

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

War on Iran?
page 5



**How to be a
troublemaker**
centre pages

**Who is Yvette
Cooper?**
page 8



Resisting EU/IMF/European Central Bank cuts

Greek workers rebel

**SEE
PAGE 3**

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.
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Students plan week of action

By Ed Maltby

The national conference of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts took place in Liverpool University Guild of Students on the weekend of 28-29 January.

Around 150 activists from colleges across the UK attended, including representatives from the Northern Ireland Student Assembly and the Galway branch of the Irish campaign Free Education for Everyone (FEE).

The conference was an impressive organisational effort. Activists from Merseyside Network Against Fees and Cuts played a special role in housing students on floors and sofas.

The Conference elected a new National Committee and an eleven-strong Women's Committee.

The Women's Committee now has a mandate to develop a charter of demands for women in education.

The National Committee was instructed to work on

a week of action (7-16 March) against the government's privatisation agenda in higher education, the HE White Paper.

We will also be mobilising students to support further strikes by lecturers over pensions and launching a major campaign over democratic structures in student unions.

The conference also mandated the committee to make solidarity with students in Iran, against both war and the Islamic regime.

The conference gave a good reflection of the state of the current student movement, and of the NCAFC.

CAMPUS

Most attending were delegates sent from local campus groups which have grown in the last two years of struggles.

The NCAFC in early 2010, with a view to co-ordinating these groups on a democratic basis. Since then it has played a leading role in the student movement, developed democratic structures and an

elected national committee, and organised a demonstration on 9 November 2011 demo in the face of opposition from the NUS and sectarian left groups.

The NCAFC's consistent democracy and orientation to class struggle has won it a reputation as a framework within which local independent activist groups can co-ordinate usefully.

However, the emergence of an independent, democratic student organisation, which contests NUS elections in its own name and organises action independently of the NUS, has alarmed sectarian left groups such as the SWP and the shadowy Stalinist sect Socialist Action. They view the grassroots initiatives of the NCAFC as violations of their monopoly on student politics.

These groups organised an intervention at this conference, seeking to disrupt motions debates, prevent the NCAFC from organising action and embarrass the AWL. The result was some bad-tempered motions debates on the second day; SWP activists filmed

delegates as they voted and Socialist Action activists heckled two chairs in succession to the point where they were forced to leave the stage.

However, most independent student activists saw these attempts to disrupt for what it was: a cynical political manoeuvre and an indictment of the irrational sect politics which put the prestige of "the party" above any consideration of democracy or the logic of the struggle.

The conference set a benchmark for transparency and democracy in a student movement, and made stronger ties between a local campaign groups, which will allow us to capitalise on the government's withdrawal of the pro-privatisation Higher Education Bill.

The NCAFC is calling on all student activists to support a demonstration on 15 February at Birmingham University, against management brutality and crackdowns on the right to protest.

• More: anticuts.com

Pensions: end the waiting game!

By Gerry Bates

Ealing and Kirklees are among the latest local government branches of the public-services union Unison to demand a special local government conference of the union on pensions, and Oxfordshire Health branch is pushing for a special health conference.

In local government, Unison and GMB have signed joint "principles" with the employers to implement the Government's plans for worse public sector pensions. Unite is dissenting only passively. "Final proposals" on "initial design" of the new (worse) pension scheme are due by 8 February. "Final proposals" for "future scheme management" are due by 7 March. 12 March to 20 April is the timeslot allocated for "union consultation", before it all goes to the Government for legal drafting, on 23 April.

TALKS

Talks are also proceeding in the Health Service, where Unison, the biggest union, has also agreed a (bad) framework, but no document which could be signed yet exists.

Activists in Unison will be much helped by a move for action from the unions which have rejected the Government's terms. But the first "rejectionist" union summit, on 25 January, had adverse conse-

quences. By refusing to come in on the plans by the lecturers' union UCU for a strike on 1 March, it gave leverage to UCU general secretary Sally Hunt, who opposes UCU's strike decision, to try to reverse it. UCU Exec meets again on 10 February. Meanwhile, balloting in its general secretary election opens on 6 February.

And the National Union of Teachers (NUT) Executive the next day, 26 January, decided to wait on the next "rejectionist" summit, and the thin hope that waiting could bring the second-biggest teachers' union, NASUWT, in on further action.

DELAY

Every further delay makes it more difficult to organise a continuing campaign with a good chance of extracting real concessions from the Government.

The civil service union PCS gained credit by being the only union (apart from NIPSA) to reject the Government terms immediately and unequivocally on 19/20 December. PCS leaders have said repeatedly that they believe unions should strike again for pensions.

Understandably, other unions are inclined to look to PCS for a lead. But waiting for PCS can be a snare.

The PCS leadership is dominated by a would-be Marxist group, the Socialist Party, which since 19 December has been demand-

ing, on the streets and in meetings, that unions "name the date" for further action on pensions.

The SPers in the PCS leadership, however — the SPers who could actually "name the date" — have not responded to the SP's public demand!

The January/February issue of the PCS union magazine, *View*, does not even hint at further industrial action for pensions. The most militant thing it says is: "unions now have to make a decision of enormous significance — accept the government's proposals on pension age, contributions and the value of pensions or demand real negotiations on the real issues".

Real joint action will be best achieved by unions moving quickly, taking the initiative, naming definite days, making definite proposals — and responding to proposals from others with support, not quibbling and delay.

Even an 11th-hour token protest just before the Government's contributions increases come in, even one called by only a few unions, or only one union, would be better than nothing.

But the unions can and should go for much more: a strike in good time, followed by a rapid campaign of rolling and selective action, organised with rank-and-file control, assisted by strike levies, and with activity every week.



WORKING-CLASS POLITICS AND ANARCHISM

A new pamphlet from Workers' Liberty

Including articles by Ira Berkovic, Martin Thomas, North London Solidarity Federation, Iain McKay (Editor, Anarchist FAQ), Yves Coleman (*Ni Patrie, Ni Frontières*), Bob Sutton and more.

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• What workers will have deducted from their wages, as increased pension contributions, from April:
NHS: bit.ly/AaYBmd
Teachers: bit.ly/x2wyPb
Civil service: bit.ly/xMIbQy

Writing treaties while Europe burns

By Chris Reynolds

On 30 January, European Union leaders met in Brussels to fix the new "budget discipline" treaty decided on 9 December.

The British government made itself a minority of one on 9 December in trying to block the treaty, but has subsequently quietly assented to the treaty involving EU institutions in enforcing its constraints on eurozone member states who sign up for it.

However, on the one hand, the treaty's loopholes through which governments can claim exemption from its budget rules have become large enough that the European Central Bank has publicly said it is unsatisfactory.

On the other hand, to the extent that the treaty has any bite, it will push governments towards drastic cuts which will make the economic crisis worse. Wolfgang Münchau of the *Financial Times* writes: "The new European fiscal pact [is] quite mad... I have yet to meet anybody who can explain what good the treaty will do."

EU leaders are trying to impose ruinous further cuts on Greece in the run-up to large repayments on its debt which Greece has to make on 20 March, and for which it needs further credit from the EU. It was revealed on 27 January that the German government is proposing that, as a condition of further credit, the EU should require that the Greek government commit to making debt payments before it spends anything on running Greece, and accept a European commissioner as dictator over its budget decisions.

Even Greek finance minister Evangelos Venizelos has flatly rejected such impositions, similar to what European powers did to countries like Egypt and Turkey in the era of high imperialism.

Italy is bobbing along just the right side of debt disaster; Spain's levels of slump and unemployment are soaring; Portugal is having to pay higher and higher charges to borrow in global markets, and is lurching towards Greek-scale debt crisis.

Four million refuse to pay in Greece

By Theodora Polenta

As the German government proposes that the EU and ECB should insist on an external "commissioner" running Greece's budget, it has been revealed that four million bills for the new regressive property tax, imposed as part of the Greek government's cuts programme, have not been paid.

According to the power workers' Genop-Dei, 1.5 million bills have passed their expiry date, and 250,000 have gone beyond the 80-day threshold after which the government sends orders for cutting off the electricity supply. In order to increase the pressure to pay, the government has made the new tax payable as a part of electricity bills.

The state power company DEI has issued 50,000 orders for cutting off electricity supply to households. But the Genop-Dei trade union has asked every worker instructed to take part in cutting off a household's electricity supply to ignore the orders and actively obstruct the subcontractors.

20,000 cutting-off orders have been passed to private subcontractors. However, the government, under pressure from the massive non-payment movement, has decided reluctantly to freeze the cutting-off orders. Only 100 households have had electricity cut off.

The government and DEI bosses have refused to publish the figures.

However, the government's temporary climb-down of the government should not make the non-payment movement complacent. Working-class people should organise in every neighbourhood; call general meetings; and organise self-defence teams and support for households threatened with cut-off.

A lot of private sector electricians' unions have issued statements of solidar-

Greek protest against last month's visit by IMF and EU officials

ity with non-payers, and under the social pressure of the non-payment movement a lot of private sector subcontractors have refused the disgraceful "business" of cut-offs. Of course there will still be a lot of subcontractors who will not resist the profit to be made from cut-offs.

NEIGHBOURHOOD
It is very important for the non-payment movement to organise in each neighbourhood a first-aid team of electricians who will reconnect people's electricity supply. Such teams have already been organised in some areas.

The movement is stronger, and the number of people that have refused to pay is bigger, in neighbourhoods where the movement has the active support of the council.

For example in Nea Ionia, which has a left-wing council, the councillors issued a statement in which they asked the people to refuse to pay the regressive property tax and offered legal support and technical back-up and guarantees of reconnection to every household that had its electricity cut off.

2500 people in Nea Ionia refused to pay their tax.

Other councils, under the pressure of the neighbourhood committees and general open meetings, have been forced to make statements against the imposition of the regressive property tax. Some of those statements have proven empty promises because

they were not backed up by the councillors' active support for the households that have not paid the regressive property tax.

An equivalent to the British anti-poll-tax movement of 1989-91 is spreading all around Greece with thousands of people refusing en masse to pay the tax and organising their resistance. The non-payment movement reintroduces the concept of solidarity and the potential of collective resistance and struggle, which are the only tools that the people have in order to defeat the government.

Open meetings are taking place in every neighbourhood. Neighbourhood activists organise protests and sit-ins outside their local DEI offices and outside the subcontractors' offices where the orders for cut-offs are being received.

A few months ago the government gave explicit orders to DEI to accept payment of electricity bills only alongside the payment of the regressive property tax. As a result of the non-payment movement protests, some local DEIs (Khfhsia, Keratsini) have backed down and have accepted people paying only the electricity part of the bill and not the regressive property tax.

The private company Geroh Ltd, which had been assigned the cut-off orders for the whole of Athens, was forced to shut down its "business" after an occupation of its offices by

non-payment activists. Genop-Dei has published on the internet the details of every private company hired by the government for cut-offs.

People who have appealed to justice to declare illegal the threat of cutting off their electricity have won. 173 citizens of Petropoli, supported by the KKE-dominated council, have won their court cases against the government orders.

INTENSIFY
The non-payment movement should intensify and escalate its action. The imposition of the regressive property tax is equivalent to robbery from the majority of working people.

And the tax and the other austerity measures cannot save Greece from bankruptcy. On the contrary, they are bankrupting the people of Greece.

The revenues go to feed the black hole of the Greek debt, while the people get poorer. One million are unemployed; and 30% living below the poverty line. But the debt increases, as the shrinkage of economic activity pushes down government revenues faster than the new taxes can raise them.

The coordination of all the multiple forms of actions and different types of political and social community movements that are developing in every neighbourhood of Greece is of paramount importance. Furthermore it is im-

portant for the neighbourhood community movements to strengthen their links with the trade unionists and the organised working class movement.

A united front of the neighbourhood movement, the Genop-Dei trade union, and the council workers has already recorded some victories against the regressive property tax.

A united front between the workers and the community movement can do more: coordinate and organise local neighbourhood activities so as to generalise the political confrontation against the government.

REGRESSIVE

On Friday 27 January, people protested outside the parliament against the regressive property tax, stating that they would carry on their struggle until the government withdraws the regressive property tax and other imposed taxes.

They make clear that they will carry on their struggle to the defeat of the coalition government that is leading Greece to ever-increasing poverty. Representatives from local neighbourhood movements and from networks of solidarity movements, and trade unionists from Syriza and Antarsya were present.

- No house with no electricity. Enough is enough! We do not owe even a penny to the government, the bankers, the EU, and the IMF

- We are not paying regressive taxes. We are not paying for their crisis. We are not paying for their debts

- Nationalise all public utility companies under workers' control

- For a united front of trade unionists, neighbourhood activists, and left-wing councillors

United, we can overthrow the coalition government and the political establishment that supports it.

Bail-out serves the banks

By Theodora Polenta

The Greek government claims that the current talks on "private sector involvement" (PSI) in the EU-ECB-IMF bail-out will bring relief for the people of Greece. But:

- First of all, the PSI talks and the second bailout fund of €130 billion will be linked to a new "memorandum" of anti-working-class measures.
- Secondly, the 50% "haircut" on privately-

owned Greek government bonds will bring Greek pension funds to bankruptcy. The pension funds own €26 billion in Greek government bonds. It is estimated that the pension funds already lost €4.5 billion in 2011 from reduced workers' contributions and forced early retirements.

- Thirdly, the bailout money is going directly to the bankers and predators. €30 billion will be directly given to the banks, hedge funds, etc. as a form of

compensation for their participation in the 50% haircut on the Greek debt. Another €39 billion will be given to the Greek banks to recapitalise them, and €14 billion to Greek bondholders, for Greek bonds that are expiring this March. The people of Greece will pay, with a 30 year austerity program.

- Fourthly, Greek government debt will still not be viable after the PSI deal and the bail-out. On the best-case scenarios, the

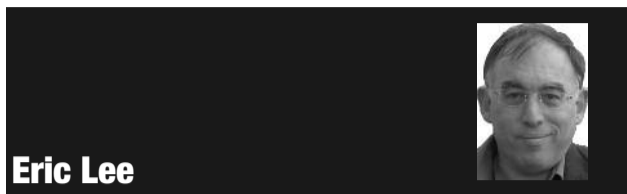
debt will be 120% of the GDP in 2020, which was its level in the end of 2009 when it was considered essential for Greece to seek external aid. Current IMF predictions are for Greek debt of around 150% of the GDP in 2020.

- Finally, a precondition for the acceptance of the 50% haircut by the private sector is for the new Greek debt to be governed by English law. This hand over all power to the creditors. They will be able to

enforce the whole payment of the debt with the threat of repossessing Greek public property and Greek public resources and wealth.

If Greece is expelled from the eurozone and is forced to return to its national currency (drachma), the Greek debt instead of being adjusted into drachmas, under Greek law, would remain in euros, and become even more unpayable.

Long live free Georgia!



Eric Lee

It's the final moments of a fictional 1927 silent film. The hero is being tortured, and those paying close attention will see that the torturers are Russians. (The dials on their machines have Cyrillic characters.)

The hero breaks free, rescues the girl, and flies off to freedom. His last words, which appear as a title card, are "Long live free Georgia!"

My guess is that Michel Hazanavicius, director of *The Artist*, in which the fictional film appears, was looking for something that would seem authentic in the 1920s, something sufficiently obscure that it would have an air of being genuine. To have the hero of this adventure fighting for Georgia is about as obscure as you can get.

I'm sure audiences in the USA are convinced that it must have something to do with the state of Georgia.

But we know better.

In the 1920s, the plight of the formerly independent Georgian republic was very much in public view. And this was particularly true on the left.

Georgia, which had been a province of the tsarist empire, declared independence in 1918 and was led by Mensheviks.

In 1921, the Red Army invaded — probably at the instigation of Stalin, and without the knowledge of Trotsky.

The Mensheviks were quickly routed and many of their leaders fled to exile in western Europe.

From there they continued a long struggle to delegitimise the Russian occupation of their country. A large part of the struggle took place within the international socialist movement.

Leading socialists from across Europe travelled to Georgia in its final months, the most prominent of these being Karl Kautsky.

Kautsky wrote a book praising the Menshevik success in Georgia, citing it as an example of a democratic socialist alternative to Bolshevism. He contrasted the multi-party system, free press and independent trade unions of Georgia with repressive regime in Soviet Russia.

Trotsky countered with a vitriolic attack on the man formerly known as "the pope of Marxism" and defended what turned out to be the first successful Soviet invasion of a neighbouring country (others were to follow).

In Britain, the cause of Georgia was so well-known and widely discussed that the TUC eventually sent a trade union delegation to investigate. For years the Georgian social democrats in exile participated as honoured members of international socialist congresses.

Just three years after the Red Army seized Tbilisi, the Georgians rose up in a violent insurrection against Soviet rule. Leaders of the Menshevik People's Guard led the uprising, but it was eventually crushed. Within a decade there

was little left of the Georgian Mensheviks in their homeland.

The new Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic was the kind of place where psychopath like Lavrenty Beria could rise to power. Beria was so successful in brutally terrorising the local population that Stalin eventually promoted him to head the secret police throughout the Soviet empire.

Though the Mensheviks died off one by one in exile, the memory of Georgian independence never did. Georgia remained for decades a centre of anti-Soviet activism, culminating in mass street protests in the 1980s.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Georgians proclaimed independence and chose as their symbol the flag of the short-lived Menshevik republic. They made the date of the Menshevik's declaration of independence their national holiday. And for a few years at least, the constitution of the Menshevik republic was back in force.

But the 1990s were to prove a turbulent time in Georgia, with civil wars and a series of failed leaders.

The country is currently ruled by the right-wing Saakashvili regime, whose record on workers' rights has attracted the attention of the international trade union movement.

One of the first things Saakashvili got rid of when coming to power was the hated crimson flag of the Mensheviks.

To Michel Hazanavicius, the slogan "Long live free Georgia!" must have seemed as obscure as it gets, a historical curiosity, something that would appeal only to trivia buffs.

But to socialists, "free Georgia" is a reminder of a historical tragedy.



Letters

What does Kronstadt mean?

The debate in *Solidarity* about Kronstadt has been between those who utterly condemn the suppression and see it as the beginning of the Stalinist Thermidor and the end of workers' self rule in Russia; those who absolutely defend the suppression and see it as guaranteeing the survival of the workers' revolution for a little longer; and those who see it as a tragic mistake and in retrospect the first signs of an "emergent totalitarianism" whilst still defending the good intentions of the Bolsheviks and asserting their fallibility. Victor Serge was in the latter camp.

Paul Hampton (*Solidarity* 230) is correct to point out that Serge's emphasis changed. He originally supported the suppression. Later he said Kronstadt was the beginning of the victory of the party bureaucracy over working class self rule. As Hannah Thompson has noted (*Solidarity* 229) the Kronstadt sailors' opposition to one party rule was an anti-Bolshevik but not an anti-October demand — after the suppression of the uprising, on what democratic basis does the Bolshevik party then rule? The Bolsheviks created the context for their own elimination.

According to the orthodoxy, the party had already substituted itself for an atomised working class. If only we could hold out for revolution in the west it mattered little that the working class of Russia was being smashed. The party would survive and become subsequently rejuvenated by the German revolution.

This is true as far as it goes but only half-true. Simon Pirani's work has pointed to working class self-assertion during this period both politically and economically.

Martin Thomas (*Solidarity* 229) castigates me for backcasting a fetish for democracy into the dark days of 1921. Martin says the Bolsheviks "had become convinced in the course of 1917 that the only realisable form of radical democracy...was soviet rule, workers democracy". Absolutely. The radical libertarianism of the Bolsheviks forged in the prisons of the Tsarist autocracy was the lifeblood of revolution. Yet how easy it was to suspend these principles in the context of a period when workers' rule threatened to overcome the one-party state.

I imagine the majority of AWL comrades view this suspension of soviet legality, basic principles of workers' democracy, freedom of expression and so on and the development of the apparatus of the unlawful and unaccountable state terror of the Cheka as justified for the following reasons.

Only the Bolsheviks truly represented the incarnation of the spirit of October even over and against working-class power and self-emancipation (or crucially if somehow the working class was absent).

Only the Bolshevik party stood as the bastion against the

nascent bureaucracy.

The mitigation or suspension of Bolshevik party rule would lead eventually to White counter-revolution.

There is no other possible lineage and revolutionary tradition other than the Bolsheviks and to "existentially" abandon the Bolsheviks is to abandon October root and branch.

The Bolsheviks were the highest form of "human material" yet seen on the stage of history and we the AWL stand in that tradition, accept their pre-eminence, and fundamentally repudiate any critique that diminishes them to any significant extent before the beginnings of the bureaucratic counter-revolution in 1923-1924. Hence how important it is to never surrender our subjection to the myth that the Bolsheviks were October (against Tsarism), that they were utterly infallible (destroying Kronstadt in order to defend October against white restorationism), and that "rivers of blood" separate the Bolshevik and Stalinist traditions.

Moralising about Kronstadt doesn't really achieve much now, and of course that was not Serge's intention. But, and it's a big but, working-class liberation is best served by honesty and a commitment to admit that what happened was not just unfortunate but incorrect and murderous, in 1921, in 1937, and now and we should say that.

All contributors have accepted that the negotiations with the Whites was a fabrication and that what happened was a tragedy. They should now say that the very suppression of Kronstadt was emblematic of a libertarian Bolshevik tradition eradicated for the best part of a century and was the true beginning of the Thermidor that would wipe the old Bolsheviks off the face of the earth. This is very far from the idea that the best gains of October were sustained by the suppression.

ONE-PARTY

The bureaucracy was born of the one-party state. Its origins lie with the Tsaritsyn circle and the opposition to Trotsky and his use of ex-Tsarist military specialists.

Cronyist Stalinism begins with the horror of the idea of Trotsky as Thermidorian and Bonaparte, and it recruited cell by cell on the basis of opposition to Trotsky and his clique, including many who objected to his disdain for workers' democracy and perceived him as a Menshevik parvenu. It was only after 1924 that many of the old Bolsheviks flocked to the beginnings of the Opposition and the standard that Trotsky would henceforth, with some reservations, fly for democracy and liberty against the embryonic dictatorship.

But the new Stalinist clique didn't have to learn anything anew — the party had been delivered to them already by Lenin and Trotsky and their suspension of anything looking like working class self-emancipation. The furious forced collectivization of the USSR was the implementation of a Trotskyist programme by the bureaucrats, leading whole ranks of Left Oppositionists to desert Trotsky because Stalin seemed to be about to take on and destroy what they considered to be the true Thermidorian faction around Bukharin and Rykov.

But how could emancipation operate where the working class has been atomized or eliminated? Well we can see its agency on the streets of the Kronstadt garrison, in the factories of Moscow, in the Red Army, in the variety of oppositions, in the meanderings of the Mensheviks, in the talk and debate within the Bolshevik party itself while free expression lasted for a few months longer.

Paul Hampton's contention in *Solidarity* 228 that the very suppression of Kronstadt did "prevent even the tenuous

forms of workers' self-rule from unravelling" is just the self-deception that comes with the orthodoxy, that questioning Bolshevik infallibility means surrendering the whole legacy of October.

We don't have to make that choice. Luxemburg was absolutely correct when she wrote that freedom is always freedom for the one who thinks differently — "the historical task is to replace bourgeois democracy by proletarian democracy, not to abolish all democracy" — the victory of the bureaucracy is secured in the abolition of liberty and the substitution of the central committee for the working class and its manifold emancipation.

Martyn Hudson, Middlesborough

United front or class collaboration?

It was with some surprise that I found myself accused of a "too sweeping attack" on the the Italian trade union leadership, specifically that of CGIL (*Solidarity* 231). According to Toby Abse it was only due to the latter that the united action with the CISL and UIL leadership took place.

Even if it were true, the point of the article was to underline the covert agreement between them that there would be no more action if Monti made the right gestures — which he promptly did! And the ensuing "social peace" has delighted the markets, with spreads on Italian bonds diminishing considerably. A case, I think, of Toby not seeing the woods for the trees.

While he correctly, if far, far too weakly, reproaches the CGIL leadership for its far from principled support for the metalworkers of FIOM in the most crucial and critical battle for the future of the workers' movement in Italy against the FIAT bosses, he states that the same leadership's resistance against labour reform should not be so "cavalierly dismissed". But the point I wanted to make was that workers should put little trust in the rhetoric of leaders like Sussanna Camusso. On 28 June with the other federation leaders, Camusso signed a pact with Confindustria — "a pact for Italy" to "save" the country from economic collapse!

Serious opposition to labour law reform should begin from a principled rejection of negotiations premised on class collaborationist assumptions. That is just saying what is.

This not "dismissing" the CGIL members and their capacity to mobilise, to pressurise and force the leadership to fight. It represents much of what is progressive in Italian working-class history but, nevertheless, it has been led in the past mainly by bureaucrats associated with the former Communist Party, and today the ex-Stalinists of the Democratic Party.

Toby is correct to say that to counterpose "abstract rank and filism" in the present situation is useless. But to propose a tactic of the United Front of the trade unions and workers' movement against the government and bosses attacks is absolutely central now.

Such a perspective fought for with, and within unions, communities, the radical left etc; the key political issues and programmatic demands of revolutionary strategy — this is increasingly more and more meaningful in a context of deepening and sharpening class struggle.

Hugh Edwards, Italy

No to war! No to Iranian bomb!

Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are now visiting Iran. In November 2011 the agency reported that Iran had conducted tests "relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device".

It was also concerned about medium-level uranium enrichment at Iran's Fordo plant near Qom in northern Iran. Technology which enables higher level enrichment of uranium is a prerequisite for developing nuclear weapons. That is why uranium enrichment has been a "red line" for the US, the EU, Israel, the Gulf States and others. The IAEA report triggered a ratcheting up of a decade-long conflict.

In late November the US, UK and Canada announced further bilateral sanctions on Iran. The sanctions were said to be targeted on the military purchases, trade and financial transactions carried out by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which controls the nuclear program and owns large parts of the economy.

In the same month Israel tested a long-range ballistic missile. The test came after a week of speculation in the Israeli press about whether their government had decided to attack Iran's nuclear complexes.

On 11 January an Iranian nuclear scientist was blown up by a car bomb in Tehran. It was the fourth such attack in two years. Iranian officials blamed the US and Israel.

In January the EU announced sanctions which (from July) will prohibit the import, purchase and transport of Iranian crude oil and petroleum products and related finance and insurance to EU countries.

By this point Iran had already threatened to close off the Strait of Hormuz — the transit route for around one-fifth of the oil traded globally. In response the US had said its Fifth Fleet based in nearby Bahrain would defend the shipping route and, if necessary, retaliate militarily against Iran.

All sides are still sending out mixed messages. On 26 January a report by (the US Congress financed) Institute for Science and International Security said, "Iran is unlikely to decide to dash toward making nuclear weapons as long as its uranium enrichment capability remains as limited as it is today". On the same day President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said he was ready for talks on uranium enrichment.

In the "soft" outcome, Iran will resume the talks on nuclear enrichment which collapsed last year. What if it doesn't?

WAR

The big powers, on the evidence, do not want war; but their actions drift towards a situation where events could easily spiral out of control and into a war which would set the whole region alight, as Iran uses proxy action by Hamas and Hezbollah to fight back.

War would be extremely unpopular in the US, but the US could still stumble into war. Israel has softened its stance recently, but many "hawks" are pressing for an Israeli military strike.

Some accounts of the conflict, such as Pepe Escobar's on *Al Jazeera*, argue it is "all about the oil". Iran's trading alliances with China, Pakistan etc., are an increasing threat to US interests in the Middle East.

Others speculate that the Obama administration has adopted the same "regime change" line on Iran which Bush had on Iraq and Afghanistan. But these analyses slot the events into a frame which doesn't fit.

China is not committed to Iran. It has pushed Iran to negotiate. Iran is not getting inexorably stronger. Its major ally, the Assad regime in Syria, is weakened.

Bush's strategists thought that a "short sharp" military attack would trigger regime change in Iraq, and had successfully triggered regime change in Afghanistan. Today US strategists know that regime change cannot realistically be imposed on Iran by military action from outside, especially since the Iranian regime's crushing of internal opposition in 2009.

This conflict is still, and mostly, about the potential of an Iranian nuclear bomb. Stopping "nuclear proliferation" — more bombs in both new territories and old — is the focus here. The possession of a nuclear bomb would make Iran more aggressive in its foreign policy, expressed mostly through its support for groups like Hamas and Hezbollah.

Ahmadinejad's frequent declarations that "the Zionist entity" will "disappear" and "go to hell", and the religious fervour of the regime, indicates that a nuclear-armed Iran really might use its nuclear weapons against Israel.

The prospect of Iran having a bomb is alarming. To answer "Israel's got the bomb, why shouldn't Iran?" is evasive.

Of course we are against Israel — or the US, or Britain — having nuclear weapons. But Iran is a clerical-fascist regime explicitly committed to making another state in its region (Israel) "disappear". And we certainly cannot trust the Iran-

Ahmadinejad admires Fordo nuclear plant

ian regime when it says its nuclear programme is only about modernising the economy or "diversifying" its energy supply.

It will be good if Iran backs down on nuclear enrichment. Yet socialists cannot endorse the latest economic sanctions. They increase the risk of war, especially at a time of vicious factional conflict between two "conservative" wings of Iran's clerical-fascist state over next month's (highly rigged) elections. Ahmadinejad and the "civilian" government machine are pitted against the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his personally-appointed religious hierarchy on the other.

There are no "smart sanctions", ones that will just hit Iran's powerful, any more than there were against Iraq in 1991-2003. In an grossly unequal society like Iran, working-class people will suffer, sooner or later, from an economic fall out; jobs will be lost, and basic food prices will go up, while the regime and the capitalists will preserve their interests.

Sanctions will help the regime whip up nationalist support in its defence (including from the "green" opposition).

We are against the sanctions and war drive and we are resolutely with the Iranian working class against the Iranian regime.

To prepare the correct "moral tone" for the forthcoming elections the regime has begun the new year by executing three people a day. Whom are they killing? Iranian Afghans. Kurdish activists, political people, and people they call "heretics" (secular minded liberals they don't like). We stand in solidarity with prisoners whose lives are on the line.

We stand in solidarity with Iranian workers who still periodically strike even as they face mass sackings (and worse), and struggle against conditions where they have no labour rights. Their organisations are precarious, and precious. We oppose the drift towards war in the name of that solidarity

• No to war! • No to the Islamic Republic! • Solidarity with Iranian workers!

No solidarity

At the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts conference in Liverpool on Sunday 29 January, student members of the Socialist Workers Party, Counterfire and Socialist Action voted against a motion opposing US sanctions or military action against Iran! Why? Because it expressed the idea of solidarity with the workers, women and oppressed peoples of Iran and criticised the Iranian state.

• www.workersliberty.org/swp-iran-tea-party

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

A collection including items previously published in *Solidarity* and forerunner publications over the last 25 years.

Buy from bit.ly/wLMj5D or for £9.99 post free from AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (order at www.workersliberty.org/donate)

All proceeds go to the AWL fundraising drive

Help the AWL to raise £20,000

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;
3. Improve our website;
4. Organise events such as our New Unionism dayschool next month, and our Ideas for Freedom summer school;
5. Organise study courses;
6. Build on our work as one of the main forces fighting for rank-and-file democracy and control in the labour movement;

7. Build on our work in developing a broad, democratic student movement against fees and cuts;

8. Pay the rent on and finance the staffing of our office to 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: £7,115.



We raised another excellent £1,085 this week in donations and new standing orders.

Thanks to John, Jason, Dave, Boyd, Andrew and Rebecca!

Comrades are beginning to make fundraising plans; please send in reports.

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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.

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Signature

How to be a Trou

Kim Moody is a writer and activist in the labour movement. His books include *Workers In a Lean World* and *US Labor in Trouble and Transition*. In 1979, he helped found *Labor Notes*, an independent trade union magazine that has gone on to become one of the most important focuses for rank-and-file organising in the American trade union movement. Now based in Britain, Kim is involved in *Trade Union Solidarity* magazine. He spoke to us about the *Labor Notes* publication *The Troublemaker's Handbook*, a guide to militant organising at work. On Saturday 18 February, Kim will lead a workshop on using the *Handbook* at the AWL event "New Unionism: How workers can fight back." (See box.)

There are two *Troublemaker's Handbooks* (TMH), the first published in 1991, the more recent one in 2005.

The first TMH was the result of a "Workplace Strategies School" which *Labor Notes* (LN) held in 1989. This was based mainly on union members relating experiences of using tactics or ways of organising that worked — i.e., won. There were about 100 workers from a variety of unions and industries at the weekend-long school, and about 25 workshops on different issues, but mostly focused on the workplace.

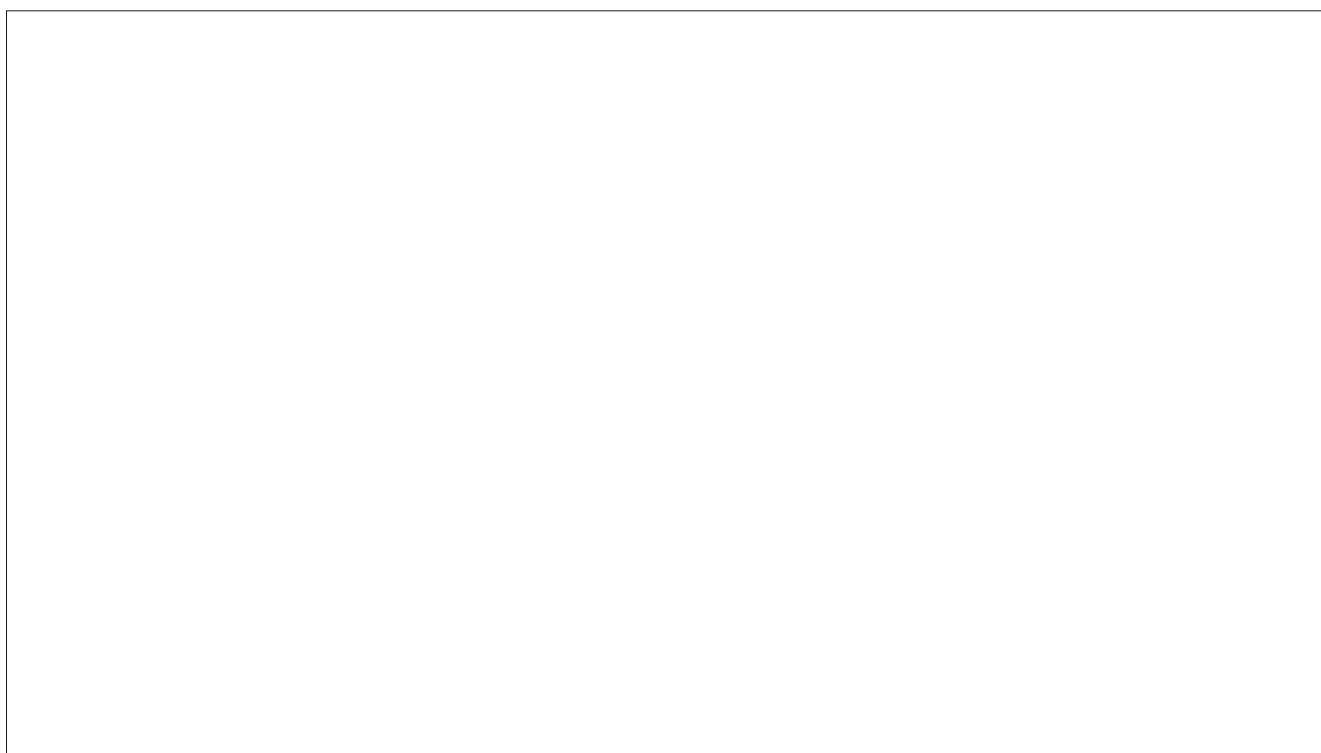
The "stories" were so great that we had the idea of pulling them together in a book. We (LN) hired Dan La Botz, an experienced socialist, activist and writer, to do this. As he worked on it, he ran across even more "stories" and ideas about workplace struggle. So the first TMH ended up being quite long.

COLLECTIVE

Although Dan edited it, it involved dozens of rank-and-file union activists, helping to solidify the network we always hoped to build. The LN staff also helped out, so it was a very collective effort.

I think it did help a number of the workers involved see the bigger class picture, because it involved people from all kinds of jobs facing similar problem and using collective means to fight back.

The second version of the TMH was edited by LN staffer Jane Slaughter, and involved the same collective process. By the time we did the newer one, LN had held several confer-



Some unions, like the United Electrical Workers (whose members in Local 1110, above, staged the successful sit-down strike at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago in 2008), have used the *Troublemakers' Handbook* in their official training.

ences, drawing up to a thousand union activists, and five weekend schools dealing with lean production and new management methods. So the experience was even richer.

TMH is used mainly by workplace activists, stewards, and reps, but it also serves as an educational tool for many union locals [branches]. A few "official" unions have used it in their training programs, such as the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (before merging several times with other, more conservative, unions); the United Electrical Workers; sometimes the Communications Workers of America. Various labour education programmes or individual union tutors in the US use it, typically by reproducing pages or chapters of it. Mostly, though, it is individual activists,

groups of militants, or local unions that use it. The first version sold about 15,000 copies, the second probably more.

Its success inspired LN to organise "Troublemakers' Schools". These are one-day schools that have been held in about 20 cities in the last couple of years. LN staff initiate them, but it is local people who put them together, select the workshop leaders, etc. These schools, too, have helped to create a growing (admittedly very loose) network of workplace activists across the country. One result was that the last LN conference in 2010 drew 1,200 people — the biggest yet.

These conferences are not one-day rallies, but weekend educational events with about 50 workshops and a number of plenary sessions. People are encouraged to use the weekend to make links with others or even to form rank-and-file networks in their own unions. They typically draw about 100 immigrant workers and many international participants.

REFORM

TMH has been used by reform groups [rank-and-file campaigns for democratic reform within particular unions or union branches] such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union, New Directions in the Transport Workers Union Local 100, and many smaller, local ones.

It brings people with diverse views on many questions together and teaches them how to look at their problem collectively in an era when the powers-that-be want us to think in individual terms. It allow reformers, militants, and radicals to bring more conservatively-minded workers together to get a bigger view of what conflict at work is really about, and to see things across the entire working class. It's political in that it deals with a wide variety of issues, including race, gender, and international connections, but puts them in a class context and proposes collective ways to fight back. Struggle is the force that overcomes conservative views, and TMH provides practical ways to conduct struggle.

TMH can do this in part because it and LN are viewed as being independent of both the union bureaucracy and of any particular political group, even though some of the staff and close supporters are known socialists.

Despite being embedded in the US (and, to a lesser extent, Canadian) industrial relations systems, which are quite different from the UK, I think TMH is particularly relevant today because you now have a situation here where stewards and activists are buried alive in "casework"; i.e., individual grievances, tribunals, etc.

Since that has long been the case in the US, TMH attempts

New Unionism: how workers can fight back

Saturday 18 February, 11.30-5.30 at

Highgate Newtown Community Centre, London N19 5DQ

Book tickets (£15/£8/£4) online: workersliberty.org/newunionism

In the late 1880s, workers — often unskilled or semi-skilled, often migrants or working in casualised environments — organised militant industrial unions to fight their bosses. After 40 years of limited struggles, this movement put working-class power back onto the political agenda. **Can we build a New Unionism for the 21st century that transforms and revolutionises the modern labour movement?**

Speakers and sessions:

• **Louise Raw** (author of *Striking A Light*) and **Jill Mountford** (Workers' Liberty):

From the Bryant & May matchwomen's strike to the Cradley Heath Chainmakers' strike — how women organised

• **Colin Waugh** (Editorial Board, Post-16 Educator, and author of a pamphlet on the Plebs League) on the movement for working-class self-education

• Reading *The Troublemakers' Handbook*: the *Labor Notes* guide to organising at work today, with *Labor Notes* founder **Kim Moody**

• Finding a political voice: from New Unionism to Labour Representation, with **Sam Greenwood** and **Martin Thomas** (Workers' Liberty)

• How socialists organised: the life of Tom Mann, with **Charlie McDonald** (Hackney DWP PCS, pc) and **Cathy Nugent** (Editor, *Solidarity*)

• **Ruth Cashman** (Lambeth Unison, pc), **Mick Duncan** (Unite organiser, pc), **Nadine Houghton** (GMB organiser, pc) and others (tbc) discuss "organising the unorganised today".

• What came next: The Great Unrest, with socialist activist and historian **Edd Mustill**

• **Closing plenary: New Unionism 2012?** A panel discussion with working-class activists, including **Eamonn Lynch** (RMT, tube driver victimised for union activity and reinstated following a militant campaign), **Jean Lane** (Tower Hamlets Unison, pc), and an activist from the **Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Cleaners' Branch**

Creche • cheap food • bookstalls



troublemaker



Troublemakers' Schools are coming to London!

Rank-and-file trade union activists who want to adapt the *Labor Notes/Troublemaker's Handbook* approach to organising at work and apply it in the UK will be meeting, initially in London, for mini "Troublemakers' Schools". We'll be sharing experiences from work, looking at what tactics have succeeded, and discussing how we can use the tactics in TMH to fight back.

For more info, including details on the first meeting and how to get involved, watch this space or contact Kim Moody and Sheila Cohen at mooco3@btinternet.com

to address this by finding ways to turn individual grievances into collective actions whenever possible.

Here in the UK, we are in a situation where most of our high-level leaders, even the most left-wing of them, can't seem to think beyond one-day strikes. For its part, too much of the revolutionary left sees union activity in terms of running for high office, as though that was a shortcut to mobilisation and grassroots organisation. Changing things or reviving our unions involves more than ritualistic calls for a general strike or running for places on National Executives. It means building from the base in the workplace or on-the-job, activating people collectively, and expanding consciousness through struggle. TMH is one of many tools for doing that.

One-day strikes are just not effective in most cases. A problem here, of course, is that to strike legally there must be a ballot beforehand, which means it's harder to catch the employer off-balance. However, once the ballot has been taken the union can decide when and where to strike, so rolling, selective and repetitive strikes are possibilities. There are also various "inside strategies", like work-to-rule or additional harassment tactics like "quickie" stoppages on the job, mass grievances, everyone coming to work late by a few minutes, etc. This kind of thing is in both editions of TMH. In the final analysis, however, the open-ended [indefinite] strike is workers' most powerful weapon if well-prepared and conducted. This means various efforts at activating and mobilising members before the strike, again using some of the tactics you can find in TMH.

DEFIED

It's also worth keeping mind that several groups of workers have simply defied the law in the last few years and gotten away with it.

For the government to come down hard on a large, strategically important, group like the engineering construction workers is somewhat risky. So, they turn the other way and pretend nothing happened. This wouldn't necessarily work for all workers, but if enough people did it, it might bring aspects of the anti-union laws into public debate.

In fact, it's already in public debate. The Tories want to make it harder to strike at all. A little "civil disobedience" might well be in order.

I think something like LN, adapted to British conditions, would be extremely useful for getting the trade union movement going again. We have a problem with turning points that don't turn. There's a big strike or occupation, but no follow-up.

A UK version of LN could help build a cross-union net-

work that could provide some continuity. It would provide access to various strategies and tactics, a network of workplace reps and activists to spread these kind of ideas and, when possible, organise for them. We hope the re-launched *Trade Union Solidarity* magazine can play this role.

Of course, it takes time to build up a network across union lines. A UK TMH is a great idea, one that Sheila Cohen of *Trade Union Solidarity* [and author of *Ramparts of Resistance*] has been suggesting for some time.

It is a big project, however. Like the first one we did in the US, you need to build up the "stories" and tactics by extending and deepening the network. Perhaps some "schools", where people tell what kind of tactics worked for them, would be a way to start.

- *Labor Notes* — labornotes.org
- *Troublemaker's Handbook 2* — labornotes.org/troublemakershandbook2
- *Trade Union Solidarity* magazine — solidaritymagazine.wordpress.com

Capturing the wisdom

Martin Donohue reviews the *Troublemaker's Handbook*. This review first appeared in *Solidarity* 154, 25 June 2009.

Founded in the USA in 1979, *Labor Notes* is a rank-and-file union organising project and best known for its monthly newsletter. It also organises conferences attracting over 1,000 rank-and-file union stewards, and publishes pamphlets and books.

The continued survival and success of such a democratic, living and vibrant project in the belly of world capitalism holds up an unflattering mirror to our experience in the UK. Since the demise of the excellent *Trade Union News* we have had nothing remotely similar.

The *Troublemaker's Handbook* (TMH) is simply essential. Every union rep and activist should have a copy of this book, and it is invaluable as an exciting and involving primer for younger socialists with less experience of unions.

The TMH contains page after page of first hand accounts of genuinely organising in the workplace. "Organising", or the "organising agenda", has replaced partnership as the buzzword/cliché within the union movement. But "organising" means all things to all people. This book serves as a welcome reminder of what organising should mean

[for us]. Organising is not something that needs to be done for us by "professionals"; it is the means by which the rank and file can struggle to win back power in the workplace.

Chapters include: shop floor and creative tactics, reforming your branch, and bringing immigrants into the movement. There is a wealth of bitterly won, first-hand experience here. Don't reinvent the wheel! Read it, and give yourself and your union brothers and sisters and a head start over management. So much of rank-and-file union wisdom is oral, and often lost to the wind. This book provides an invaluable service to the movement in capturing and collecting this information and presenting it in an inspiring way.

Hopefully by now you've already decided to buy the TMH (or better, to get your union branch to buy a few copies), so I can safely add a word of warning. This is a book written from the American experience, so there are differences of terminology and more. For example some locals (branches) in the States have tens of thousands of members, so sections on running your "local" read a little different from one written here.

This should not detract from the book, but highlights the lack of a similar book made specific to UK realities.

Countering Cooper

By Martin Thomas

Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls's sharp rightward shift on cuts in mid-January — endorsing a public-sector pay freeze for indefinite years to come, and saying that all the Tory cuts would stay under a Labour government — was connected with factional manoeuvrings within Labour's top ranks.

According to insiders, Balls's statement was made without prior agreement with Labour leader Ed Miliband. It went further than Miliband wanted, but Miliband then, weakly, felt cornered, and backed Balls.

The background is manoeuvring by Balls and by diehard Blairites to discredit and oust Ed Miliband, and to replace him as Labour leader by Balls's wife Yvette Cooper.

John Rentoul, who describes himself as a "Blairite ultra" and wrote an admiring biography of Tony Blair (though in another era he wrote a useful demolition of Thatcherism, *The Rich Get Richer* [1987]), puffed Cooper for leader in the *Independent* on 3 January.

Dan Hodges, a former Labour Party official who describes himself as "a Blairite cuckoo in the Miliband nest", has also been promoting Cooper, through the *Daily Telegraph*. "Yvette's the next leader of the party", said one shadow cabinet source. "The only question is whether it's before the election or after".

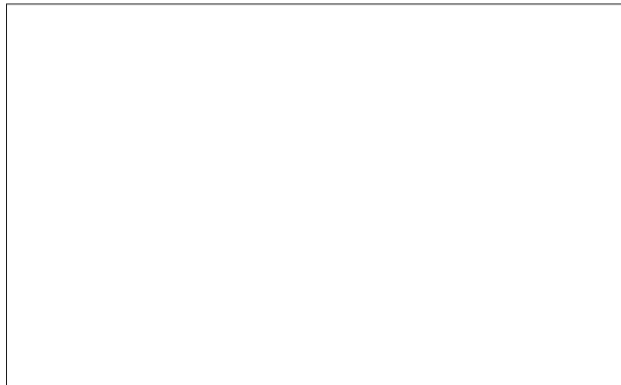
DRAFT

The other main voice in the "draft Cooper" campaign is, oddly, the very Tory *Daily Mail*. On 30 January the *Mail* reported that at New Year "Mr Balls cooked lasagne for more than 30 of their [Balls's and Cooper's] closest political allies", in an effort to cohere a faction.

The *Mail* speculates: "A bizarre Labour plot would see allies of Tony Blair backing Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper for leader if Ed Miliband is forced to step down..."

"The conspirators are reportedly supporting Ms Cooper, not because they think she will win the next General Election, but because they are convinced Labour will lose. They are ready to use her in a bid to finish off Ed Miliband and pave the way for his brother David to take over if Ms Cooper loses to David Cameron in 2015" (7 January).

Through its 13 years in office, the New Labour leadership was famously divided into "Blairites" and "Brownites". Cooper, like Balls, was a "Brownite". Mostly it was impossible to see what separated the "Blairites" and "Brownites" beyond personal rivalries and competing networks of patronage. The one visible political difference — on British entry to the euro, which Blair favoured more than Brown did — was not a left-vs-right one.



A difference did open up in 2009-10, with "Brownites" like Cooper, then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, adopting a "Keynesian" response to the economic crisis — "You can't cut your way out of recession; you have to grow your way out of recession" — and diehard Blairites like Mandelson and Alistair Darling insisting on cuts.

That adds an odd dimension to the current shifts. On the "Keynesian" issue, Ed Balls was not only a "Brownite", he was *the* "Brownite". He not only recited the standard slogans, but (unusually for a politician, especially a New Labour politician) theorised about them, giving academic lectures that were well received by the minority but significant slice of bourgeois economic thought that dissents from the coalition government's cuts strategy, for example the economic commentators of the *Financial Times*.

In the Labour leadership contest of 2010, Balls ran a stronger anti-cuts line (or a less weak one, anyway) than the other candidates.

Cooper is also a trained economist, with more academic background than Balls. Like all New Labour politicians, she affects a robotic, soundbite-structured, always-on-message public persona, but even New Labour politicians must sometimes, somewhere below their shiny surfaces, *think*. The probability must be that both Cooper and Balls know the issues on economic policy and care about them, *believe* the "Keynesian" line, and know that the coalition government's poor economic record resoundingly vindicates their arguments of 2009-10 against big and fast cuts.

That makes Balls's shift on cuts perplexing. It is normal for Labour politicians in opposition, and certainly when, as now, they are safely distant from having to deliver in office, to talk more "left" than they really think, but Balls is doing the opposite. The obvious speculation is that truth may be dear to him and Cooper, but career is dearer; and they have done a deal to get diehard-Blairite backing.

In general, Cooper is clearly right-wing by any traditional

Labour Party standards. Currently shadow Home Secretary, she opened her speech to the 2011 Labour Party conference by praising herself for being the first Labour Home Secretary or shadow to invite a Police Federation representative to address Labour conference, lengthily praising the cops, and criticising the Tories for "cutting police powers". When she attacked the Tories, it was not for being right-wing, but on the grounds that they were "just wrong" or "reckless" or "didn't get it".

She made the now-obligatory gesture of differentiating from Blairism, by saying that 90-day and 42-day detention had been wrong, but was careful to balance that criticism of the New Labour government "from the left" with one "from the right", saying that New Labour should have taken up its option under EU law to delay free entry for Polish and other East European workers.

She is said to have fought, and won, a number of internal battles with shadow Justice minister Sadiq Khan, no leftist, over Khan's push for a more liberal stance on sentencing.

BACKGROUND

Like many New Labour politicians, Cooper has no background in rank-and-file labour movement activity. Her father was a trade union official, but for (successively) IPCS, EMA, and Prospect, all conservative unions mainly for managers and engineers.

She went to a comprehensive school in Hampshire, and then to Oxford University, Harvard, and LSE. She was in the student Labour Club at Oxford, but on her own account inactive.

She went from university straight into the top ranks of politics, working as a backroom person for, successively, John Smith (then Shadow Chancellor), Bill Clinton, and Harriet Harman (when a Treasury minister). She was out of work for a year with ME; had a brief spell as economics correspondent for the *Independent*; got a safe Labour seat for the 1997 general election, and was a minister by 1999. She married Ed Balls (whose background is similar) in 1998.

The manoeuvres are opaque. One thing is clear, though: despite Ed Miliband's statement to the 2011 Labour conference that he "is not Tony Blair", and the conference's enthusiastic applause for it, the diehard Blairites have great clout in Labour's top circles.

They have it in large part because the unions and the left have mounted so little counter-pressure. The job of activists is to mobilise the unions and the left to create that counter-pressure.

One first step would be to start rallying support for a left-winger — the obvious choice is John McDonnell MP — as the prospective successor to Ed Miliband as leader.

Who's to blame for the crisis? The disabled!



The political atmosphere is so dominated by the prejudices and norms of the right that it always a surprise when someone expresses even the most basic of socialist or egalitarian ideas in the mainstream media.

Hence it was a joy to see Mark Steel tell it like it is on *Question Time* on 26 January. When the panel were asked about the proposals to cap benefits he said "This is what [the Tories] do all the time — make the poor pay for the mess created by the rich".

Pointing out that there are only 67,000 households receiving housing benefit and that the areas where most is paid are simply those where rent is highest, he identified the pernicious political agenda. "The real danger here," he said, "is that all the different people being hammered are made to squabble amongst each other about which of them are to blame while the rich get away with it." It's one of the greatest indictments of the Labour Party that we rely on left-wing stand-up comics to popularise such ideas.

Earlier in the same day, however, the most widely read newspaper in the country contained a particularly vile example of the "blame-the-poor" method. In his *Sun* column Rod Liddle decided to do the brave and challenging job of attacking the disabled.

"My New Year's resolution for 2012 was to become disabled. Nothing too serious, maybe just a bit of a bad back or one of those newly invented illnesses which make you a bit peaky for decades — fibromyalgia, or ME."

"And being disabled is incredibly fashionable. The number of people who claim to be disabled has doubled in the

past ten years."

"I think we should all pretend to be disabled for a month or so, claim benefits and hope this persuades the authorities to sort out the mess."

"It has become easier to claim those benefits, partly as a consequence of the disablement charities who, out of their own self-interest, insist that an ever-greater proportion of the population is disabled."

It is customary for hate-mongers like Liddle to be hailed by their co-thinkers as boldly "saying the unsayable". Except Liddle lacks the courage to admit his own poisonous bigotry. He was, he later claimed, only attacking a group he called "the pretend disabled". The "real disabled" he had no problem with. In fact, so goes the truly tired excuse now, these exposures of the "sham disabled" (or poor, sick etc) are the best means of championing the genuinely vulnerable.

This defence was repeated in the *Telegraph* by self-styled (and immensely self-important) libertarian James Delingpole. If you took the trouble to read Liddle's article, as he had, you could see that his point was well-made. And this point was? "There really are far, far too many people sponging off the taxpayer right now ... and they're one of the reasons we're in the financial mess we're in." "One of", he adds defensively.

Liddle's claim that he was only having a go at fakers is just a tad undermined by his reference to ME and fibromyalgia.

Dr Charles Shepherd, the medical spokesperson for the ME Association, said: "This is a disgusting and inaccurate attack on people with ME Rod Liddle should get his facts right. The condition is recognised by the World Health Organisation after first being described in the *Lancet* in 1955." And fibromyalgia is a medical disorder characterised by chronic widespread pain and a heightened and painful response to pressure. Both conditions are routine targets for people like Liddle because the symptoms of severe fatigue

and exhaustion, make for bit of easy dog-whistle politics to label sufferers no more than lazy.

Underneath the inhumane bile, however, is political and economic illiteracy.

There is no examination of any of the reasons why disability might have doubled, such as the overall increase in population or the fact that people are living longer or the attack on health and safety at work.

There is no attempt to consider how much the banking collapse, the Eurozone crisis or the austerity programme may have contributed to "the financial mess we're in" when compared to "exaggerated disability". Liddle doesn't even attempt a calculation on this front.

Delingpole does dabble in hard figures. "A report last year from the Taxpayers' Alliance showed that in 2007/8 over £37 million of our money was spent on our behalf," he claims. That does seem like quite a lot but can he be sure this has been spent on the "pretend disabled"? It turns out that this figure, quoted in a very short article about disability fraud, has nothing whatever to do with benefit claims but, it is alleged, was paid by the government to "hard-left organisations like Friends Of The Earth and the New Economics Foundation". What is the link with disability benefits? Perhaps they are linked in Delingpole's mind because they "campaign for more encroachment in our lives by the overweening state".

Delingpole is the author of a number of books, among them *365 Ways to Drive a Liberal Crazy* and *Welcome to Obamaland*. In fact while his third-rate public school-boy attempts at controversy will leave most "liberals" yawning, the poison spread by the likes of him and Liddle serve the essential purpose so sharply skewered by Mark Steel.

They encourage "the working poor" (who really exist and are really poor) to blame the unemployed and disabled for an economic crisis caused by the rich and powerful. And Liddle, Delingpole and their ilk serve the rich and powerful for their miserable living.

Karl Radek on Kronstadt

What follows is part one of an article by the Bolshevik revolutionary Karl Radek about the Kronstadt sailors' uprising. It was published in *Bulletin Communiste*, the organ of the French section of the Communist International, on 1 April 1921. As a contemporary account and analysis of the uprising, it represents a not-often-heard dimension. We publish it to inform the debate that has taken place in the pages of this paper on the uprising and the record of the Bolshevik government. The article was translated from the French by Ed Maltby.

A great joy seized White Guards all over the world when on the 2 March, news reached the outside world that that the sailors of Kronstadt had risen up against the Soviets.

"I have made you, and I shall kill you" — that was the caption below a cartoon that appeared in a big broadsheet in Paris, showing a tall, lanky sailor pointing his revolver at Trotsky. "The odious sailors of Kronstadt, who brought revolution into every corner of Russia, the maniacal enemies of the bourgeoisie, have broken from the Soviet government. Upon whom will the government support itself now?"

That is what was repeated by all the possible, imaginable organs of the Russian counter-revolution. And more than one was already banking on the end of the Soviet government. But things didn't work out as they had expected. The Kronstadt uprising, just as they proudly declared it, fled into the land of Canaan, into Finland, where grass had just begun to grow on the graves of 30,000 proletarians murdered by the Finnish Whites. They abandoned the sailors to the revolutionary tribunals of Soviet Russia.

Nevertheless, the crushing of this mutiny by military force did not erase its significance. The real character of the Kronstadt uprising does not only cast light on the current situation in Russia, it also illuminates at the same time one of the most important problems of the world revolution in general: the problem of the relationship between the Communist Party and the mass of the proletariat and the form of the dictatorship: dictatorship of the Party or dictatorship of the class (to employ the customary expression, which is in any case inexact).

THE UPRISING

The Kronstadt uprising was not a local event, although it naturally bore numerous local characteristics. The latter consisted first of all in the fact that it was not provoked by a very high level of material deprivation.

The sailors of Kronstadt live better than the rest of the army or the working class, they are well dressed and their other material conditions of life are without a doubt better than the average of those experienced by the rest of the Russian proletariat.

The local discontent of the sailors was directed first and foremost against the discipline and order established by the Soviet government. That is expressly confirmed by the central organ of the Whites, *Les Dernières Nouvelles* of Milyukov, who writes, according to a refugee sailor, that the discontent had already manifested itself the year before and that it had been stirred up by the radical measures taken by the Soviet government in order to arrest the degeneration of the fleet. Everywhere, but especially in Russia, sailors have always been a particularly ill-disciplined element and given to excess. It is a fatal consequence of their life and of the union which they form with their ship: once they come ashore, they run riot.

As a result of this undisciplined spirit and of the great number of highly qualified workers among their ranks, the Kronstadt sailors played an eminent role in the revolutions of both 1905 and 1917 as agents of the destruction of the bourgeois state. These highly qualified workers acted as a moral cement, transforming the indiscipline of the mass into a revolutionary factor.

But these revolutionary proletarian elements have been singularly weakened during the last three years. The former crews of Kronstadt have given the Soviet government thousands upon thousands of fighters, who, in all the armies, in all the services, have played the most glorious role in the defence and the reconstruction of Soviet Russia. Only an insignificant number of these former militants have remained at Kronstadt and all of these now occupy command positions. They constitute the Communist apparatus of the fleet and it is against them that the new crews have rebelled.

Where have these new crews of the fleet been recruited from? Finland and the Baltic provinces no longer belonging to Russia, there only remains Southern Russia and the coasts of the Black Sea. In the main, the fleet is now composed of peasant elements from the Ukraine.

Before, specialist sailors were principally metalworkers; the necessity of keeping the latter in war industries meant that many young bourgeois who had had to interrupt their studies as a result either of the war or the revolution, were attracted into the fleet by the relatively good conditions that it offered them. If we add to this the fact that the Communist



The Kronstadt sailors' declaration, including their demands for new elections

organisation in Petrograd has been badly weakened by the departure of tens of thousands of members going to literally guard the Revolution in all corners of Russia, we can understand that the work of politically educating the sailors had greatly suffered.

Finally, we must say that the Kronstadt sailors had a very clear idea of their own strength. They were still bathed in the halo of their revolutionary past; they guarded the gates of Petrograd; their little isle is like the Heligoland of revolutionary Russia. Such are the local particularities which made the Kronstadt uprising possible and which gave it its original colour.

In a general sense and in the first instance, it is the discontent of the peasant and the Ukrainian peasant which is expressed in this mutiny. After the liquidation of the fronts, the majority of sailors were off on leave at home. They had heard everywhere that there was no longer any danger from the Whites, and they had been struck by complaints about food requisitioning.

MAKHNO

In the Ukraine, people spoke of the merciless struggle waged by the Soviet government against the bands which pillaged, burned and cut the rail-roads under the Anarchist flag of Makhno.

More than one sailor never returned at all from leave, and some went over to Makhno's side. In an article that a fugitive sailor wrote in Milyukov's newspaper, to characterise the uprising at Kronstadt, he frankly recognised that Makhno's calls to pillage pleased the sailors a lot and in any case played on their natures (17 March 1921). A characteristic fact is that four members of the "revolutionary committee" of Kronstadt are the children of Ukrainian peasants and that the more influential amongst them, Petritchenco, had been nicknamed "Petlioura" by his friends.

The peasant believes that he has nothing more to fear from feudal land-owners. He now demands of the Soviet government to reduce the demands placed upon him. The same tendency has had an impact on the little island of Kronstadt. The son of the peasant, held there on a ship under a rigid discipline, saw in the Communists in the fleet people who were demanding from him submission to discipline, when no more Entente squadrons were to be seen. And the Communists who were demanding this discipline of him were the same who were demanding the peasant give up his grain.

At the same time the Kronstadt sailor feels himself to be a born revolutionary; he does not have the slightest intention of aiding the capitalist, the Tsarist general or the fat landlord to regain their dominion. His protest against the demands placed on the peasant as well as against revolutionary discipline and order, is not in his opinion an expression of a counter-revolutionary tendency; on the contrary, this protest his, he thinks, surely an extension of the October Revolution. "We made the revolution, we proclaimed Soviet power; but who exercises power now? The Communist Party. It's the Soviets who should hold and exercise power, it is the masses. We must found a real Soviet power." This tendency had been determined by the public discussions over all the questions which had accumulated over three years of war within the Communist Party.

In the Communist press and in Communist meetings, it was openly said that over the course of long years of struggle the organism of the Soviets had developed a parasitic, bureaucratic tendency.

One often heard talk of the necessity of purging the Communist Party of all its careerist elements. Kronstadt had heard all that, and their essentially peasant psychology (albeit transformed by the conditions of life as sailors) conceived of these problems as being inherent in Soviet Russia.

In this general conception, there is a mixture of anarchism which rejects all bureaucracy and centralisation, of SR-ism, and a syndicalism which affirms that the worker, like the peasant, should be master of what he himself makes. All these tendencies are summed up in the demand for the re-election of the Soviets, re-election which would free them from the influence of the Communist Party in general. The syndicalist side has seduced a part of the workers of Kronstadt, for whom the direct domination of the proletariat over all factories is the same as the appropriation by the worker of the product of his work; the legal right to relieve his poverty through the sale of the instruments of his work and, eventually, of the produce of his labour as well.

Furthermore, the people at Kronstadt were isolated. They had heard talk of peasant movements about which exaggerated tales were being spread (they received White newspapers from Finland); they had heard of the poverty and the strikes which gripped Petrograd, among workers who had hoped that with the end of the war would come an improvement in their situation.

CLANDESTINE

In this atmosphere, the clandestine organisations of Right SRs and Left SRs, of anarchists, of Mensheviks and, in the background and unbeknownst to the sailors, the Monarchist counter-revolutionary conspiracy of the artillery commander Kozlovski, all acted efficiently.

The sailors did not think to rise up, they assembled in stormy meetings where they met with the commissar of the fleet Kouzmin, much-respected by them, and Zinoviev.

On the very day of the uprising, Kalinin, president of the Executive Central Committee, to which they accorded great weight and importance, spoke to them in Anchor Square, in Kronstadt. At mid-day, the sailors' delegates met to discuss the re-election of the Soviet. During the discussion, news arrived that great detachments of soldiers were marching against them. This was nothing but a provocation, the means chosen by the SRs or even the Monarchists to transform the conflict into an armed confrontation. In order to guarantee themselves against any surprise, the sailors established patrols, it was insinuated to them that these would be useless, that the Petrograd Soviet would attack anyway, as the Communists did not want to concede the re-election; they had to, so the sailors were told, take some hostages in order to assure the re-election, i.e. arresting all the Communists and in preventing people from Petrograd from coming to Kronstadt.

The sailors placed an embargo on Petrograd and arrested the Communists. The struggle was provoked. The Soviet government naturally could not tolerate the arrest of its representatives, the seizure of the fortress which guarded the approaches to Petrograd. The radio-telegraphic station of the dreadnought Petropavlovsk sent coded telegrams to Reval and to Finland. It is clear that there was in Kronstadt a military staff for which the re-election of the Soviets was merely a pretext, and which is capable of turning Kronstadt over to the Entente. The Finnish Whites hurried to make contact with Kronstadt.

The Soviet government ordered the sailors to lay down their arms, but they hoped that their example would be followed in Petrograd and Moscow. Their leaders promised them that in a few days the government would be obliged to hold new general elections which would end with a Soviet government without a party, a Soviet government which would put everything right and satisfy everyone. The peasant would no longer have to give over his produce, and the worker would no longer be hungry. Finally the sailors were persuaded that after rising up against the government they would be held to account for their actions, and they stiffened their resistance.

The government could wait any longer. It could not, for the simple reason that when the debacle spread across the gulf of Finland and the Neva, the counter-revolutionaries would be able to push the sailors into an assault on Petrograd. And fate followed its course.

The Gordian knot had to be cut by the sword. Troops brought from the front, led by the attack battalion of trainee Red Army officers and delegates from the Party Congress, set out one night over the ice of the Gulf of Finland which is already beginning to break up.

"Infantry has never before or since fought warships on ice", proclaimed the soldiers of the Red Army.

Continued on page 10

SWP's one-eighty on independence, and the return of the prodigal son

Scotland
By Dale Street



The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is calling for a yes vote in the referendum on Scotland's constitutional status which is due to be held in 2014.

According to recent issues of its paper:

"(We) back independence for Scotland. The UK is an imperialist power that pillages the world's resources. A yes vote in the referendum would weaken the British state.... The break up of our 'kingdom' would be one small victory against its rotten record." (*Socialist Worker* 2285)

"Britain is a major imperialist power that still wants to be able to invade and rob other countries across the globe. A clear yes vote for independence would weaken the British state and undermine its ability to engage in future wars." (SW 2286)

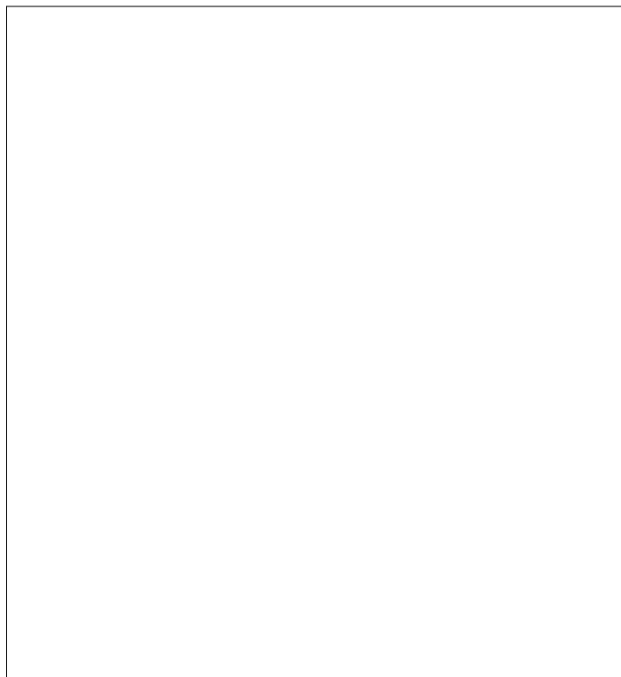
Problem number one, for the SWP, with this position: Its argument for a yes vote is a "timeless" one. Britain has been an imperialist power for centuries. So why is it only now that the SWP has decided that Scottish independence would be a "good thing"?

In the past the SWP has been vigorously anti-independence. When it briefly joined the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in 2001, for example, one of the sticking points was its refusal to share the SSP's unconditional support for Scottish independence. What has changed since then?

Problem number two with this argument: It is a "universal" one. If the break-up of Britain along national lines is a 'good thing' because of Britain's imperialist history, then, logically, the break-up of any and all imperialist states along national lines would equally be a 'good thing'.

So, should the Alaskan Independence Party ever achieve its goal of a multi-question referendum on the state's constitutional status, the SWP would call for a vote for independence? Independence for Alaska might not be a fatal blow to US imperialism, but it would certainly be a setback.

On the other hand, given Germany's record of "invading



SNP leader Alex Salmond: unconscious anti-imperialist?

and robbing other countries", socialists should presumably have opposed the reunification of Germany in 1990. (Some socialists actually did so — but their arguments were largely based on emotional revulsion against German identity: "Nie wieder Deutschland".)

In fact, why does the SWP not take its argument to its logical conclusion and advocate the break-up of the European Union?

True, that would throw European history back by over half a century and recreate a patchwork of warring states. But it would certainly weaken capitalism at a continental level — not just at the level of one state — and doubtless constitute "one small victory against its rotten record."

Although the SWP's pro-independence articles stress that the key divide in the world is class, that workers need unity in a struggle against their rulers, and that "our class unity will continue to be our greatest strength", they fail to explain how Scottish independence relates to such basic socialist ideas.

They fail to do so because independence for Scotland is at odds with such ideas. Socialists generally favour the creation of larger political units and breaking down existing state barriers where they exist as this provides the most fruitful ground for creating working-class unity.

In fact, the very articles which advocate Scottish independence admit that in an independent Scotland "Scottish rulers will still exploit Scottish workers... Scottish workers will still need to fight their bosses ... and workers in Scotland, Wales and England and beyond will still need unity in struggle against our rulers."

Nowhere do the articles even attempt to explain how the creation of a new national boundary and a new national unit of capital accumulation will facilitate "unity in struggle against our rulers."

CIRCUMSTANCES

The SWP's current argument for a yes vote is different from previous arguments advanced by the SWP in which it described circumstances where, supposedly, socialists might support a vote for independence.

According to former SWP guru Chris Bamberg, for example, speaking at a debate with the SSP in 1999: "We would have no problem in voting for a referendum which posed separation as a vote of confidence in the Blair government. We'd have to judge on the concrete terms."

Similarly, in an article published in *Socialist Worker* in 2006, Neil Davidson argued: "Britain is an imperialist state at war... A referendum in these circumstances would effectively be a judgement on Britain's role in the New World Order, and New Labour's record more generally."

This is consistent with what Davidson wrote in his above-quoted article in *International Socialism*: "Support (by socialists) for separation should always depend on the concrete circumstances in which the issue is posed and its impact on the wider struggle against capitalism."

So, again, if in 1999, 2006 and 2007 (and many other years as well), support for independence was justified only in a set of narrowly defined circumstances, why now can it be justified on the basis of generalities about Britain's imperial-

ist past (and present)?

There appear to be two reasons for the SWP's embrace of independence for Scotland.

One is the ongoing collapse of the SWP into a crude and classless "anti-imperialism", in which a class perspective is subordinated to supporting any movement or demand, no matter how reactionary, which is deemed to be in conflict with "imperialism". Thus, Scottish independence is a 'good thing' because it weakens British imperialism.

The second reason for the SWP flipping is accommodation to prevailing left orthodoxy.

On the Scottish far left support for independence is now mainstream. The SSP and the Socialist Party (Scotland) have been consistently pro-independence. The International Socialist Group (Scotland), which broke away from the SWP last year, has also joined the ranks of this choir.

Far easier for the SWP to drift with this pro-independence current than to try to promote political clarity (especially given its own deficiencies in that department).

Oppose Sheridan speaking ban, but no hero's welcome!

Tommy Sheridan — one-time leader of the Scottish Socialist Party, one-time leader of "Solidarity — Scotland's Socialist Movement", and then a convicted perjurer — was released from prison on Monday 30 January.

In 2006 Sheridan won a libel case against the *News of the World* concerning allegations about his private life. In January of last year he was sentenced to three years in prison for having committed perjury during the libel trial.

Anyone serving a prison sentence of less than four years is entitled to automatic release after the half-way point in their sentence, and the six months prior to their release can be spent on a home detention curfew.

Hence Sheridan's release from prison after just a year.

But stringent conditions have been attached to Sheridan for the next six months: he has been banned by the Scottish Prison Service from speaking in public.

This means that he will have no chance to intervene in campaigning around this May's local government elections, or to intervene in the early stages of the referendum campaign (in which Sheridan, when allowed to do so, will be calling for support for independence).

Sheridan's lawyer, Aamer Anwar, has described the ban as an attempt to "gag" his client and as "unprecedented and absolutely draconian, denying my client the right to earn a living."

Socialists should oppose the ban on Sheridan speaking in public. Apart from the legal arguments about the imposition of the ban, there is a more fundamental democratic argument that the ban represents an infringement of Sheridan's rights.

Banning Sheridan from speaking in public also denies people the right to call him to account in public.

Sheridan has served a prison sentence for his perjury. But he still has to answer to the left for his bogus allegations against socialists, wild claims about conspiracies and vendettas supposedly targeted against him, and his style of questioning female witnesses in the libel and perjury trials.

But the protests of Aamer Anwar (and, speaking through his lawyer, of Sheridan himself) about the "gag" imposed on Sheridan also reek of hypocrisy.

With a fine sense of timing, Sheridan's release from prison coincided almost to the day with the (delayed) release of Gregor Gall's book, *Tommy Sheridan: From Hero to Zero*?

The book's appearance was delayed by attempts by Aamer Anwar, acting on behalf of Sheridan, to prevent its publication. As the *Scotsman* reported last March:

"(Sheridan) has instructed his solicitor to threaten Professor Gregor Gall, and the academic's employer, the University of Hertfordshire, with legal action over the publication of Gall's book."

"We will use every legal challenge to stop it from being published," promised Anwar. Sheridan's solicitor demanded to know what financial support had been provided to Gall, questioned whether the book was really an academic work, and accused Gall of research misconduct.

Eight months later a university investigation concluded that the allegations were "without any merit or foundation." Double standards from Tommy Sheridan? Surely not!

Radek on Kronstadt

Continued from page 9

The example of Voroshilov, of Zatonky and of Boubnov and so on, the example of the students of the military colleges, led the troops on, and by daybreak they were on the firm ground of Kronstadt in the fire of the street-fighting against the insurgents.

The resistance was bloody, but not as much as it could have been given the weapons that Kronstadt had at its disposal. During the final days the faith of victory had been shaken among the sailors and most likely even faith in the justice of their cause.

This was above all because the counter-revolution, at first hidden in the background, acted more and more openly. The SR Tchernov imposed on the sailors the demand for the Constituent Assembly. From Finland arrived, as representatives of the Red Cross, authentic Russian Whites, with the captain of the vessel, Wilkins, at their head, whom the old sailors knew as a military tyrant and who had only been able to escape their vengeance in 1917 by fleeing abroad. All this enlightened the masses and sapped confidence in the correctness of their cause.

Kozlovsky's people demanded more and more obedience to their orders, because without discipline the defence of the positions could not be assured. Their spies in Petrograd informed them that their uprising had not only failed to bring the mass of the workers along with it, but on the contrary had singularly repulsed them, such that the factories where dissension and ferment had been strongest, had now gone back to work having heard the cannon from Kronstadt.

Thus was Kronstadt stormed. The dead were still being buried when White newspapers arrived from Paris, Berlin and Prague, and it was seen then just how well the Soviet government was right to not consider the insurrection as the beginning of a third revolution but to brand it simply as a new counter-revolutionary attack.

• Part two next week

Tube workers' Olympics fight: one workforce, one bonus!

By a Tubeworker supporter

London Underground staff were gobsmacked by the pathetic £15 per shift Olympic bonus offer, which has now been upped to £20. RMT has knocked both offers back.

It is attendance-based, so if you're sick or take summer annual leave for childcare, you won't get it all. LU even cheekily re-branded quarter 2 of our existing bonus scheme as part of the Olympics package.

LU wants a lot from its staff. We'll be working til 2

or 3am. On stations, moving shifts has created gaps that take some stations below minimum numbers. They need us to do overtime to keep stations open.

Meanwhile, drivers are not happy they are being bribed £500 to break their train operators' agreement (by working overtime and making extra trips in a shift). Drivers in the RMT and some in ASLEF have told management they won't do it, refusing to throw away hard-won conditions for a one-off bribe. It's good that some ASLEF members have rejected what their ASLEF officials negotiated. LU is pocketing around £17 mil-



lion from the Olympics Authority. The Games will earn them extra revenue. They are giving themselves an Olympic reward, rather than rewarding their staff.

On London Overground and DLR, unions have reached an agreement; the DLR deal is worth £2,500. On TfL, travel information staff have been banned from booking annual leave

— and they haven't been offered a penny! Cleaning staff are calling for extra staff and extra pay. Nothing has been offered yet, but more members are joining the RMT, so hopefully cleaning companies will offer something soon.

The London press's reporting of the negotiations has been typically malicious. In the same edition of the *Evening Standard*

which evoked sympathy for RBS banker Stephen Hester, who was "pressured" into giving up his £1 million bonus (a bonus for doing what, exactly?), tube workers were accused of "greed" just for demanding a proportionate pay increase for a huge increase in workload! Even the *Standard* itself accepts that we'll be dealing with hundreds of thousands of extra passengers each day.

We are one workforce. All we want is a decent bonus for workers in all companies on London Transport, without management eroding our terms and conditions.

Sparks gear up for Balfour Beatty strike

By Siteworker

On 2 February we should have the BBES [Balfour Beatty Engineering Services] ballot result.

A yes vote is vital, and any legal challenge should be met with ultimate force by Unite, and ignored by responding in the only way we know, with a call for "all out", no matter what.

Come on Unite; no more Mr Nice Guy! The rank and file have led the way since

August last year and will continue to fight, but now Unite must show the BESNA [the new collective agreement unilaterally proposed by contractors] seven that we

are all serious.

Unite has drafted Kevin Coyne in to head up the campaign, assisted by Bernard McAuley. We now know that another official, Sharon Graham, has been assigned to help with organising.

We appreciate this, but will be watching closely. We remember that Coyne, as an appointed official back in 2008, ran against Derek Simpson on a right-wing ticket for General Secretary, finishing behind both Simpson and Jerry Hicks. Has he now moved over to the left due to the rank and file's tremendous actions in recent months?

We would love a big yes vote, and a swift victory. However, the dispute may

rumble on through February and past March if the BESNA 7 dig their heels in.

We may have to change our tactics slightly. This needs to be discussed at the recalled national Rank-and-File meeting in Birmingham (4 February, 1-4pm, Carrs Lane Centre, Carrs Lane). We need to get a plan together for the actions to be taken the following week throughout the UK.

If anyone needs assistance with travel costs to Birmingham please let us know as soon as possible. Email: siteworkers@virginmedia.com

• Adapted from <http://bit.ly/xrnNtM>

HMRC strike pushes tax deadline

By Darren Bedford

HM Revenue and Customs workers will strike on 31 January.

The strike is in opposition to the appointment of private companies (Sitel and Teleperformance) to run call-handling trials in HMRC contact centres in Cumbria and Bathgate (Scotland).

The trials are due to begin in February, and the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) warns that they could open the door to further privatisation within HMRC.

The strike was timed to coincide with the deadline for self-assessment tax returns, the busiest day in HMRC's calendar, and has led to an effective two-day extension of the deadline

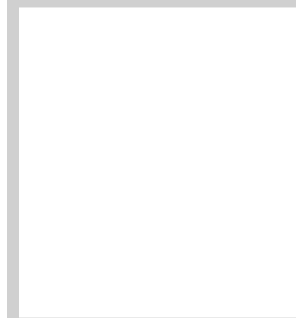
by HMRC bosses.

Only PCS members who work in Personal Tax Operations (PTOps) have been balloted to take part in the action.

However, the union is encouraging other HMRC members to support the strike by donating to the strike fund and refusing to cover work not being done by striking members.

contactus@barnetunison.org.uk and follow the branch on Twitter: @barnet_unison. NUJ members in the Newsquest South Essex chapel have started a

Reinstate Alberto Durango!



By an IWW activist

The Industrial Workers of the World Cleaners and Allied Grades Branch Secretary Alberto Durango has been sacked from his job at the Heron Tower in London by the contractor Incentive FM Group Ltd.

It is an act of victimisation of a leading union activist well known for campaigning to defend and improve the conditions of workers in the cleaning industry.

In August 2011 IWW secured a significant success on the London Living Wage for cleaners at Heron Tower and in defence of victimised staff. Since then there have been those seeking revenge against Alberto and the IWW.

In November 2011, Alberto was suspended for using a service lift used

daily by other staff. The same month, IWW negotiated an agreement with the cleaning contractor LCC that there would be no compulsory redundancies and any staff reductions would be by transfers to alternative posts. A new contractor has taken over at Heron Tower who have not recognised this agreement which continues under TUPE, Incentive have singled out Alberto for redundancy without any objective justification.

Cushman & Wakefield's, the company which manages Heron Tower, also manages Exchange Tower where IWW has a campaign for the London Living Wage. This company had taken an aggressive stance against IWW and our members, preventing leaflets being distributed and threatening IWW members with investigations.

We call on all workers to show their solidarity with the Cleaners Branch Secretary and demand the immediate reinstatement if Alberto Durango and no compulsory redundancies.

For details of a demonstration in support of Alberto on Friday 10 February, see <http://on.fb.me/zqABV9>

Essex have also voted for industrial action.

Remploy workers at sites in Chesterfield and Glasgow struck on Thursday 26 January against a two-tier workforce plan.

For more on the Remploy strikes, see <http://bit.ly/yNm4KR>.

UCU strike vote on edge

By a UCU activist

The remarkable turnaround which saw the University and College Union (UCU) name 1 March as the day for further action in the Teachers Pension Scheme dispute (TPS), which covers workers in "post-92" universities and FE colleges) was won by the UCU National Executive Committee in the face of stern opposition from UCU General Secretary Sally Hunt.

In response, Hunt is now ascending to the moral high ground via a phoney consultation with branches and individual members. Eamon de Valera only had to look into his own heart to know the will of the Irish people; Hunt only has to invite emails from every member to know her own will. These repeated attempts at rule by anti-democratic "consultations" render her unfit for office. Fortunately the General Secretary election is almost upon us.

The challenger, Mark Campbell of the SWP-dominated UCU Left caucus, is severely limited politically. Nevertheless, he should be supported as the candidate standing against Hunt's attempted sell out on pensions.

If further inter-union talks can bring about a joint UCU-PCS-NUT date for action in March, that would give the dispute an enormous shot in the arm.

A 31 January special conference of UCU branches in "pre-92" universities, where members are in the Universities Superannuation Scheme and are not covered by the 1 March strike, voted (by 66-41) to endorse Hunt's suspension of action.

But a solid strike by UCU members in FE post-92 — even better, alongside NUT and PCS members — would be a focus for organising even for workers in unions where a sell-out is already a reality.

Strikes at Barnet Council, Newsquest, Remploy

In brief

Members of Barnet Unison local government

branch will take their fourth one-day strike on Thursday 9 February against mass privatisation at the council.

Please send messages of support to the strikers to

work-to-rule and will take three days strike action on 13-15 February. They are protesting against a pay freeze and standardised — delayed — pay review date. Newsquest North

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Pensions: make unions commit to action now!

By Martin Thomas

Unions which have not accepted the Government's so-called "final" formula for public-sector pensions are talking about a further strike on the issue in late March, and more action beyond that.

But activists in those unions, and especially in the officially "left-wing" unions, will have to fight hard:

- to make sure the further strike happens;
- that it is energetically organised, and not just a limp token protest;
- and that "more action" means a genuine ongoing campaign of rolling and selective action, with activity every week, rather than advice to workers to wait after the one-day protest on a promise that union

leaders may in some weeks' or months' time proclaim new activities.

The "rejectionist" unions met on 25 January. That was slow — PCS, the main union to reject the Government formula immediately and clearly, had been talking about a meeting since 20 December — but it was progress.

A lot of unions attended, most sending general secretaries. That's good, but it had a downside. Unions which might otherwise have taken an initiative are now inclined to wait for a hypothetical great day when all the "rejectionist" unions, or a lot of them, concur on action; and, if we leave things to the general secretaries, that great day may never come.

The 25 January meeting decided no action, and made no public statement. The "rejectionist" unions

will meet again (8 February, we believe), and there is a vague agreement that the next meeting will talk about a strike in late March.

Despite the time lost since 19 December, much more is still possible. The moves by Unilever and Shell to scrap two of the last defined-benefit pension schemes in the private sector, as soon as it became clear that many of the public-sector unions were folding, have dramatised the issues, and the Unilever workers' fightback will have encouraged many public-sector workers.

Activists in every union should press for:

- clear rejection of the 19 December formula;
- taking the initiative to name the date for a further strike;
- an ongoing campaign of rolling and selective ac-

tion, with activity every week, financed by strike levies;

- a priority for specific demands which could be won even at this stage, such as widening the range of pay levels exempt from contribution rises and extending the time of the exemption, or drastically reducing the loss of pension which workers retiring earlier than the increased full pension ages will suffer.

Such specific demands do not cut across escalating to full demolition of the Government plans, or indeed for a levelling-up improvement of current pension terms, if the continuing campaign develops solidly; but they are probably necessary to restart the campaign at this late stage.

• More: page 2

Partial victory for Palestinian quarry workers

By Ira Berkovic

The struggle of the Salit quarry workers, in the occupied West Bank (Palestine), has concluded in a partial victory, with workers winning a financial settlement but not securing a commitment from contractors taking over work at the quarry to re-employ them.

Workers had been en-

gaged in a prolonged battle, which included a three-month strike in summer 2011, against an exploitative management which used the quarry's location in an occupied territory to register their business as "foreign", and thus avoid having to pay the national insurance contributions required of them by Israeli law.

The workers were organised by the Workers' Advice Centre (Ma'an), an

independent workers' centre which organises workers (Israeli-Jewish, Israeli-Arab and Palestinian) in sectors and industries often overlooked by Israel's mainstream trade union federation, the Histadrut.

WAC-Ma'an is also currently involved in a campaign to organise truck drivers in Israel.

• For more on the Salit struggle, see

<http://bit.ly/zn5CJm>

- For more on the campaign to unionise truck drivers, see <http://bit.ly/rIagit>

India strikes

Up to 100 million workers could participate in a general strike in India on 28 February.

For more, see <http://bit.ly/yCV1MP>

Syria: fighting draws closer to Damascus

By Dan Katz

The Arab League has suspended its monitoring operation in Syria.

It has effectively accepted that the initiative — which should have seen political prisoners released, the army move away from urban areas, and a dialogue open with the opposition — has failed. The one-party Syrian state has continued to butcher its own citizens under the noses of the Arab League's observers.

The Arab League's failure has pushed more Syrian oppositionists towards the view that they will have to fight with guns in hand to overthrow the narrowly-based state of Bashar Assad. Assad's rule rests on the Alawite community, a Shia sect which is about 10% of the Syrian population. 75% of the country is Sunni Muslim.

More and more towns and villages seem to be freeing themselves from the central state — at least for short periods, until the government rolls back in using heavy weapons and tanks. Local militias are being formed, made up of army deserters and activists, under the general banner of the "Syrian Free Army", although often with little direct control from the Turkey-based FSA leadership.

Significantly the eastern and northern suburbs of the capital, Damascus, are becoming no-go areas for the state. Last weekend fighting a few miles from the centre of Damascus claimed dozens of lives.

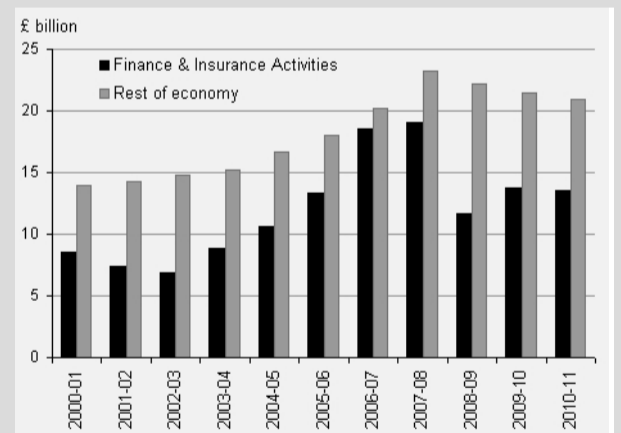
Despite the wishes of many opponents of the regime the general tone of the opposition seems to be becoming more sectarian. Alawites run every elite unit of the armed forces; most Alawite families have a family member in the security system and increasingly they seem to believe they are all fighting for their lives.

WILL THE REGIME FALL?

Joshua Landis, the well-informed US academic and Syria analyst believes the downfall of the regime is now certain, but will be much more drawn out than many believe.

He cites three main reasons: the strength (military and political) of the regime as against the opposition; the disorganisation and fragmented nature of the opposition; the unwillingness of foreign powers to intervene. He states that "Assad family has prepared for this moment of popular, Sunni revolt for 40 years."

The regime will not fall easily.



Seize the bankers' loot!

By Rhodri Evans

Look at the graph: bonus payouts in banking and finance totalled £14 billion in 2011.

Most of these bonuses go to a top few. The government-owned Royal Bank of Scotland paid out £1 billion in 2011, when it had made a thumping loss, and plans to pay out £0.5 billion this year. Having persuaded top RBS boss Simon Hester to waive his £1 million bonus, prime minister David Cameron now says he "will not micro-manage" the bonuses paid to

other RBS chiefs this year, some of them much higher than Hester's million. He hopes the fuss will have died down by the time other banks announce their bonuses.

If those amounts were redirected to social spending, they would be way more than enough to reverse all the Government's cuts. Benefit cuts to 2015: £18 billion. Cuts in education and local services: £16 billion.

The labour movement should demand that the next Labour government expropriate the banks and high finance.