

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 189 19 January 2011 30p/80p

For a workers' government

**Tunisia: democracy,  
not Islamism!** page 3



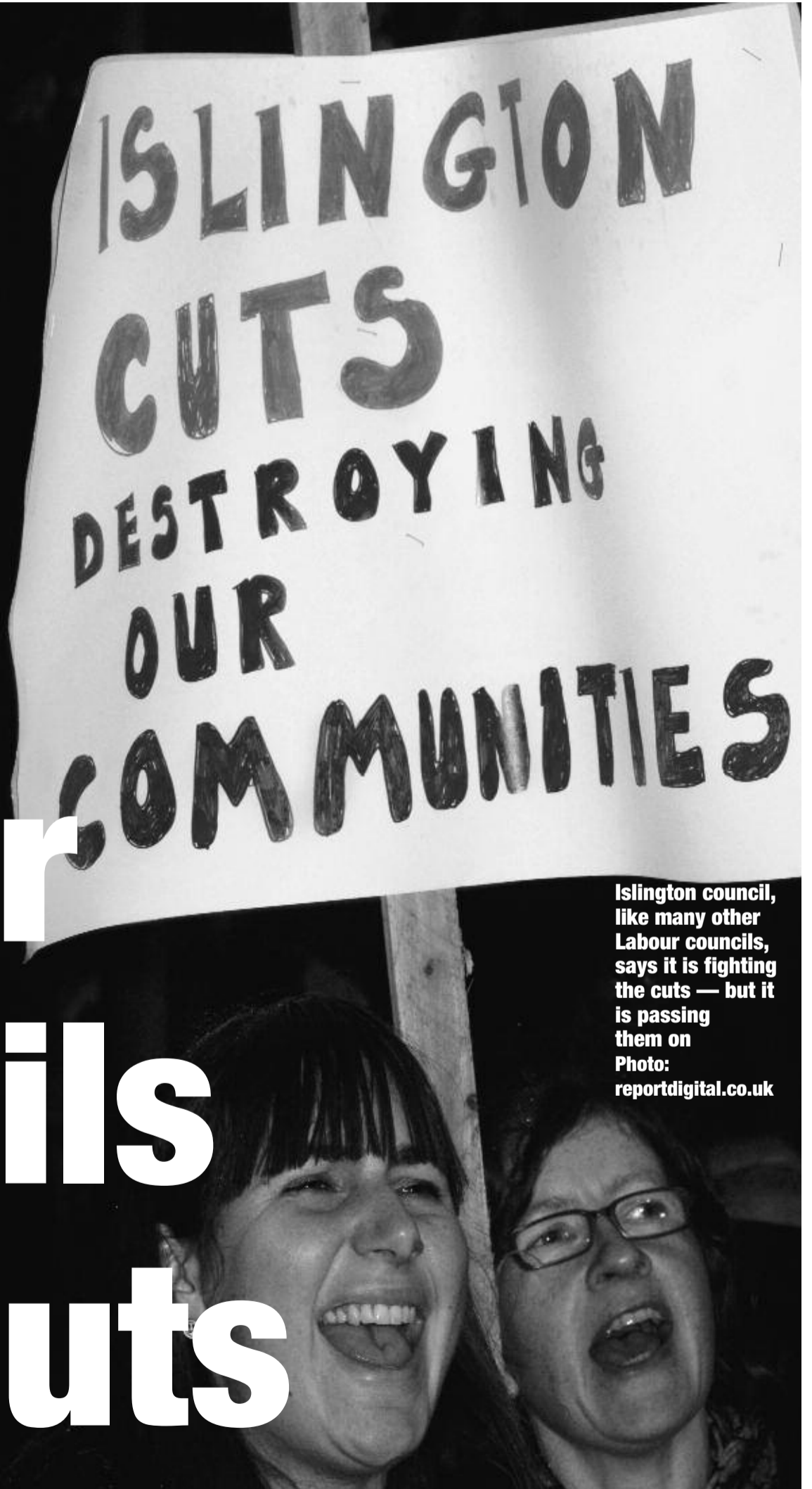
**Save the NHS**  
centre pages

**Lenin as he really  
was** pages 8 & 9



**Activist conference  
puts out call: see  
page 5**

# Make Labour councils defy cuts



Islington council, like many other Labour councils, says it is fighting the cuts — but it is passing them on  
Photo: reportdigital.co.uk

## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

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

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

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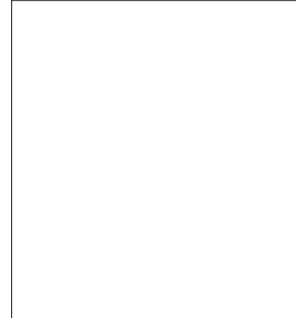
## Hunger amidst record crops

By Rhodri Evans

World wheat prices increased about 70% in the second half of 2010. Overall, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's world food price index was, by the end of 2010, as high as the peak it reached in 2008. The FAO expects it to go higher still in 2010.

Food prices rose very fast in 2007 and the first half of 2008; dropped again in the second half of 2008 as the financial crisis "deflated" economies; and have been rising since early 2009, with a lull in the first half of 2010 and a sharp increase since then.

Overall, food prices are about two-thirds higher



now than they were at the start of 2007 or the start of 2009.

In Britain this is troublesome. In the world's poorer countries, it is deadly, pushing hundreds of millions of people into undernourishment.

Weather difficulties and crop failures are cited. However, 2010 had the

biggest world rice harvest ever, and rice prices still rose about 24%.

Speculation plays a large part. As reserve stocks dwindle, speculators expect higher prices. They buy up stocks and hold on to them to win profits. That sends prices higher still.

According to the *Financial Times*, just "four trading houses [three American, one French] dominate global flows of agricultural commodities". Cargill, the biggest of the four, trebled its profits in September-November 2010 compared to 2009.

Capitalism means millions of people going hungry because of big corporations' drive for bigger profits.

## Floods of sloppy reporting

By Martin Thomas

Last Thursday, 13 January, I bought a copy of *The Independent*, because it had six full pages on the floods in Brisbane, Australia, the city where my daughters live.

I learned nothing about the floods that I didn't already know, but something about the deterioration of newspaper standards.

The six pages read like copy churned out by harassed and uninterested journalists instructed at short notice by the editor to fill the space. Better reporting, with fewer blunders, could have been done by a single person with an hour available, an internet connection, and a desire to check and question things.

And why six pages on Brisbane? They attracted me. But the Brisbane floods had less objective importance than the floods in Brazil and Sri Lanka, happening at the same time, but almost ignored by *The Independent*.

This is not the *Sun* or the *Daily Sport*. It is *The Independent*, a supposedly "serious" daily.

The pattern here was analysed by Nick Davies in his 2008 book *Flat Earth News*. Shallowness and sloppiness is driven not so much by billionaire owners insisting on bias (though that happens), as by the owners' cost-cutting and insistence on fewer and fewer journalists writing more and more words of "news", with less and less checking, to surround the advertisements in their papers.

As Davies shows, many newspaper articles are just rewrites of press releases.

Study an article based on a press release, and almost always you can see that the journalist has not applied any background knowledge to their rewrite or read the full report which the press release summarises. The *Financial Times* is the only (partial) exception.

At the same time I'm

reading volume 13 of Marx's collected works, comprising newspaper articles which he wrote (for money, to make a living) during the Crimean War. Leave aside the political slant which Marx puts into the articles when he can, and consider only his attitude to facts.

He gives his source for every bit of information. He tells you when the source is unreliable. He digs back into diplomatic and military history to put things in context.

Sloppy, churn-it-out journalism is not necessarily yes-saying. Even right-wing papers like the *Mail* and the *Express* often carry populist denunciations of the rich and the government.

It is necessarily shallow, unable to promote critical thinking, predisposed to swim with popular prejudice, and a captive to organisations with the clout and wealth to get their press releases noted.

## Equality yes, pension cuts no!

By Joan Trevor

The government is abolishing the default retirement age (DRA), currently 65.

They say this will end age discrimination in employment, where people can be forced to retire when they would prefer to and could go on working. On that score, this is a progressive measure. However, at the same time the government has announced other changes to retirement regulations and pensions that are regressive.

The Pensions Bill proposes raising the state pension age to 66 by 2020; this

is six years earlier than Labour planned. And the equalisation of pension age between women and men (forcing women to work longer before they qualify for a state pension than previously) will happen two years earlier than Labour planned, in 2018.

From 2012, all employees of more than three months service will be enrolled in a work pension scheme to which they and employers must contribute at least three per cent of salary. Behind this measure is the threat that the state pension will continue to wither.

"People are living longer" is the mantra behind all these changes.

While in general it is true, behind that happy fact lies shocking inequality. A National Audit Office report in 2010 showed the poorest people in England died 10 years younger than the richest. By area, the average for Blackpool was 73.6 years (men)/78.8 years (women) compared with 84.3 years (men)/89.9 years (women) in Kensington and Chelsea.

Raising the retirement age means many more people will never have the opportunity to retire; and many will be doing arduous or stressful jobs.

End age discrimination, yes, but, people should also be able to retire on a decent pension when they need to,

## Galloway's stand will not help the left's political recovery

By Dale Street

On Sunday 16 January George Galloway launched his campaign to win a seat in the Scottish Parliament.

He has not yet produced an election manifesto. Nor has he decided whether he will be standing as an individual or as part of a slate.

Galloway said "he was not seeking to become an MSP because he needed the wages."

But according to an interview in the *Scotsman* Galloway finds even his current annual income of nearly £500,000 insufficient: he has staff to employ, he speaks for free on Palestine, and he has "a lot of ex-wives".

If elected, Galloway certainly won't be a worker's MP on a worker's wage. According to the *Scotsman* interview: "He doesn't agree with socialist MSPs like Tommy Sheridan taking only the average worker's wage? 'No, I don't. I think it's tokenistic'."

The launch of Galloway's campaign had been overshadowed by conflicting reports about whether he and Gail Sheridan would stand on a single slate, with Sheridan in number two position.

Galloway was a Labour MP for a Glasgow Westminster constituency from 1987 to 2003. From 2005 to 2010 he was a Respect MP for Bethnal Green and Bow.

Galloway's 2005 election campaign had strongly communalist overtones. Respect election literature in 2004 described the party as "the party for Muslims".

But now Galloway has re-invented himself as a champion of "old Labour" values: "I'm a real Labour man — the John Smith Labour Party, that is."

This is convenient. If Galloway is to win a seat in Holyrood, he will need to win a substantial number of Labour supporters to cast their "regional list" votes for him (he stands no chance of being elected for a constituency seat).

If Galloway is elected to Holyrood and the Scottish left now becomes identified with him (after so long being identified with Sheridan) it will delay its political recovery.

**“It’s all normal out there!”**

By Ed Mustill

When an event as earth-shattering as the uprising in Tunisia happens, the BBC has its finger on the pulse

A BBC News Channel presenter turned on Frank Gardner, the security correspondent who was once shot while on assignment in Saudi Arabia, leaving him wheelchair bound for life, and asked the all-important question:

“Frank, there are reports that President Ben Ali has fled the country, how will that change things for the British tourists still there?”

Gardner, to his credit, discussed the serious part of the question first. But never fear, the BBC had a correspondent at Gatwick airport who was “monitoring the situation as events unfold.”

The good news was that the trouble showed no sign of spreading. A BBC correspondent in Cairo informed us that life there “continued as normal” the day after Ben Ali was forced out. It’s almost as if it’s a different country! Apparently, Egyptians are too beaten down and “not aspirational”:

“On one Facebook page, Egyptians are urged to begin the campaign to change their government — but not until 25 January.”

Ah, the fact that a revolution hasn’t spread from one country to another, which is 1000 km away, within 48 hours proves conclusively that it hasn’t had the effect we feared.

Tough, our class has a memory longer than the 140 characters that Twitter allows. Wait and see.

## Tunisia: fight for workers’ rights

By Dan Katz

**On 17 December a young Tunisian man set himself on fire in protest at poverty, lack of jobs and police harassment.**

The act of this desperate man struck a chord. Mass protests followed. By the end of December the popular mobilisations had spread to the capital, Tunis. The brutal dictatorship of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali — in power for the previous 23 years and growing rich at the expense of ordinary people — struck back, killing dozens and arresting and torturing many more.

The state shut universities and schools to stop students organising. Ben Ali attempted to offer economic and political concessions aiming to split and calm the movement.

Workers’ strikes have taken place. The Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) has emerged as one of the centres of opposition to the regime. On Wednesday 12 January the police stormed the UGTT’s headquarters.

Hamma Hammami, the leader of the banned Tunisian Workers’ Communist Party (in fact a Stalinist political grouping), was arrested at his home near Tunis after his party

called on the people to form an alternative government (it has been reported that he has since been released).

President Ben Ali fled the country on 14 January. He appears to have been pushed out by the army, which now has tanks on the streets. The remnants of the old regime have put together an interim “national unity” government. Elections have been promised. But the mobilisations continue.

The US and the UK have called for calm — they are worried about the threat to regional stability. Their criticisms of Ben Ali were always muted, in part because they saw him as an ally against Islamism. And the threat of a rise in Islamism in the country is real.

Socialists must back working-class self-organisation and a consistent fight for democracy and workers’ rights in Tunisia.

Other governments in the area are watching with alarm. In neighbouring Algeria protests have taken place against high unemployment and rising costs of food and according to reports protestors have been killed. The Algerian government has also offered concessions, saying it will take measures to reduce prices.

## Islamist threat?

**We don’t know how strong the Islamist threat is in Tunisia. The country has a long tradition of secularisation, and some vocal secularists.**

Yet that was true in Iran, too, in 1978-9, in the tumult which ended with the coming to power of Khomeini’s Islamist dictatorship, more crushing even than the Shah’s. That tumult included tremendous workers’ strike movements on democratic and secular demands; but the fact that the mosques had become the only tolerated place of opposition under the Shah, the strength of the Islamist cadre of clerics and reli-

gious students, and the complaisance of the left towards the Islamists, proved decisive.

The British left has not learned the lessons of Iran. At the Labour Representation Committee conference in London on 15 January, the invited platform speaker on Tunisia was Mohammed Ali Harrath, former leader of the Tunisian Islamic Front and now CEO of Islam Channel, a TV station charged by some (including Yvonne Ridley, whom it sacked) with anti-Shia bigotry.

Islam Channel:  
<http://bit.ly/gksByB> and  
<http://bit.ly/gKtAa6>.

## “The dictatorship, not just the dictator!”

Shawky Arif, a Tunisian political activist, spoke to *Solidarity*

**The situation is still fluid and fast-moving. The head is gone, but the body of the dictatorship remains. So-called “new” leaders coming forward are all members of the old regime and its truly-criminal system. The people of Tunisia continue to demand a wholesale break with the decades of dictatorship.**

We need the dissolution of the old ruling-party. We demand that members of the ruling party face justice for their corruption and for sanctioning the use of violence and torture against opponents. The head of the main union is a creature of the old regime. He was among those who called on

the ex-President to stay in power back in 2009. But the middle ranks of the unions and the rank-and-file are more independent and oppositional.

The army is on the streets and appears to be instrumental in restoring conditions for the resumption of normal life and economic activity. People feel safer. Politically it is hard to say which way the armed forces will go. Since the French quit Tunisia [1956] the army has stayed out of the civilian institutions. This gave the army a credibility and respect from the people. During the protests, when the army took to the streets to restore order and put an end to the militias of the old regime, people greeted it and cooperated with it. It has been reported that during the

protests, Rashid Ammar, was asked to fire on the people, but he refused, telling the overthrown dictator “you are over.” I hope that the army stays outside political life.

Some parties of the opposition rushed to comply when the first minister of the overthrown dictator called on them for talks about the formation of a government of national unity. We want all the old setup out. Mohammed Ghannoushi and Fouad Mbazza are Ben Ali’s men. How can we accept an interim government with the old figures?

What the people demand is, first and foremost, dissolve the old ruling-party that tortured us for 55 years. I would even propose that members of the ex-ruling party be banned

from politics for some years. It takes time to wash out dictatorship and its ugly image. What we need is a clean break with the past, its institutions and its personnel. The guilty must face justice for their crimes.

There must be a Constituent Assembly to oversee the framing of a new Constitution, and the drafting of a new Electoral Code. There must be freedom of expression, of the press and of political assembly. There must be no barriers to the formation of new political parties. The courts must be cleansed of corruption: they have rubber-stamped the excesses of the old regime and its mafia-style workings. National businesses that were sold out to relatives and friends of Ben Ali and his wife have to be nation-

alised again. Businesses that were sold out to foreigners have to be taken back and nationalised. Ben Ali auctioned the economy. We have to get it back.

So far four people have set themselves on fire in Algeria, directly copying the event which set in train the upsurge of resistance in Tunisia. One of these people is reported to have died. Similar acts have taken place in Egypt and Mauritania. The people want freedom.

It was no surprise that Colonel Gaddafi said what he said against the ousting of ex-President Ben Ali. Colonel Gaddafi said on television that nobody was better than Ben Ali and that he ought to be President for life. But the people want freedom and will make sacrifices to win it.

## Iraqi railworkers demand security benefit

By Ira Berkovic

**Iraqi railworkers who work on the railways heading south from Baghdad are fighting for pay increases and security benefits after several workers died in explosions on the track.**

The railway, which heads south from Baghdad to Samawah, crosses a particularly dangerous territory in which armed gangs are active. Instead of providing adequate security for the trains and their workers, railway bosses have attempted to pay off the gangs themselves.

Falah Alwan, president of the Federation of Workers’ Councils and Unions in Iraq, said “railway workers have been suffering from mines and explosions. The authorities instructed tribal gangs to provide security for the railways. Tribal gangs are getting huge amounts of money from the authorities but they don’t really provide security; eight train drivers have been killed in the last few months because of explosions.”

“The specific demands of the railway workers were, first, to ensure security and ask the authorities to take their responsibilities directly. The final demand was security benefits, because they are facing dangers in every day and every hour on their way from Baghdad to Basra. Before the strike was held, the authorities agreed to negotiate with the workers so the workers didn’t hold their strike. They are waiting for an answer from the administration.”

AWL will be organising solidarity from railway workers in the UK and releasing more information on the dispute as we receive it. If you’d like to help us in these efforts, email [skillz\\_999@hotmail.com](mailto:skillz_999@hotmail.com).

# Why I am writing for Solidarity

**Dave Osler**

Long-term members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty will presumably be even more surprised to read me in these pages than I am to find myself helping to fill them.

It's fair to say that I have had my disagreements with you lot in the three decades since I came across the group formerly known as *Socialist Organiser*, after joining the Labour Party Young Socialists at the start of the Thatcher period.

The first time I was mentioned by name in *Socialist Organiser's* press, for instance, I had just taken a job as a journalist for rival Trotskyist newspaper *Socialist Outlook*. For whatever reason, this was considered noteworthy, leading to the description of me as possessing 'a public schoolboy sense of humour'.

Since that obvious class slur has never been retracted, I'll just take this opportunity to put the record straight at 20 years' remove. I had a blue-collar upbringing absolutely normal for its day, and I am entirely state educated.

Then there was that time outside a pub in Blackpool one Labour Party conference week, in which a leading *Socialist Organiser* full time worker repeatedly and loudly denounced me as "a state agent" for writing something uncomplimentary about Arthur Scargill. That's okay, guys; we'd all had a few beers, and it's probably too late to apologise now.

I bring these matters up not because they deserve any special place in the already voluminous annals of Trotskyist infamy, but to underline that the AWL is not immune from the small-change stupidity that renders the entire British far left, as presently constituted, not fit for purpose.

Let me just add that I don't even consider myself a Trot any more, properly speaking. The idea that the USSR was a degenerate workers' state always struck me as unlikely even when I argued for it in public, and the continued vitality of capitalism — until 2007, anyway — surely disproves the theory of permanent revolution.

Building a democratic centralist cadre outfit of 200 or so members in the expectation that it will be catapulted into government by unspecified future events strikes me as a pointless exercise. And I am increasingly persuaded by the philosophy of analytical Marxism, which holds that dialectics is essentially obfuscatory mumbo jumbo.

**All of this being the case, why I am writing for *Solidarity*, and far more importantly, why is *Solidarity* offering me space? Well, there are always those important things on which we do agree.**

If Marxism has got a future — and sadly, I don't take that as a given — it is as a democratic, rationalist, humanist doctrine able to win mass support among the exploited and the oppressed of this planet, giving them the necessary intellectual framework for their fight against their exploiters and oppressors.

No existing organisation on the left instantiates what is necessary to bring this about. But in a period in which it has been extremely difficult for Marxists to find the correct orientation, the AWL has emerged as obviously the least worst option.

Crucially for me, it hangs on to the unfashionable notion that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself, a proposition once axiomatic among revolutionary socialists in this country, but now largely honoured in the breach.

The AWL appreciates the corollary that there is a difference between anti-imperialism and fawning deference for any group that points an AK-47 vaguely in the direction of the US armed forces. It does not cheerlead for the remaining outposts of Stalinism, and recognises demagogic third world nationalist rhetoric as neither more nor less than what it is.

I am, as I mentioned, a journalist by trade. I have penned columns for both political and non-political publications over many years. In my experience, the format works best when a columnist either resolutely reinforces readership prejudices, or manages gently to challenge them.

In writing for *Solidarity*, I am going to try to achieve a bit of both. But there is an element of risk involved here, as much for me as for the paper. In short, what you are reading is the first instalment of a political experiment that may or may not work. I guess we'll see how it goes.

# The chainmakers' champion

**On Whose Shoulders We Stand** By Jill Mountford

**Mary MacArthur**

For as long as workers have been fighting for their rights there have been key women organising other women and fighting alongside men. We begin a series on these inspirational women, often hidden from history.

Mary MacArthur was a socialist and trade unionist. She had what Labour MP Margaret Bondfield described as "boundless energy and leadership of a high order".

Mary left Glasgow for London (at the age of 23) in 1903 to pursue political activity, leaving behind the man she loved and who wanted to marry her. Mary was active in the women's suffrage movement, trade unions and the Independent Labour Party. She set up the National Federation of Women Workers in 1906 to organise women in small unions and workplaces of the "sweated industries" and to campaign for a minimum wage.

She was involved in the setting up of the Anti-Sweating League and in 1910 she played a central role in the Chainmakers' Strike that won the first minimum wage for women in Britain.

The Chainmakers' strike (in Cradley Heath, West Midlands) was an indefinite strike of around 700 women over pay. The chainmaking women worked for long hours and piece work rates, often with their children alongside them or heavily pregnant in small forges hand-hammering chains for domestic use; some forges were in their own backyards, with a few as two workers in a workplace.

The oldest striker, Patience Round, was 79 years old and had been making chains all of her working life. Early in the strike she said: "These are wonderful times. I never thought that I should live to assert the rights of us women. It has been the week of my life — three meetings and such beautiful talking."

In March 1910 a minimum wage of tuppence ha'penny per hour was proposed to replace the old piecework system. Low as this was, it more than doubled most women's pay. The bosses, however, got a delay for six months. During this gap they had forms drafted saying workers wished to "contract out" of the minimum wage. They then dedicated middle managers' time to getting these forms signed by illiterate women workers. Those who refused to sign were told there was no work for them.

Meanwhile employers were stockpiling chains made under the old rate which they would sell when the new rate became legally binding.

On 23 August the National Federation of Women Workers demanded the minimum wage be paid immediately. The employers refused and the union called a strike for all those women on less than the minimum wage. At a mass meeting of 400 women workers, they all pledged not to sign the form "contracting out" of the minimum wage.

The strike was not easy to organise. These women earned around five shillings a week for 55 hours work; they needed every penny of their pay to eke out a miserable existence for them and their families.

More than half of the women on strike had not joined the union because the weekly subscription of 3d could buy a loaf of bread — a serious matter for these women in 1910.

Mary set about raising national awareness of the strike and the women workers' conditions and the donations to the strike fund came flooding in. Mary reported that 20 people were working day and night to respond to the letters of support. This was mainly down to the work of Mary herself. She exposed the chainmasters. She was media-savvy, and used it to promote the cause of women, placing the likes of Patience Round at the forefront of the struggle.

The last of the employers gave in by 22 October, when the dispute ended. But though this was an historical victory the mood was subdued. J J Mallon, one of the organisers, said he thought this was because the women realised what they'd had during the strike — a great sense of power and solidarity — and that was now over.

In the summer of 1911 Mary organised more than 2000 women in 20 concurrent strikes in Bermondsey and other parts of London.

She was founder of the *Women Worker* a newspaper (eventually weekly) for women trade unionists with a circulation of around 20,000.

Unlike many socialists in Europe, Mary opposed the First World War. After the war she stood as Labour candidate in Stourbridge but she did not win; it was thought her stance against the war went against her.

Mary did marry the man she loved, Will Anderson; he had moved down from Glasgow a few years after her. They fought the class struggle together until his death in 1919. Mary died of cancer at just 40 years old, but knowing not one moment had been wasted from the fight for justice and freedom for the working class.

Great shoulders on which we can stand!

**Letters**

To: [solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)  
Cc:  
Subject: anti-fascism

## Keep quiet about Islamism?

On 11 January I attended a meeting in Luton about organising against the English Defence League mobilisation planned there on 5 February.

Details of the counter-mobilisation are yet to be finalised. One young member of the Muslim Youth League reported that large numbers of Luton's Muslim youth were planning slogans on the lines that Islamic fundamentalism is as bad as EDL extremism.

True enough. But the young anti-Islamist Muslim was sharply slapped down by an SWPer who insisted that "we" shouldn't mention any problems about Islamic fundamentalism.

Dan Angell, East London

## Family friendly?

SWP activists often say that anti-racist and anti-fascist demonstrations can't be confrontational because we need actions that everyone feels comfortable attending, that families and children need to be able to demonstrate. I have even heard it argued that women need this kind of demonstration (as if women were like children!)

The SWP counterpose "inclusive and non-elitist demonstrations" in order to dodge a discussion about the need to physically take on the fascists.

During the Bradford anti-fascist demonstrations, I spoke

to German comrades who told me about a tactic they said was common in Germany.

Large rallies are formed as safe spaces for those who do not want physical danger, but also as bases from which contingents of activists would go out to fight fascists.

This undermines the dichotomy that SWPers tend to raise.

Dan Rawnsley, south London

## The next big thing?

Quora.com is now being hyped as the next big social media thing — a crowd-sourced version of wiki-answers, combining features of (and integrating with) twitter and Facebook.

Someone asks a question to an online community, the members of the community provide a set of answers and then the community vote on which they believe to be the best answer. The winning answers might receive a financial reward. Apparently this technology managed to solve in a matter of weeks some problems that NASA scientists had been working on non-stop for years.

But this could also drive out individuality, and tend towards a status quo. As with Wikipedia, dominant personalities are as easily able to dominate online as they are in the real world. Crowds are more likely to value the misguided opinion of some big cheese than a lone voice of sanity.

Worryingly, some councils plan to use it to get local people to agree what cuts should be made to budgets. For politicians crowd-sourcing has X-Factor appeal. 20 people vote to cut a local youth club and councillors can say "you wanted Wagner/cuts, you've got them."

On the other hand it wouldn't take much for our unions to organise a unified response to such councils — to intervene and answer "no cuts". What do other readers think?

Martin Ohr, Leeds

# Make Labour councils defy cuts

Labour and trade union activists meeting on 15 January in London at the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) conference voted almost unanimously to call on Labour councils to defy the Tory/ Lib-Dem cuts.

The LRC is the biggest grouping of the Labour left, and has the affiliation of six unions, four Labour-affiliated and two (RMT and FBU) not.

Only one speaker at the conference, Charlyne Pullen, a Labour councillor from Islington, north London, demurred. Her council has put out a leaflet denouncing the local cuts (pictured below), and council leader Catherine West has told anti-cuts demonstrators that she is “with them all the way”... but the council is implementing the same cuts that it denounces!

Charlyne Pullen argued that if Labour councils don’t make cuts, then the Government will kick them out and make worse cuts directly.

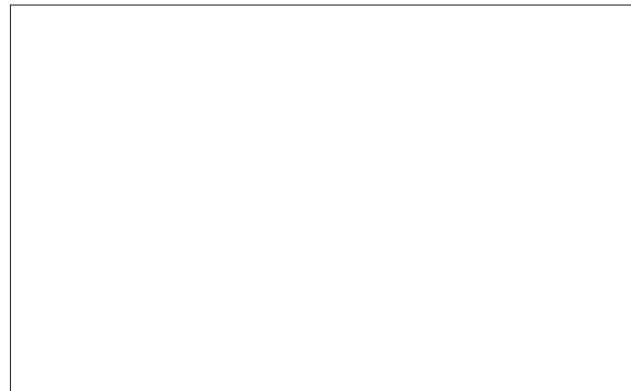
Gordon Nardell, a lawyer with expertise in this area and a former Southwark Labour councillor, who was also at the conference, confirmed to *Solidarity* that reserve powers exist in law for the local government minister, Eric Pickles, to “sack” an elected council and run the local authority himself.

But our chances of defeating cuts are better if they are fought by a whole united local labour movement, fired up by outrage at Pickles’s coup.

For that reason, Pickles might well not choose to intervene and instead wait for a defiant council to lose its nerve as it runs out of money, as Liverpool did in 1985. In any case, defiance by the council would improve, not worsen, the odds for fighting cuts.

It wouldn’t even mean councillors being surcharged, as they could be in the 1980s. Individual councillors could face complaints at the Standards Board (which the coalition government plans to abolish, but hasn’t abolished yet) for defying council Finance Officer’s warnings, but at worst they would only be fined, suspended, or disqualified (in which case fresh councillors are elected in their place).

However, Pullen’s argument is popular among Labour



Islington Labour leaflets against the “Tory/ Lib Dem cuts”... which the Labour council is carrying out!

councillors. In Hackney, east London, the council’s ruling Labour Group has passed a motion aspiring to “lead the fight against the cuts” at the same time as... making them.

The Labour Party nationally, and the Labour Group, must (says the Hackney motion) “play the leading role in campaigning against” — if not the cuts as such, at least “the excessive speed and depth of the cuts”.

Leaflets, petitions, street stalls, rallies, demonstrations, banners on demonstrations are promised.

The Labour Group resolves to “use the campaign against the cuts to recruit members to the Labour Party and drive the renewal of our ward parties...”

Yet the motion also notes that the “excessive speed and depth” is nowhere more speedy and deep than in local government.

What will the Labour Group do about those exceptionally “excessive” cuts? Implement them! “Our legal responsibility to set a balanced budget”.

The contradiction is resolved in the councillors’ heads by the thought that: “the electoral defeat of the Coalition parties and a Labour victory is the only certain way to overturn their policies”.

But what do we do while the cuts are happening, between now and the general election?

The Hackney Labour Group has already told us that electoral victory for Labour in local elections in May will not “overturn” the coalition cuts, but at best produce a variant of them “targeted on protecting services for the most vulnerable”.

How do we get a new Labour government which will actually “overturn”, i.e. reverse the cuts and other Coalition policies, rather than building on them (and maybe slowing them down) as Blair did with Thatcher’s policies? Not by training the labour movement to implement and apologise for Labour council cuts, but by rallying the whole labour movement to fight.

Taking the Hackney Labour Party banner on a TUC demonstration is good, but not enough. To beat the cuts we must coordinate budgetary defiance from the councillors, council worker strikes, rent strikes and the withholding of council tax.

In Broxtowe, Nottinghamshire, the constituency Labour Party General Committee has passed a motion calling for defiance. A number of new members are putting themselves forwards as “anti-cuts” Labour candidates in the upcoming elections.

A fight in the unions is also necessary. At present the local government unions are telling Labour councils that they should make the cuts, but negotiate them through voluntary redundancies and agreed redeployments. In the 1980s, when some Labour councils defied partially, often the unions, and even the council workers’ own shop stewards’ committees, weighed on the side of compliance and compromise.

Labour councils should defy the cuts; and, to make that possible, the unions must be won to a policy of demanding and supporting defiance.

Miliband, speech to the Fabian Society, 15 January).

In December, “speaking at his first monthly conference as opposition leader, Mr Miliband offered Liberal Democrats an offer to participate in the party policy review... The Labour leader is working with Richard Grayson, a former director of policy for the Liberal Democrats, in the policy review...” (politics.co.uk, 13 December).

Douglas Alexander, Labour front-bencher for Work and Pensions, 23 December, followed up by cajoling the Lib Dems to work with him to soften (not reverse) the coalition government’s benefit cuts. “I have written today to Lib Dem ministers offering immediate talks in the New Year on Privy Council terms to work together to make the government’s welfare policies fairer” (23 December).

Remember what Ed Miliband said when standing for election as Labour leader! “In the end you’ve got to have some principles... In the talks I had with the Lib Dems they were actually hawks on the deficit. They were the ones saying — quite contrary to their position at the election — ‘we’ve got to cut now, we’ve got to cut deeply’” (Ed Miliband, interview with politics.co.uk, 10 September).

## The point of selling socialist papers on the street

### AWL news

I’m friends with an ex-member of another Trotskyist group. He is still a socialist, and active in left-wing politics as well as union activity, but no longer organised by a revolutionary tendency. One thing he’s often said to me is that he doesn’t see the point of public paper sales, except if they’re linked to activity for a campaign or anti-cuts committee.

There are many reasons why the AWL does public sales of *Solidarity*, and one of them is to talk to people about the campaigns we’re involved in. But I want to challenge the idea that such activity is pointless for winning people to revolutionary politics. Definitely not true!

The AWL has a new member in Sheffield, a 16 year old school student who has been central to the massive school students’ struggles that have taken place there recently. If we hadn’t recruited him, our ability to be involved in this movement would have been radically less. How did we meet him?

When we were selling *Solidarity* on the streets. (And from what I’m told, there’s another lesson: the comrade who sold him a paper made an active effort to speak to him as he passed by and looked at the headline.)

Or another case: one of our new National Committee members was recruited in 2006 when he met comrades selling the paper outside York station. (Yet another lesson: the comrade he bought it from, now an RMT activist and also a National Committee member, was recruited after an AWLer saw her reading *Socialist Worker* on the train and talked to her.)

Last anecdote. At the end of a paper sale in Peckham, in South London, on 15 January, cold, hungover and having only sold two papers, I was approached by a young woman angry about the government making cuts while the bankers clean up. She said she had been thinking about socialism and would be interested to know more, and left her details.

With the economic crisis and the growing fight against the cuts, there are many more people thinking about socialism, and potentially interested in the AWL. Getting out on the streets, and doing it regularly and consistently, is one of the ways to let them know we exist!

Sacha Ismail

## Fund drive

We are asking all our readers for financial help. This will help us sustain the weekly *Solidarity* and get our new premises up and running at the end of this month. A donation, however small, will help keep us on track.

Send a cheque payable to “AWL” to PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA.

Or see [www.workersliberty.org/donate](http://www.workersliberty.org/donate).

Thanks this week to Dave and Debbie for new standing orders and J for other fundraising. Our fundraising total (our target is £25,000) stands at £19,953.

# Core of the student movement

**Michael Chessum, a co-founder of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) and an officer at University College London students union, spoke to *Solidarity* about the organisation's conference (Saturday 22 January), and the role of student struggle. The full version of this article is online at [tinyurl.com/chessum](http://tinyurl.com/chessum).**

NCAFC is the major organisation leading the anti-cuts movement in education. It needs to develop its own structures, and we need to have a debate about how these will work. NCAFC is the organisation that will play a durable, stable role in leading the student anti-cuts movement and linking up with the workers' movement. There are other bodies but NCAFC is the political core of the movement.

Students are about to stop being at the forefront of the whole anti-cuts movement; we're about to become a part of larger waves of industrial action across the public sector. What might require different tactics. But the things we do, such as direct action, are precisely how we can be most useful to the working-class movement. The TUC might not call for the occupation of a building, but we can.

We should continue with rolling days of action and try to expand our numbers; we are not going to wither.

We need to figure out where we stand in relation to the official structures. We need to ask ourselves whether we think NUS will ever be a fighting union. We're capable of leading a good intervention — we can discredit the leadership at the NUS conference this April — but we certainly need to build parallel, alternative structures to NUS. This is a role NCAFC can play.

Bringing down the government is a target, but I wouldn't necessarily pose it in a slogan. If the government falls, you replace it with the only alternative — you replace it with Labour. I want to know, what's the alternative to Labour? We need to discuss this in the movement — is it possible to reclaim Labour? I don't think that it is. I think that it's "workerist" to just say, "let's join the Labour Party because that's where the unions are".

When the history books are written, our success will be measured by the extent to which this time is remembered as a time when a generation became conscious and built a movement that took British politics dramatically to the left.

## NCAFC conference: vote for democracy!

A key debate at this year's NCAFC conference will be on establishing a structure for the campaign. Until now, NCAFC, while open, has operated with practically no formal structures, which AWL believes is unsustainable and, ultimately, undemocratic.

We are proposing a membership structure that gives NCAFC members (defined as anyone who supports the aims of the campaign and pays a notional membership fee) the opportunity to elect a steering committee to oversee the day-to-day running of the campaign. A clearly defined, transparent and accountable structure is far preferable to a utopian bid to carry on without structure.

The debate will come in the context of an ongoing discussion in the movement about organisational forms that Martin Thomas of the AWL commented on at [tinyurl.com/nottweeted](http://tinyurl.com/nottweeted).

Daniel Randall

### NCAFC conference —

**Saturday 22 January, 11am-6pm, Jeremy Bentham Room, UCL, Gower Street, London. More: <http://bit.ly/hekXsA>; [againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com](mailto:againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com)**

### Day to defend EMA —

**Wednesday 26 January, walk out then rally from 12 noon in your town centre or Trafalgar Square**

### March against education cuts —

**Saturday 29 January. London (tba) and Manchester (1.30pm, Platts Field, Wilmslow Road)**

# Tories swing

By Stuart Jordan

On 15 January, the NHS Confederation, representing top doctors and medical managers, put out a formal warning in advance of the Government's Health and Social Care Bill, to be published on 19 January.

The Government's plans, said the Confederation, are "extraordinarily risky", and could lead to hospitals being closed, treatment being rationed more, and patients suffering.

The central plank of the Tory plans is to abolish the Primary Care Trusts (PCTs, the "purchasers" under the NHS's current "purchaser/provider" structure) and replace them with "GP commissioning".

GPs are too busy seeing patients, so in fact this means that "purchaser" power in the NHS will shift to private companies whom GPs pay to do their "commissioning".

The Tories also want to "liberate" the health market so that private healthcare firms can bid competitively for contracts. They want healthcare teams to split off from the NHS to form their own "social enterprises".

All Trusts will be encouraged to become Foundation Trusts. Health Secretary Andrew Lansley has said "I am looking forward to a world where the Department of Health does not own Foundation Trusts". Who will "own" them? And will the rules making the Foundation Trusts not-for-profit be scrapped?

The cap on raising revenue from private patients will be lifted. The Tory plans point towards a tiered healthcare system based on ability to pay.

Since the 1980s the NHS has gradually become a slush fund for redirecting tax revenue into the profits of private corporations. Service companies like Serco, pharmaceutical companies like GlaxoSmithKline, and construction firms like Tarmac plc have all profited enormously.

The new Tory-Liberal government plans to accelerate privatisation whilst implementing £20bn of cuts.

These are shattering new blows of the neo-liberal axe to a public-service structure which has been battered and bashed for more than 30 years now.

In 1948, when the NHS was established, the national debt was almost 240% GDP (it is currently around 50%), but the post-war Labour government was brought to power by a combative working-class movement. In 1943 Tory MP Quintin Hogg had said: "If you do not give the people social reform, they will give you social revolution."

The Labour government created a system of free state-of-the-art healthcare for all, regardless of ability to pay.

The NHS was never perfect. But compared to the rest of Western Europe, let alone the USA, Britain had not only a relatively fair, but also an efficient healthcare system.

Britain spent two to four times less (in proportion to GDP per head) than the USA, yet had consistently better rates of infant mortality and life expectancy than the richer country.

The NHS almost completely eliminated internal market mechanisms. It bought from external providers like pharmaceutical companies, and it received money from a few private patients, but otherwise funding was based on redistribution, risk pooling, risk planning and equity, not on market mechanisms.

Before 1991 hospitals and community services were funded and controlled by health authorities. The health authorities received a block of funding calculated by a needs-based formula and distributed it to the services in their charge. Very detailed accounts were available for public scrutiny. Despite the massive expansion of administrative staff, accounts of that quality and detail are no longer available.

GPs had the freedom to send their patients wherever they thought they would receive the best care. High-risk, high-cost patients were a burden spread across the whole service.

By the time Thatcher came to power in 1979, the NHS suffered from cumulative underfunding. Long waiting times, staff shortages, low pay and ancient buildings were all common. But the NHS was still firmly committed to and delivering on its founding principles of comprehensive, universal and equitable healthcare.

In 1983, Thatcher asked supermarket boss Roy Griffiths to write a report on how to run the health service. His first proposal was that they needed to pack the upper ranks of the NHS with business people like himself. From 1986 to 1995 the number of senior managers rose from 1000 to 26,000. Admin costs rose from 5% of the budget to over 12%.

Griffiths's second proposal was to outsource cleaning, catering, security and auxiliary staff. From 1981 to 1990 the number of non-clinical staff working for the NHS fell from 260,000 to 157,000. Privatisation helped to weaken union organisation in the NHS.

The third proposal was to scrap NHS coverage for opticians, dentists and long-term care of the elderly. By 1999 over 50% of all dentistry was paid for privately. By 2003 private companies managed 69% of long-stay care beds.

Those changes marked the end of the NHS as a comprehensive service. We still had free state-of-the-art healthcare... so long as it did not involve eyes or teeth. We still had a service "from the cradle to the grave"... so long as you died quickly and did not slowly deteriorate in old age.

After John Major came to power in 1990, he went for an "internal market" in the NHS. Hospitals would become "providers", getting their income by selling services to "NHS purchasers" — Health Authorities and some "GP fundholders". Health Authorities were stripped of their planning capacity.

Now, for complex and expensive cases, such as heart surgery or eating disorders, hospitals needed to appeal to the Health Authority for an "extra contractual referral" before they could start treatment. Hospitals would plan or deny treatment on the basis of the ability of the NHS purchaser to pay. Sometimes appointments would be moved, staff would be put on unpaid leave, and wards, theatres and their staff would close, as money ran out toward the end of the financial year.

## UNDER NEW LABOUR

**The internal market also increased geographical health inequalities. The admin costs ballooned. The bureaucracy more than doubled, while the government restrained overall NHS funding so it barely kept pace with inflation.**

With the landslide Labour victory in 1997 there was great hope for the NHS to be returned to its founding principles. But for the first two years in power, Labour maintained the Tory spending plans. Frank Dobson as health minister failed to reduce waiting times or improve services. He made only limited attempts to abolish the "internal market". His main contribution was to replace the Health Authorities with Strategic Health Authorities who oversaw Primary Care Groups (later Trusts).

The PCG/Ts now controlled 75% of the NHS budget and commissioned services from NHS providers, buying broad categories of care under three- (instead of one-) year contracts. If the hospitals had been ill-equipped to take on the planning role of the HAs, the new PCTs were even worse so. With each PCT covering around 100,000 patients, the risk-pool was very small. If one area had exceptionally many patients in need of very expensive drugs, then some patients would have to do without or other services would be cut.

Dobson's term at the DoH also saw the massive expansion of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). PFI had been conceived in the early 1990s by the Conservative government. Their plan was that private consortia of banks, construction firms and service corporations would stump up the capital investment for a large building project (such as a hospital) and provide all the maintenance and support staff for the building over a period of 30 to 60 years, and the taxpayer would pay them off like a hire-purchase scheme.

By 1996 the Tories had failed to get the detail sorted out. However, Blair's government seized on PFI and ran with it. The cost is huge.

States can borrow money more cheaply than private businesses. Long-term, PFI means the taxpayer paying the extra borrowing costs. PFI schemes tie the NHS into contracts that last several decades, by which time health needs may have radically changed.

For example, in 2006 the Bart's and London Hospital Trust

# axxe at the NHS

**Demonstration in summer 2010 against plans to hand management of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital in Huntingdon to a private company. A contract is likely to be awarded in February to Circle, which claims to run on the John Lewis partnership model. Picture: Cambridgeshire Against the Cuts**

in East London signed a contract for a £1 billion new 1000 bed PFI hospital with the Skanska Innisfree Consortium. By 2010 the hospital was almost ready to open, but the Trust announced that it could not afford to staff all 1000 beds. Instead, 200 beds would stand idle. The estimated cost to the taxpayer will be £5-6 billion over 42 years.

After 2000 Labour promised real term spending increases of 6.1% over four years. The "NHS Plan" sought to build 100 new hospitals, bringing 7000 new hospital and intermediate care beds. It would train 7500 new consultants, 2000 GPs, 20,000 nurses, and 6,500 new therapists by 2010.

At the same time, elective and critical surgery and intermediate care (for people who no longer need acute hospital care but are still not well enough to return home) were opened up to private business. Pharmaceutical companies were encouraged to get involved in developing the new "National Service Frameworks" allowing them to write the guidance on "disease management".

Labour planned to reduce waiting lists by setting up Diagnostic Treatment Centres where private firms would provide extra resources. It ran into trouble. The NHS could still do all this surgery much cheaper than the private sector. Also, all the best surgeons and staff worked in the NHS. The NHS carried all the risk for these centres. If something went wrong in surgery then the private firm would just call an NHS ambulance and ship the patient back to an NHS hospital.

In 2004, all the most powerful teaching hospitals were allowed to become Foundation Trusts. FTs were dubbed "public benefit corporations". They were set up with an independent regulator, Monitor, out of the control of Strategic Health Authorities and the Department of Health. FTs, unlike the DoH, did not have a legal duty to provide universal, comprehensive and equal care.

Foundation Trusts were not allowed to make profit but they were free to enter into contracts and joint ventures with private providers. They could also make money by selling their assets. Previously, such money would have been redistributed across the NHS but now it remained within the FT.

FTs were free to set their own pay scales and to get themselves into debt, though so far only one FT, Southend Hospital, has opted out of the national pay scale.

The introduction of FTs coincided with an attempt to work out a national tariff for treatments.

By 1998 the DoH had published "reference costs" on a whole host of procedures by working out the average cost; by 2003 they decided that these "reference costs" should form the basis of a "national tariff"; and by 2005 there was a national tariff for all outpatient, admitted inpatient, and A&E procedures.

The government calculated averages and made them the procedures' prices. If a hospital could not perform the procedure at the given price, then they would have to find money from another source. If a hospital spent less on a treatment than they received, then it could keep the extra cash.

## ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

**In the privatised USA health system, 30% of total health spending goes on admin charges. The NHS is going the same way. A privatised system requires an army of paper-shufflers who put the service out to tender, negotiate with the private companies, draw up the contracts, set quality criteria, inspect the work of the private firm, make the payments, etc. The private firm also has its own bureaucracy: a hierarchy of managers, payroll, HR, procurement, sales and estates departments, etc.**

Some people do not get the health care they need; others get more than is good for them. Pharmaceutical marketing guru Vince Parry specialises in "condition branding" whereby he rebrands a particular illness in order to sell a particular drug under a particular patent.

Parry explains: "No therapeutic category is more accepting of condition branding than the field of anxiety and depression, where illness is rarely based on measurable physical symptoms and, therefore, open to conceptual definition." There are some limits to "condition branding", but marketisation opens up the NHS to capital's tendency to de-

fine your health problem in terms suited to their profit-making needs.

All this is part of a broader project of global capitalism.

US health giants, such as United Healthcare and Kaiser-Permanente, were keen to tap into the low risk tax revenues of the European health sector. They campaigned for privatisation of public services through international capitalist bodies such as the World Bank and World Trade Organisation.

In 1995, an international free trade agreement was signed called the General Agreement in Trade in Services (GATS). GATS committed governments to open up their public services to privatisation and foreign investment.

The agreement included an exemption for services which were not provided on a "commercial basis" or not provided in "competition with one or more service providers". At the time, the Tories and New Labour said that the NHS was exempt from the GATS agreement because it was run as a state monopoly.

The latest round of reforms can tip the UK health sector into full commercialisation, with the effect that the NHS could only be renationalised by a government willing to opt out of GATS.

Part of the story of the NHS since the 1980s has been about taxpayers' money being siphoned off into the pockets of private profiteers. The banking bailout took this logic much further. In effect, we are now being asked to give up our welfare state in order that the government can pay for a welfare state it provided for the rich.

Yet the world could be run democratically for human need, not private profit. The old NHS shows how even a very limited amount of democratic control and planning could create a better health care system. But we should fight for much greater democratic control.

We need to fight for a world which is controlled by human beings, not the hidden hand of the market. For this we need to build a movement of healthcare workers in solidarity with other sections of the working-class movement. We need to organise for collective action, including occupation of hospitals threatened with closure.

# The Bolsheviks as they really were

**This extract from *The Bolshevik Party* by Pierre Broué (1963) shows what Bolshevism meant, and how different it was from the “Leninism” constructed after Lenin’s death in 1924**

The heart of the Bolsheviks’ organization, the “column of steel” of professional revolutionaries, was recruited entirely from young people, workers and students, in a period in a society which in fact scarcely gave time for childhood to drag itself out, especially in working class families.

It was those under 20 who renounced all prospect of career and ambition other than a political and a collective one, in order to identify themselves, never looking back, with the workers’ struggle. A Mikhail Tomsy, lithographer, who joined the Party at the age of 25, stands out from the others, despite his years as a non-party militant. In fact, by the time they reached his age, the majority of the others had already put behind them years of full-time political struggle...

Before leaving the stage of adolescence, these young men are already old members, cadres. Sverdlov, 17 years old, is in charge of the Sormovo social-democratic organisation, and the Tsarist police who try to identify him nickname him “The Little One”; Sokolnikov is 18 and in charge of one of the Moscow districts...

These young men came in successive waves, coinciding with strikes and with the course of the revolutionary movement. The older ones joined around 1898 and became Bolsheviks in 1905; after them came the generation of the period 1905 and the two years following; finally a third wave joined from 1911-12.

The life of these men consists of years of imprisonment, of underground activity, condemnations, deportations, exile...

The courage of these men was clearly equal to every test: they gave the very best of themselves, convinced that only in this way could they express all those possibilities with which their young intelligence was bursting...

[They] studied, on every possible occasion, for when the Party was described as a school, this was no mere figure of speech. Often it was only in the Party that people learned to read, and every member became a tutor, responsible for a group around him who learned from him in discussion.

The enemies of Bolshevism like to sneer at this taste for books, which seemed at times to turn the Party into a sociology club, but the Prague Congress was effectively prepared by the formation, at the Longjumeau cadre school, of a few dozen members who listened and discussed 45 lectures from Lenin, of which 30 were on political economy, and ten devoted to the agrarian problem, the history of the Russian Party; the history of the workers’ movement in the West, law, literature, journalistic technique.

Certainly, it was not a question of all the Bolsheviks being great men of science, but their culture raised them well above the average level among the masses, and among their ranks were numbered some of the most brilliant intellects of the century. Without a doubt, the Party raised its members to a high level, and the professional revolutionary bears no resemblance to the bureaucrat *avant-la-lettre* so often portrayed by partisan commentators.

Trotsky, who knew them well and shared that life, even though not being at that time a Bolshevik, he was not one of them, wrote about them:

“The youth of the revolutionary generation coincided with the youth of the labour movement. It was the epoch of people between the ages of eighteen and thirty. Revolutionists above that age were few in number and seemed old men. The movement was as yet utterly devoid of careerism, lived on its faith in the future and on its spirit of self-sacrifice.

“There were as yet no routine, no set formulae, no theatrical gestures, no ready-made oratorical tricks. The struggle was by nature full of pathos; shy and awkward. The very words ‘committee’, ‘party’ were as yet new, with a aura of vernal freshness, and rang in young ears as a disquieting and alluring melody.

“Whoever joined the organisation knew that prison followed by exile awaited him within the next few months. The measure of ambition was to last as long as possible on the job prior to arrest; to hold oneself steadfast when facing the gendarmes; to ease, as far as possible, the plight of one’s comrades; to read, while in prison, as many books as possible; to escape as soon as possible from exile abroad; to acquire wisdom there; and then to return to revolutionary activity in Russia”.

It is certain that nothing can better explain the victories of the Bolsheviks, and above all the winning, first slow and then very rapid, of those whom Bukharin called the second concentric circle of the Party, its antennae and its levers in the revolutionary period, the revolutionary workers, organizers of trade unions and of party committees, poles of resistance, centres of initiative, indefatigable educators and moving spirits through which the Party was able to integrate itself in the class and give it leadership.

History has almost forgotten the names of all these in most cases; Lenin spoke about them as the cadres “of the Kaivrov type”, referring to the name of the man who hid him for some days in 1917 and who had his complete confidence. Unless their existence is considered, the Bolshevik \*miracle\* defies understanding.

## ALONE OF HIS GENERATION

**The description of what the Bolshevik Party was would be incomplete without an attempt to describe the man who founded it and led it right up to his death. Certainly Lenin to a certain extent identified himself with the Party: for all that, he must be seen as also different from it.**

To start with, he was just about the only one of his generation, his first companion in arms, Plekhanov, his senior, and Martov, his contemporary, leading the Mensheviks.

His lieutenants of the first stage, Bogdanov and Krassin, later left. In the period of the Prague Congress, the oldest of his immediate collaborators, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Sverdlov and Nogin, were under 30. He himself was 42 and he was the only one among the Bolsheviks from the generation before *Iskra*, the generation of pioneers of Marxism. The young men of the Bolshevik nucleus were first and above all his pupils...

Deeply convinced that ideological conflicts were inevitable, he wrote to Krassin that “it is a Utopia to expect complete firmness, agreement and strength among the Central Committee or its agents”. He fought to convince, sure that he was right.

Also he could finally accept quite light-heartedly a defeat which he considered only temporary and provisional, like that which he suffered as the hands of the Komitetchki at the 1905 Congress, on the eve of a Revolution which he knew would sweep aside their routine. At the end of the same year he gave way to the pressure of members on the question of a reunification which he himself judged to be premature, at the same time making sure to limit in advance the possible damage by concentrating all his efforts to obtain within the unified Party the election of the Central Committee according to the proportional representation of tendencies.

Between 1906 and 1910, he multiplied his efforts to convince the dissidents of his faction and finally left the initiative of the break to them. In 1910 he bent before the policy of the conciliators defended by Bubrovinsky, whom he regarded as a precious comrade and whom he hoped would quickly be convinced by experience...

His object was not to prove himself right, but to fashion the implement which could permit him to intervene in the class struggle and be historically right, “on the scale of millions”, as he liked to say: to keep together his fraction, those men carefully tried and tested over years, he knew how to wait and even to give way, but he never indulged in show, nor did he hesitate to begin all over again if his adversaries called in question fundamentals.

In ideological or tactical controversy, he always seemed to sharpen angles, push contradictions to their extreme, point up contracts, often to schematise and even caricature his opponent’s point of view. These were methods of struggle which sought victory, not compromise, sought to dismantle the very process of thought of his adversary, to lead back the controversy to premises which were easy for everybody to understand.

But he never lost sight of the need to preserve the collaboration in joint work of those with whom he crossed swords. During the war, in disagreement with Bukharin on

the question of the State, he asked him not to write anything on this subject, in order not to accentuate disagreements on points which in his eyes neither of them had yet sufficiently studied.

He argued always, bent sometimes, but never renounced the aim of convincing, for it was thus and only thus — whatever has been and still is said by his detractors — that he carried off his victories and became the uncontested leader of his fraction, a fraction built by his hands and composed of men selected and trained by him.

Moreover, that seemed perfectly normal to him, and he replied without discomfort to those who worried about quarrels between comrades: “Let sentimental people weep and moan; more conflict! more internal squabbles! more controversies! We reply: without new and constantly renewed struggles, no revolutionary social-democrat has ever been formed...”

## BATTLE OF IDEAS

**His influence rested on the strength and vigour of his ideas, his fighting temperament and his polemical talent, not upon rigid discipline and conformity. From Krassin to Bukharin, his comrades will show that for them it was an awful drama of consciousness to take up opposition to Lenin. Nonetheless they did so, for that was a duty, “the first duty of a revolutionary”, he said, the duty of criticising one’s leaders; the pupils would not have judged themselves worthy of, their master if they did not dare to fight against his views when they thought him wrong...**

It is difficult to separate Lenin from his fraction, where unanimity of views was born from a virtually continuous discussion on big questions just as much as on temporary tactical questions,

Moreover, there is no doubt that it was Lenin’s capacity to bring together, through struggle in the realm of ideas, such diverse elements, and such opposite personalities, men of such contradictory tendencies, Zinoviev, Stalin, Kamenev, Sverdlov, Preobrazhensky, Bukharin, which really explains the success of his organizational work; the “column of steel” which the Bolsheviks wanted and did become, was born, as well as from the “wonderful proletariat” spoken about by Deutscher, from the brain of the man who chose this path of party-building.

But this same thing explains Lenin’s solitude. Not a single man in the party, in the end, will come up to the level of his abilities: he will have auxiliaries and pupils, collaborators and comrades, but it was certainly only with Trotsky that he found a companionship on a footing of equality — Trotsky, whose very personality perhaps explains why he did not become a Bolshevik or recognise the hegemony of Lenin before 1917.

It was this which made him, among the old Bolsheviks, a man who could not be replaced, even if, as Preobrazhensky said, he was “less the man at the helm than the cement holding the mass together”.

For, if one admits with Bukharin that the Party’s victories were due as much to its “Marxist firmness” as to its “tactical flexibility” — and that was the view of the old Bolsheviks — it must also be recognised that in both these respects only Lenin was the inspirer, and that with time, educated by their defects, those Bolsheviks who crossed swords with him learned to yield.

But the revolutionary period, in plunging him into history which was being made by the millions, left him no time to train the generation of those who would have perhaps been able to continue his successful work. In any case, that is the hypothesis suggested by the Party’s history up to Lenin’s death, a death which only served to permit there to be born, from this essentially anti-dogmatic thought, the dogma of “Leninism” which finally was substituted for the Bolshevik spirit which he had been able to create.

**What kind of “new politics”? Laurie Penny debates Workers’ Liberty**

**Thursday 27 January, 7.30pm  
University of London Union, Malet St  
<http://bit.ly/dTZBfm>**



“...a real proletarian army” — a strike at the Putilov engineering factory was the prelude to the 1917 revolution

## The Lenin who thought the working class would work “miracles”

Lars Lih, author of a 600-page study on *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is To Be Done In Context*, has written a new book, *Lenin, a short biography* (Reaktion Books, spring 2011).

In his earlier book, Lih comprehensively turned upside down the conventional wisdom, Stalinist and bourgeois alike, about *What Is To Be Done?* According to that conventional wisdom, the main idea in *What Is To Be Done?* is that the workers were reluctant to support socialism, or anything more than trade unionism, and needed a forceful, authoritarian party to pull them along. In fact Lenin’s main idea was that the workers were ready and eager to hear the Marxist message, and that the Marxists must lift themselves up to be adequate to the workers, rather than dawdling and underestimating the workers.

At the Historical Materialism conference in London on 13 November 2010, Martin Thomas from *Solidarity* asked Lars Lih to tell us about his new book.

**My new book on Lenin is a much shorter one, and that’s right for the sort of book it is. I have one unifying theme in the book.**

If the book were shorter, then I would not be able to follow the theme worked out through the different periods of Lenin’s life. If it were longer, the main theme would be lost in detail.

I’m also proud of the illustrations in the book. I’ve tried to get away from the more familiar pictures of Lenin, and to include less-known illustrations which better help convey what Lenin really did.

The main theme of the book is summed up by a quotation from a speech in commemoration of Lenin made by his widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, in 1924. Lenin, she said, had organised his life round “the grand idea of Marx” that “the working class can be the leader of all the labouring people and all the oppressed”.

Lenin had a very exalted idea of the workers who were going to lead the labouring people to emancipation. You could almost say that he “believed in miracles” — he believed that the working class could do what would seem to be miracles once the socialist word was brought to it.

His view of his own role can be summed up by another quotation, from Lenin himself in a tribute to the Bolshevik leader Yakov Sverdlov, who died in 1919: “The history of the Russian revolutionary movement over a period of many decades contains a list of martyrs who were devoted to the revolutionary cause, but who had no opportunity to put their revolutionary ideals into practice. In this respect, the proletarian revolution, for the first time, provided these formerly isolated heroes of the revolutionary struggle with real ground, a real basis, a real environment, a real audience, and a real proletarian army in which they could display their talents...”

**Q. Some people argue that Lenin’s comment in his notes on reading Hegel’s *Logic*, in 1915, marked a sharp turn in his political thinking. “It is impossible completely to understand Marx’s *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel’s *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!”**

A. I don’t think so. It was an aphorism which he threw off casually, and now it has become the only thing anyone ever quotes from those notebooks. I think the people who quote it may know Hegel very well, but they don’t really understand how Lenin worked.

He didn’t change his basic positions. Of course, he got involved in new polemics — with Bukharin and others on the national question, for example — and developed his positions in that way. But he did not change his outlook and view of the world revolutionary situation.

**Q. Those same notebooks of Lenin contain comments saying that this or that passage in Hegel “is so obscure that nothing can be understood”. So did Lenin mean by his aphorism that he himself did not understand *Capital* even after reading Hegel? Moreover, the shift in Lenin’s views is usually said to amount to him moving from a theoretical outlook which owed much to Kautsky to a new one. But when Lenin wrote *Imperialism*, the next year, in 1916, he based his analysis — and his polemic against the positions Kautsky had adopted by 1916 — on ideas about imperialism which the younger Kautsky had developed.**

A. I think *Imperialism* is another example of Lenin defending “Kautsky then” against “Kautsky now”. In general I think Lenin’s “homework assignments” — works where he takes a topic, studies, takes notes, and reports back what he finds, like *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, *Imperialism*, and *State and Revolution* — are not the real heart of Lenin.

The real heart of Lenin’s thinking is found, I think, in shorter articles, and in some longer pamphlets like *What Is To Be Done?* In those you find the main theme which I mentioned, again and again.

**Q. And in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*?**

A. Yes. That pamphlet deserves to be better-known. Lenin’s preoccupation or even obsession with Kautsky there indicates his personal debt to Kautsky. In 1919 you found people saying: why is Comrade Lenin going on about Kautsky? Kautsky was not a major political figure any more.

But dealing with Kautsky was important for Lenin. Even *State and Revolution* was in large part motivated by Lenin wanting to deal with Kautsky’s reply to Pannekoek from 1912.

In fact, if it weren’t for Kautsky we would have almost no systematic, coherent attempts by the Bolsheviks to expound

their views. *State and Revolution*, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, *Terrorism and Communism* (Trotsky), *The Economics of the Transition Period* (Bukharin), and so on, were all written as responses to Kautsky.

**Q. In my view, with the April Theses of 1917, in substance Lenin came over to Trotsky’s perspective of “permanent revolution”. But you don’t think so...**

A. In the debate between the “Old Bolsheviks” and Lenin in spring 1917, I think the “Old Bolsheviks” came nearer to being right about the class dynamics of Russian revolution than Lenin. Lenin overestimated the differentiation of the peasantry and therefore underestimated the potential support for a thorough-going democratic revolution.

The debate was about whether the bourgeois revolution was finished in Russia. Lenin said it was finished. The “Old Bolsheviks” who said that it was not finished, and therefore there remained many radical democratic tasks such as liquidation of the noble landowners as a class, were right.

**Q. But the leading “Old Bolsheviks” in that debate, Stalin and Kamenev, advocated critical support for the Provisional Government...**

A.. In my view, critical support is a misleading summary of their tactics. Stalin’s and Kamenev’s perspective was to replace the Provisional Government with the soviets. For example, Kamenev explained that when he demanded that the Provisional Government publish the secret treaties, that was not because he thought it would do it, but so that the workers would see that the Provisional Government wouldn’t do it and see the need to replace it.

**Q. Is that an explanation that Stalin and Kamenev gave when on the defensive in the debate with Lenin?**

A. No, that’s before Lenin got back to Russia. The debate was about whether the bourgeois revolution was finished, and Lenin said it was...

**Q. Not quite, I think...**

A. I think he did. And if you look for a point where Lenin clearly changed his views, this is it. Later he would say that the bourgeois revolution had not been carried through until late 1918. And later still, in 1921, he would say that all the Bolsheviks had managed to do was to carry through measures of the democratic revolution, that even that was not finished, and they had not really started yet on socialist tasks.

Trotsky’s view back in 1905 was that the peasants would not support the workers for socialism, but the workers might get away with making a socialist revolution without open revolt from the peasantry. Then either international revolution would change the balance, or you would eventually end up with a civil war with the peasantry.

Lenin never quite thought that the workers could get away with making a socialist revolution unless the peasant majority supported socialism. This was the main reason he limited his perspective to democratic revolution before 1917. He did think in 1917 that the peasants, or a large section of them, might rapidly move towards supporting socialism. He overestimated the differentiation in the peasantry. Later he realised he had been wrong. This is shown, among other things, by the fact that the Bolsheviks abandoned the “poor peasants’ committees” at the end of 1918.

Maybe Trotsky’s theory was closer to being right as a description of what would happen. There was a civil war with the peasantry later, in 1930, when collectivisation was imposed...

**Q. Except that then the force conducting the civil war against the peasantry was not the working class, but the bureaucracy which had suppressed the working class... How did you start on your research? How did you become interested in writing on Lenin?**

A. My first book, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914-1921*, was about food supply in Russia. My research on this topic got me interested in war communism the name often given to the Bolshevik policies of 1919-1920. Lots of people were saying that war communism had been a time of crazy policies, so I looked into it and found that it wasn’t so. I hope to publish a collection of my articles on this topic in the near future.

Then I got into a larger-scale research project on the Bolsheviks. My intention at first was to move away from a Lenin-centred approach, and see the Bolsheviks in a broader way.

As you can see, it hasn’t happened that way, since I have ended up writing quite a lot about Lenin. But I think the originality of my take on Lenin owes a lot to the fact that I have read what other Bolsheviks and Social-Democrats wrote, as well as Lenin. I’m hoping now to get back to researching the Bolsheviks more broadly, putting Lenin as leader into his context.

My motive in it all has been less in drawing political conclusions than a more academic urge to get things right. I’d always been interested in the Russian Revolution. But it was a lucky day when I got involved with all this. It’s been very stimulating, and I have grown to depend very much on critical reader response.

## Democracy? Yes! AV? Hmmm...

**Martin Thomas opens a debate on the Alternative Vote referendum due on 5 May**

The division among Labour MPs cuts across the usual left/right lines.

On the left, Katy Clark, Kelvin Hopkins, and Ronnie Campbell, are against AV; John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn for. Tony Benn, no longer an MP, backs AV. Hard Labour right-wingers are also to be found on both sides. Ed Miliband is for AV.

Unite and the GMB oppose AV.

AV means that you vote not just for one candidate but also for second, third, fourth, etc. preferences. Preferences are transferred from losing candidates until some candidate, with the help of transfers, tops 50% of the vote.

The broad idea is similar to the two-round voting system in France and other countries, but the detail has important differences. The main country where AV is used is Australia — for the federal House of Representatives and all state elections except in Tasmania.

I don't think we should back it.

On the face of it, AV would make it easier for small left parties to gain votes (by pledging second preferences to Labour). Experience from Australia indicates that it would do that very little, or not at all.

In Australia the Socialist Alliance and, over history, quite big minority parties — the Communist Party of Australia in its heyday, the Australian Democrats, the Greens, the Democratic Labor Party — have done badly under AV, worse than minority parties in Britain.

Proportional Representation is more democratic than First Past The Post. But a change to AV would be likely to gazump PR. No new pressure for electoral reform could have effect until after AV had become discredited, which would take at least a few general elections. And AV could be stable. It is in Australia.

In Australia AV pushes parties into alliances based on agreements to exchange second preferences, polarising politics into a bloc dominated by Labor and one dominated by the Liberals (Tories).

At polling booths the parties distribute "how-to-vote" cards advising their supporters how to use their second, third, etc. preferences. Voters in Australia generally follow that advice (even when you'd think they wouldn't).

It seems this is what Ed Miliband hopes for from AV — a future where a semi-permanent Lib-Lab coalition could dominate parliament.

In the short term, AV would give the Lib Dems enough extra seats to "win" the next election however we vote, short of an electoral earthquake. They will be able to decide the government, either by a pre-election deal to swap preferences with Labour or Tories, or by a post-election coalition deal with one or the other.

Longer-term, AV could marginalise the Lib Dems, reducing them to a junior partner of one or another of the bigger parties, as the Nationals in Australia have become a junior partner of the Liberals.

That depends on how the Lib Dems choose to play the system (a semi-permanent preference-swap deal with Labour or the Tories? National preference-swap deals decided election by election? Locally-decided preference-swaps? No preference-swap deal?) and how the electorate responds to that choice.

This murkiness is not a gain for democracy.

The AV referendum is also likely to be, to some degree, a referendum on the coalition government.

The Lib Dems are likely to campaign hard for AV. They want to have something to show from the coalition. The Tories will oppose AV, but quite likely in a low-key way. Labour's anti-AV contingent is likely to be more vocal than its pro-AV section.

**AV: Lib Dems need something to show from being in the coalition**

## Great film-making, stomach-turning politics

**Clive Bradley continues his series on Bafta and Oscar award nominees with a review of great British hope *The King's Speech***

*The King's Speech* is prominent in the shortlist for the 2011 Baftas (and other awards — lead actor Colin Firth has just won the Golden Globe award for best actor; it won a shelf of British Independent Film Awards; and it's sure to get Oscar nominations).

It is firmly in the tradition of British "heritage drama" — stories about the upper classes, set in the past, appealing in particular to American audiences. More particularly, it walks the path of other British films successful internationally both with critics and audiences about the royal family. Stephen Frears' *The Queen* did well a few years back; before that there was *Mrs Brown*, about Queen Victoria.

This stars Colin Firth as King George VI — or "Bertie" — who will become king when his brother, David, aka Edward VIII, abdicates to stay with his divorcée American wife. So far, so familiar. Less well-known is that Bertie/George (that is, the father of the current Queen, if you're not up on your royals), suffered from a debilitating stammer — embarrassing for someone obligated by birth to public speaking, but potentially disastrous for a man who must, for instance, declare war on Hitler.

His wife, the late Queen Mother, played here as a game and slightly saucy young thing by Helena Bonham-Carter (who, remember, is a personal friend of the current Prime Minister), sets out to help cure him of his impediment, securing the services of an Australian speech therapist, Lionel Logue, played by Geoffrey Rush. George/Bertie's relationship with his colonial subject is fraught, because as therapist he brooks no nonsense, and his patient is, after all, second in line to the throne, and then, well, King. (Oh how lovely the late Queen Mother is when she graciously allows the therapist's wife to sit as they drink tea.) And, of course, in the turning point to Act Three, the (now) King and his therapist fall out — just at the moment when he needs his firm but friendly advice most.

This is when, as King, he must speak to the nation, nay the Empire, about war having been declared on Germany. Imagine the national disgrace should he stammer while performing so important a task. (All right, everyone already knows about it and Churchill has already done it, better. But he's the bloody King.)

This climactic scene — spoiler alert! — sums up the film. It's well-written, beautifully performed (Colin Firth will probably get the awards he didn't get, but was generally considered due, for *A Single Man*), nicely shot, etc. But it de-

**Colin Firth (Bertie), Helena Bonham-Carter (Elizabeth)**

pends on you buying into the idea that at this moment, announcing a war in which millions — millions — of people will die, what really matters is whether or not the King can get through his speech without stammering. Personally, I couldn't give a shit.

There is an interesting story about the abdication of Edward VIII — which is briefly touched on, here: that he was notoriously pro-Nazi, and the Establishment was glad to see the back of him in favour of the more patriotic and amenable George. (In one of those strange examples of synchronicity, "David"/Edward VIII has also cropped up recently in the revamped *Upstairs, Downstairs*, and in Channel Four's excellent *Any Human Heart*; there's something in the air).

I don't know much about the writer of *The King's Speech*, David Seidler, though it feels relevant to mention that he's American. The movie feels like it's been designed to appeal to that market (and the American Academy). It would be wrong to criticise film-makers for making cynical choices for commercial ends: film is a commercial medium, and anyone working in it has to make a living, and in any case no choice guarantees success.

On one level, *The King's Speech* deserves the accolades and audiences it has won: as a self-contained entity, it's a good piece of work. It's when you think about what it wants you to feel about the world (it ends with a caption declaring that George VII went on to be "a symbol of national resistance") that it might turn your stomach.

## Terror on the US-Mexico border

**Dan Katz reviews *Amexica* by Ed Vulliamy**

**There's not a clean, pleasant capitalism in one place — glitzy, high-tech, full of good food and happy people — and a separable, unfortunate area of poverty, unemployment and misery. The whole system contains both.**

Capitalism's scientists create fantastic drugs that are then denied to people who haven't enough money to pay for them; amazing electronic gadgets are made by people paid pennies; shiny new products are produced, as rivers and skies are polluted and the planet heads for meltdown.

Jammed up against the 3,200km US-Mexican border, on the Mexican side, is an area which appears to contradict that general observation. Here we have: the most naked sweatshop production in maquila factories; drug wars which have left 28,228 dead (*LA Times*) since 2007; torture and almost unbelievable cruelty; arms trafficking; whole towns under gang control; vast people-smuggling operations; the systematic mass murder of women ("femicide"); extraordinary levels of corruption and a merging of drug gangs with the state; widespread abuse of human rights by state forces.

And yet part of the point of Ed Vulliamy's book — starting with the title, *Amexica* — is that America and Mexico are intimately bound together, and increasingly so. Capitalism ties them and draws them closer: the sweatshops and drugs suppliers are meeting US demand; US arms dealers send weaponry south. More than that: what seems to stop at the US's border, doesn't. The Mexican drug cartels have a lot in common with normal capitalist companies, and their mid-

dle management can often be found living just over the border; they often sub-contract jobs, and killers or distributors may be unsure of which cartel they are working for. And, like other big capitalists, they buy political power and media (using extreme violence where necessary, too).

The drug cartels ship hundreds of tons of cocaine, heroin, marijuana and methamphetamines to 20 million regular drug-users in America. Organisations such as the Sinaloa cartel and the Gulf cartel have sophisticated networks which operate in more than 200 US cities. According to the US Justice Department, drug sales are worth \$39bn annually. Drug money is often laundered by US banks; the US state estimates \$29bn goes back to Mexico each year — that is the equivalent of 319 tonnes of \$100 bills.

Felipe Calderon, Mexico's president since December 2006, vowed to crush the drugs gangs. The Mexican government has now deployed 45,000 troops along the border, supplementing heavily compromised police forces, to try to counter the cartels — and they are failing.

Vulliamy dates the latest phase of narco-violence to the defeat of the Mexican PRI in the elections of 2000. The PRI, corrupt and "corporatist", had run Mexico for 72 years. The victory of Vicente Fox and Calderon's PAN party broke the relationship between the existing smuggling gangs and the local state machines. It created a "free market" scramble among the criminals and a spiral of violence. "The narco-cartels are not a criminal pastiche of contemporary, multinational late capitalism — they are part of it and operate according to its ruthless values — or, rather, lack of values."

Unity not possible?

## Aim: a united stewards' movement

Dave Chapple chair of the National Shop Stewards' Network (NSSN) spoke to *Solidarity* about the NSSN conference on 22 January which will discuss proposals from the Socialist Party to set up another anti-cuts centre in rivalry with CoR and Right To Work.

The weakness of the NSSN is that it's never succeeded in building a grassroots shop stewards' network. That is something which remains to be built if the Socialist Party does not succeed in wrecking the NSSN on Saturday.

I don't think those of us who genuinely want to build the NSSN have made many mistakes; I think some groups within the trade union movement have their own agendas, but the trade union movement is also very weak at the moment.

Had the Right to Work breakaway not occurred and had the SP not had its own agenda, then we could have had a totally united movement in the left wing of the trade unions. We would have had more success, but with the limitation that the union movement is very weak.

A merger [of all the anti-cuts campaigns] won't happen if the SP wins on 22 January, because of the sectarianism which exists. For example you have the ridiculous idea that just because the Coalition of Resistance contains some Labour activists you

can't merge with it, as if Labour activists make something unclear.

It's not realistic to say [as the AWL do] that if an anti-cuts campaign is set up on Saturday then it should merge with the others, because it won't.

Of course we are for one anti-cuts movement, but sometimes injecting common-sense into a situation doesn't work.

No-one's going to give up [on building a rank-and-file network], but it will make it very difficult. I wouldn't call it a split on Saturday if it happens, because NSSN's a network, not a democratic socialist organisation. I don't want to go on in an SP shop stewards' network. There are discussions going on about what people will want to do next.

I have avoided using the term rank and file movement because that term has a chequered history. I prefer shop stewards' network because it is based on the democracy of the trade unions, rather than being a Johnny-come-all thing. We have seen such things in the past, and they have been controlled from the start.

**RTW, COR, NSSN: fight for anti-cuts unity!**

[www.workersliberty.org/node/15208](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/15208)

**The future of the National Shop Stewards' Network**

[www.workersliberty.org/node/15643](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/15643)

## COR focuses on 26 March

By Daniel Randall

The first meeting of the Coalition of Resistance National Council was held on 15 January.

The main political blocs on the Council (which is over 100 people) are Counterfire (the key animating force behind CoR), Green Left and Socialist Resistance. There is a handful of SWPers, a few from Workers' Power, individuals from smaller left groups and a scattering of independents.

The first session consisted of speaker after speaker making long, windy speeches that reminded us all that cuts were bad and that we needed to fight back.

My proposal that CoR support the National Campaign Against Fees & Cuts was voted down. I had sought to remove a line from CoR's founding statement which committed CoR to calling a conference "to establish a united national campaign" on the issue of free education. This could easily be interpreted as an attempt to replace or replicate existing campaigns — hardly in the spirit of CoR's aim to "supplement, not supplant" existing networks. But leading Counterfire member Lindsey German opposed the amendment

and insisted the proposed conference would go ahead. Counterfire students, including ULU president Clare Solomon, have been prominently involved in NCAFC activity. Do they support NCAFC or don't they? And if so, why the ambiguous wording that makes it sound as if they intend to set up a separate campaign?

An amendment that would've committed CoR to helping facilitate discussions about a united left challenge to the NUS leadership was also defeated, as it was apparently "not in CoR's remit." A mild proposal from Workers' Power on working independently of trade union leaderships where necessary was also defeated. Following the national affiliation of Unite, CoR seems concerned not to ruffle too many feathers in the left bureaucracies.

There was an enormous emphasis on building for the March 26 TUC demonstration. Fine — it needs to be built for. But the emphasis at times tipped over into fetishisation.

There also seemed to be confusion, never properly resolved, on exactly what CoR's role was. AWL believes the movement needs a single, united anti-cuts campaign.

## Support Contact Centre strikes

By a DWP worker

**3,500 civil servants in the Department for Work and Pensions will strike on Thursday 20 and Friday 21 January against dramatic changes to their work conditions.**

The workers, members of the PCS union, are based at seven sites across the country — Bristol, the Chorlton district of Manchester, Glasgow, Macclesfield, Newport, Norwich and Sheffield. The offices currently process benefit claims and deal with enquiries on the phone. Now management are "transforming" these sites into call centres.

DWP has been moving

to a call centre model of working for a number of years. PCS advocates dealing with claimants face to face.

Telephony work is universally hated by workers in DWP due to the work regime, known as scheduling, and the tyrannical management. Contact Centre Directorate, as it is known, has the highest rates of sick leave, turnover and mental health problems, such as stress and depression, in DWP.

The workers are demanding proper access to flexible working, as enjoyed by other workers in DWP, varied work and an end to the target culture.

Many PCS activists in

the areas concerned have complained about the delay in balloting for action. The initial proposals were announced in November 2009!

The work is organised presents problems in taking effective action. Telephony work in DWP is on a virtual network. Management can divert calls to any number of the contact or benefit delivery centres that are not on strike, and can take calls. PCS has issued no guidance to branches on what to do if the work of strikers is diverted to non-striking PCS members.

But this is a vitally important dispute that is about re-gaining some dignity at work.

## Southwark teach-in

**On Monday 17 January adult education students organised a teach-in at the Thomas Calton Centre in Peckham.**

They were protesting at a steep rise in fees by Southwark Adult Education. Students now have to pay up to £165 a term for three hours a week. Concession fees have also been cut.

The fee rise is the result of a change in the way the local Labour-run council is interpreting the rules which govern central government funding.

Students say the fee rises will make the courses unsustainable. Local people will not be able to afford and an already run down service will be further cut. [southwarksaveadultlearning@gmail.com](mailto:southwarksaveadultlearning@gmail.com)

## Heinz strikers take fourth day of action

**Workers at a Heinz plan in Wigan struck again in January for a fourth time in a long-running pay dispute with their bosses.**

Workers had decisively rejected a pay deal which would have meant a 3.5% increase in 2011 and a 3.4% increase in 2012. A further strike was planned for Wednesday January 19, but following the latest strike management had offered a 3.9% increase in both years. Workers were balloting on the new offer as *Solidarity* went to press.

## Support Rawmarsh strikers

By a Rotherham NUT member

**National Union of Teachers members at Rawmarsh Community School in Rotherham are taking discontinuous strike action over savage cuts in staff at the school.**

Last term the Head and governors announced 30 redundancies — including 20 teaching staff — before April 2011. The threat of NUT action has reduced this number, and set redundancies back until July. However teachers voted unanimously to strike to protect all the jobs.

The situation seems to be due to bad financial planning by the governors and LEA. But the redundancies at Rawmarsh will have a devastating affect on students' education and well-being — larger class sizes, increased workload for teachers. And Rawmarsh school serves a community which suffered brutally at the hands of Thatcher and won't see any sympathy from Cameron.

Now teachers are being put through a humiliating and demoralising proce-

sure of a skills audit to assess who will face redundancy. Some feel they are being targeted for removal in an unfair and demeaning process.

But striking staff are organising a vibrant and democratic strike, with an active strike committee. Meetings are being held everyday to discuss latest developments and plan leafleting, publicity or rallies.

This strike is an inspiration to all those facing similar situations an example of solidarity. Striking staff have decided that the strike will not be divided by announcements of who is to be made redundant in their numbers.

Lessons can be learnt here for how to fight redundancies in schools because there are surely more on the way.

Send solidarity messages from individuals or branches to NUT rep [ralphdyson@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ralphdyson@yahoo.co.uk)

## Birmingham bin workers take on the council

**Birmingham's Tory-led council has made a number of concessions in a dispute with refuse workers, who suspended their ongoing work-to-rule and a planned strike.**

Bosses have backed off from making a proposed 20% pay cut and has offered a 4-day week of 9.25 hours per day. Many workers are sceptical about the decision to abandon strikes, believing that it puts unions in a position of

weakness in ongoing negotiations. The dispute has its roots in a significant pay-cut which in turns results from an equal pay dispute. The bin workers' struggle is particularly important given that Birmingham is one of the authorities pursuing mass dismissals across the board; if the bin workers are defeated, bosses will take it as a green light to push through cuts elsewhere.

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## “Operation Malone”: don’t come forward, don’t snitch

By Ira Berkovic

In the 1980s, the satirical magazine *Private Eye* nicknamed the police operation set up to track down individuals involved in the Brixton riots “Operation Wogs-masher”.

What nickname should we give “Operation Malone”, the police initiative now underway to track down and arrest “trouble-makers” on the recent student demonstrations? “Operation Teen-Snatcher”, perhaps?

Already, Edward Woollard has been handed a jail sentence of 32 months for dropping a fire extinguisher from the roof of Millbank Tower.

Woollard, who is 18 and who has no previous history of law-breaking whatsoever, has been given a longer sentence than some child abusers or rapists. That is not to call for longer prison sentences, but to expose the utter hypocrisy of a bourgeois justice system which says Woollard’s crime deserved more severe punishment than some members of the Derby-based paedophile ring sentenced in the same week.

What Woollard did was undoubtedly stupid but not worthy of a 32-month sentence.

The police’s next prominent target was a protester captured on camera with what appears to be a petrol bomb. His image was plastered all over the media;

### Police are the real criminals

the police asked people who know him to come forward, or for the person himself to turn himself in.

Woollard’s case shows that coming forward and pleading guilty early won’t spare you from a severe sentence. Someone suspected of being the “petrol bomb boy” has already been arrested and bailed until March. He is 14 years old.

This is a massive operation. Eighty Metropolitan

Police officers are involved. Already, more than 200 suspects, mostly in their late teens or early 20s, have been arrested and the FITWatch website, which reports on police brutality and police tactics on demonstrations, was

shut down.

Police have released various CCTV line-ups and are calling on suspects to come forward.

The message of the left in the student movement must be: don’t come forward!

“Operation Malone” is about sending a message that protesting is a dangerous business that we would all do better not to get caught up in.

The thought of nearly 100 coppers combing through CCTV footage could make some people think twice about coming along on a demonstration in future. The brutality we have seen from the police on the demonstrations themselves also aims to create a climate in which taking direct action is seen as something that will get you locked up or beaten up.

We have to send a message back to the police and the politicians who are trying to take away our rights.

AWL members have been involved in launching the Right to Resist campaign, an initiative aimed at mobilising student and labour movement activists around demands to rein in the power of the police and stop them undermining

## Right to Resist

[righttoresist.wordpress.com](http://righttoresist.wordpress.com)

## “Unity is all we have”

Eamonn Lynch is a tube driver and RMT rep who was recently sacked from his job. Despite a tribunal finding in his favour, he is yet to be reinstated. His workmates have so far taken two days of strike action to support him. Eamonn spoke to *Solidarity*. These comments are extracted from a longer interview at [tinyurl.com/eamonnlynch](http://tinyurl.com/eamonnlynch).

The campaign has been absolutely phenomenal. I have been humbled by the support all my work colleagues have shown. They have consistently shown that they are the best men and women can be, and I salute each and every one of them.

To have your workmates take industrial action and lose money to show their support really is humbling and difficult to put into words, but essentially that’s the point of being a trade unionist. Unity is all we have, and we have to send that message loud and clear to our bosses. We will not sit idly back and allow them to pick us off one by one. We will do what’s right because it’s right, and taking strike action is our ultimate sanction. We should not be afraid to use it.

We have had two magnificently supported days of action so far, and now we challenge London Underground to do the right thing and reinstate me.

The tribunal judge has ruled against the company for interim relief. That means I am currently sitting at home on full pay until the full employment tribunal in March.

I am not going to let the management into our thoughts on where we take the campaign next. Support is still very strong on the ground despite managers threatening disciplinary action for taking strike action. We are deter-

### Striking in support of Eamonn

mined to have the company reinstate me.

It is a basic right of workers in the UK not to be unfairly dismissed. This dismissal is automatically unfair. No pay off or toothless judgement from the employment tribunal that says the sacking was unfair will suffice. It is illegal to sack workers in this fashion. London Underground are not above the law, and that is what we are determined to show. Reinstatement is the objective: nothing more, nothing less.

My personal view is that the company is targeting RMT activists with a view to break the strength of the union. However, I believe this will backfire on them; unity is our strength, and victimising a few of us will only serve to strengthen our resolve.

We are trade unionists because we abhor discrimination and victimisation. We will not accept our comrades being treated so unfairly and we will fight to ensure we all receive equal treatment.

If we allow London Underground to go ahead unopposed with these job cuts, we will all suffer. Of that there is no question. The Mayor has already indicated where he wants the job cuts to end. Drivers will be on board with this fight now.

## 2,000 jobs threatened at Manchester council

By Darren Bedford

Manchester’s Labour-run city council plans to get rid of 2,000 jobs as part of £110 million cuts.

The council has been hit hard by Coalition cuts to local government funding, which disproportionately affect working-class areas. The council claims to want to avoid compulsory redundancies. All staff are being asked to consider voluntary redundancy. All staff over 55 are being asked to consider early retirement.

Given the scale of that pressure from manage-

ment, workers would be forgiven for asking how “voluntary” the redundancies actually are.

The cut represents a reduction in the workforce of nearly 20%, which the council claims it *has* to make. Its leader, Labour’s Sir Richard Leese, said “the accelerated cuts mean we can no longer achieve the staffing reductions we have been forced into through natural turnover, which is why we are proposing a time-limited offer of voluntary severance and voluntary early retirement.”

Blaming the central government funding cuts is an easy and all too familiar

get-out for Labour council chiefs. They can indulge in anti-cuts posturing while not having to lift a finger to resist the implementation of cuts. Unions representing council workers, principally Unison and GMB, should use their affiliation to the Labour Party to force Labour councillors to refuse to pass on cuts.

Manchester Unison’s statement accepts “the need for a voluntary severance programme given the financial circumstances,” but Unite has already announced that it is “considering” a consultative ballot. A Unite press release said “this is the clear result the

coalition’s austerity measures and cutbacks to local government funding announced before Christmas. It will have a devastating effect on services and the people that use them. Unite will campaign to reverse these savage cuts which will hit some of the most vulnerable in society – but these cuts won’t impact on the bonus-riddled City elite that caused the financial crisis in the first place.

“Unite members will be considering a consultative ballot for industrial action to stop these cuts to a hard-working and dedicated workforce, providing important services to the com-

munity.”

Speaking to *Solidarity*, Unite’s regional officer Keith Hutson said “when the initial announcements came out, our members were very angry. That’s putting it mildly. We’ll be running a consultative ballot to gauge members’ feelings ... and we’ll be explaining the full range of industrial actions that are available to them.

“We want to build mass campaigns across the community as well to link the issue of job cuts to cuts in services.

“Our members live in Manchester too so they’ll also be losing the services

they currently provide. There’s no way you can say that losing 2,000 staff won’t affect frontline services.

We’re starting the campaign now; we’re already communicating with members, at home and at work, and we’ll be having a series of mass meetings. We’ve traditionally had a good working relationship with the council as an employer but that’s going to be tested now.

“Ultimately we hold the government responsible. The financial elite caused the deficit crisis, but we don’t see them being asked to take the squeeze.”