at the 7 January conference organised by PCS's ruling Left Unity faction, the platform stubbornly refused to commit themselves to more than lobbying the TUC to call further action. The conference organisers dominated by the Socialist Party (the hegemonic faction in PCS) refused to allow debate on amendments calling for PCS to initiate action if the TUC won't.

ACTION
Activists should link up to support efforts to push the leaderships of the PCS, Unite and potentially others to call more action as soon as possible.

That action should be designed specifically to apply maximum pressure

to the government.

Rolling and selective strikes of, for example, revenue collectors would have a bigger economic impact than a one or even two-day "all out" demonstration strike.

That is an argument that will need to be won. Many on the labour movement left, including the far left, have a narrow and mechanical conception of strike action that sees anything other than everyone going out at the same time as somehow less militant or radical. That conception reduces strikes to mere gestures, rather than weapons used to win specific demands. A *Guardian* article on 20 December has Serwotka considering "targeted" action; a positive development, given the PCS leadership's historic hostility to such action.

But Serwotka is also quoted (again in the *FT*)

"warning" that the conflict could "expand" to include the issues of jobs and pay. The PCS's strike ballot included these issues as well as pensions, and certainly unions must find ways to link the pensions fight to other upcoming battles. But folding the pensions battle into a more general campaign on other issues is a way of putting a "militant" gloss on an admission of defeat on pensions.

FIGHT
Rank-and-file activists in "rejectionist" unions should fight for:

- their leaderships to name a date for the next set of strike action as soon as possible, in consultation with other unions
- a sustained campaign of action, not just one-off strikes, including rolling and selective action, action short of strikes and other direct actions (protests, rallies etc.) between all-out strike days
- the establishment of rank-and-file strike committees to control the dispute
- a public, political "Fair Pensions for All" campaign
- More: centre pages

Syria: Arab League fails

By Dan Katz

Since the opposition took to the streets in March 6,000 people have been killed and at least 14,000 are estimated to be in detention.

The opposition, organised through a loose network of local coordinating committees, and with a political front, The Syrian National Council (SNC) outside the country, has grown in strength while the state's authority has withered.

Neighbouring fear the deepening chaos and even — in the worst case — the break-up of the country in sectarian civil war.

A large number of deserters from the rank and file of the armed forces are now in hiding inside the country or have left for Lebanon or Turkey. Some deserters are being organised to fight the regime by the Free Syrian Army.

On Saturday 50 troops, led by an air force colonel, defected live on Al Jazeera's Arabic news channel. Colonel Afeef Mahmoud Suleiman said, "We have defected because the government is killing civilian protesters. The Syrian army attacked Hama with heavy weapons, air raids and heavy fire from tanks."

Last week a senior political figure, Mahmoud Sleiman Hajj Hamad, defected to the opposition while on holiday in Egypt. He claimed that most officials in the Syrian state were against the regime, but were being

very closely watched by Assad's secret police.

Adding to the sense of panic is a series of bombings in the capital, Damascus. The state blames Islamist suicide bombers. The opposition blames the regime.

The Arab League's recent attempt to broker a peace in Syria is failing. The League wanted to send 500 observers to monitor an agreement to remove Syrian tanks from urban centres and release political prisoners.

The League pared down the number of monitors to 150 under Syrian pressure.

There has been no real let up of state violence. Over 300 people have been killed since the arrival of the League. The regime claims to have let 3,500 prisoners go, but Human Rights Watch states that many political prisoners have been hidden on military bases. Tanks appear to be poised on the edge of towns, ready to go back in. And snipers are operating openly.

The Arab states which have pushed for intervention are themselves clerical dictatorships. As one commentator on Al Jazeera said, "these people wouldn't know a human rights abuse if it hit them in the face."

The man leading the League's intervention, Mustafa al-Dabi, is a former head of Sudanese military intelligence and is accused by Amnesty International of condoning atrocities in Darfur in the 1990s.

How I beat uni bosses and won reinstatement

Edd Bauer, recently reinstated Vice President of Education, Birmingham Guild of Students, spoke to *Solidarity*

I was released from prison on 26 September [Edd was arrested for doing a banner drop at Lib-Dem conference] and immediately went to the Guild of Students (Students Union), but found that I had been suspended from my office.

The following morning the President and the CEO (general manager) of the Guild gave me a letter banning me from the Guild premises for the remainder of the investigation surrounding my suspension.

We had a meeting and started doing lecture shout-outs and campaigning around campus.

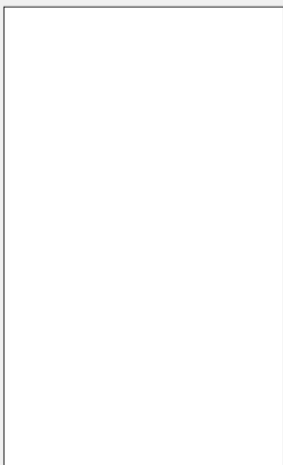
The university sent me a

letter demanding that I leave campus, which I decided to ignore. They tried to ban me again after I took part in an occupation on campus.

We decided not to focus too much on my suspension, because we didn't want the campaign to collapse in on itself and become about defending ourselves, rather than important like fees and cuts.

We picked back up on my suspension when the investigation started dragging on with no explanation as to why.

The Guild had forced through a new disciplinary policy, without a vote, via a Trustee Board meeting, a week before I was suspended. This allowed them to drag out the hearing. The panel investigating me was one senior Guild staff manager and one sabbatical officer who was close to the Pres-



ident.

That panel had no time-limit on how long it could take in investigating me. After a month they convened another body, with five members, majority non-students, and of whom only one was elected! It took until 21 December for this body to make a decision.

I feel that the decision to

reinstatement was held off so that I would miss the final Guild Council of term and would not be able to return until January. It has been pretty politically expedient for the right wing of Guild Council to not have me around this term.

UNDEMOCRATIC
I offered to resign if a vote of no confidence in me was held in a general meeting or council meeting.

In the face of that, the Guild started to look very undemocratic. Our campaign included organising a call-in to block the Guild's phone line. Liverpool Guild of Students changed the name of a meeting room in which a meeting of the Aldwych Group [the SUs of the top "Russell Group" universities] was happening to the "Edd Bauer Room". Liver-

pool, Edinburgh and Bristol University Student Unions threatened to boycott the Birmingham Guild. There was an Early Day Motion, supported by, amongst others, a Lib Dem MP whom I had last met when occupying his offices! Along with all that came the implicit threat of what students would do if I were sacked, for example occupy the Guild.

The issue is a challenge to the whole idea of student democracy as we know it.

People have a lot of trust in institutions like the Guild; they think it acts in our best interests. Only by articulating the problems with the way that the Guild and other SUs run will we challenge this. If we show that the Guild is undemocratic, silencing activists and so on, that will have a big effect. In 1968, a large part of

what the protests were about was democracy in universities.

The democracy we had both in our universities and our unions is now being lost, and we can respond to this in a similar manner to how we acted in 1968.

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts conference

28-29 January, Liverpool

More info: anticuts.com