

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 262 26 October 2012 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

For a workers' government

**Savile and
the BBC**
page 3



**Class struggles
in South Africa**
page 5

**Hobsbawm on
democracy**
page 11-12



Planned for 2013

AVALANCHE OF CUTS!

Fight back: see pages 8-9



What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

The editor (Cathy Nugent), 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

● Printed by Trinity Mirror

Get Solidarity every week!

- Trial sub, 6 issues £5
- 22 issues (six months). £18 waged
£9 unwaged
- 44 issues (year). £35 waged
£17 unwaged
- European rate: 28 euros (22 issues)
or 50 euros (44 issues)

Tick as appropriate above and send your money to:
20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG
Cheques (£) to "AWL".

Or make £ and euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub.

Name

Address

I enclose £



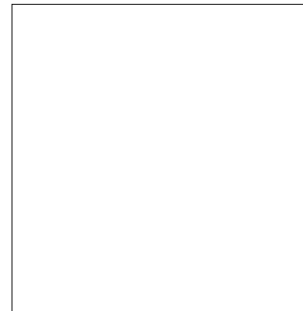
No way to create police accountability

By Robert Theakston

On 15 November, people in England and Wales will have the opportunity to vote for a Police and Crime Commissioner in each of the 41 police forces across England and Wales.

The PCCs replace the existing Police Authorities and will be in charge of holding the police fund, producing a "Police and Crime Plan" — which includes policing priorities and objectives — and a set of policing targets. That in turn is supposed to be used to hold the chief constable to account.

The Conservative Party — who created the role — have argued that Police



Lord Prescott: clean hands?

Commissioners are "the most significant democratic reform" to policing in England and Wales "in our lifetime".

We know this is a lie. The police cannot be "democratised", and Police Commissioners have no real powers to "hold the police to account". They do not

have the power to stop the police from crushing strikes, arresting and harassing trade unionists, assaulting workers and students on demonstrations, or murdering people in custody.

Nor can the Police Commissioners end the systemic, institutional racism of the police.

Unbelievably, the Labour Party have stood John Prescott as their candidate for Humberside Police Commissioner; a man allegedly responsible for the cover-up of the racist murder of Christopher Alder by Humberside Police 14 years ago.

While claiming to oppose the establishment of PCCs, Labour has nonetheless stood its own candidates in

the elections and poured vast resources into campaigning for them.

This is at a time of massive cuts and worsening poverty.

Labour Party activists' time would be better spent building the fight against the cuts and privatisation, on campaigning in the party for Labour Councils to refuse to implement any cuts and for Labour to commit to rebuilding the NHS as was agreed at its conference.

Socialists should also be using this time to counterpose the working-class alternative to the police and to demand that institutions such as MI5, MI6, TSG, and other special forces be immediately abolished.

Tony Osborne

By Janine Booth

I'm sad to report the death of Tony Osborne.

Some comrades will remember Tony coming to AWL events before he became too infirm. Others will remember him as our election agent when two AWL members stood as Socialist Unity candidates in the 2006 council elections in the Hackney Central ward.

Tony was a tireless community activist, particularly passionate about working-class people's right to decent housing.

He was the Secretary of our estate's Tenants and Residents Association until his death, keeping the TRA going through a decade-plus of improving the estate's facilities and environment, winning improvements to homes, and fighting off various at-

tempts by the Council to privatise and/or "redevelop" it.

He was also active in the borough-wide tenants' movement.

Tony was liked by everyone on our estate, with the unusual quality of being respected by all generations. He was also a popular character with Hackney's anti-cuts activists, and with the many campaigning and community groups that regularly used our community hall.

Residents are asking the Council to consider renaming the hall the Tony Osborne Community Hall.

He was also a great friend of me and my family. We're gutted.

• If you'd like to send a message email solidarity@workersliberty.org and we will forward it on.

Tories tell poor: "stop breeding"

By Clarke Benitez

Iain Duncan Smith has announced that the government is considering capping children-related benefits at two children, essentially telling poor families to stop breeding.

He explicitly said the move is being considered in order to disincentivise poor families from having more children: "When you look at families across the board across all incomes, you find the vast majority make decisions about the number of children they have, the families they want, based on what they

think they can afford," he said, while criticising the "clustering" of larger families on welfare and benefits.

Fancy words only thinly disguise social prejudice. What he means is: "the poor breed like rabbits."

The move is estimated to save £200 million, a tiny fraction of the new £10 billion cuts currently being sought from the welfare budget.

The Tories are determined to make procreation — like education, travel, and decent housing — an area of life accessible only to the rich.

Bed cuts plan in NW London



By Vicki Morris

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt will take the decision in 2013 on whether to close four A&E units in North-West London, against a backdrop of massive bed closures in

the eight-borough area.

The A&E units are at Charing Cross, Central Middlesex, Hammersmith and Ealing hospitals. The campaign against closure has included local marches, including one march of at least 2,000 people in Ealing where the local council has delivered leaflets opposing closure to all of the residents.

NHS North West London's consultation on the

closure plans has just finished. Their plan, "Shaping a Healthier Future", suggests that patients could be diverted from hospitals into more treatment in the community, but union representatives have pointed out that community health services are themselves being cut.

According to Health Emergency, the plan is to reduce hospital admissions by 158,000 a year — 148,000 emergencies and 10,000

elective cases — and outpatient attendances by 600,000 a year.

Health Emergency also claims that there are additional plans to axe more than a quarter of the 3,449 available beds in the NHS North West London area.

In the light of this, Health Emergency is calling for the consultation to be re-opened so that the bed cuts can be factored into plans.

150,000 on TUC march

Over 150,000 people demonstrated in London on 20 October and tens of thousands more in Glasgow and Belfast.

There were many flashes and flurries of militancy on the London demo — from direct action against companies involved in “workfare” to disability activists blocking Park Lane and stopping traffic at the end of the demo.

Despite discouragement from the TUC, there were a number of lively feeder marches. These included several thousand from South London anti-cuts groups and more than a thousand on a student bloc organised by the student left through the University of London Union.

Although 150,000 is still very big — a clear indication that, despite setbacks, vast numbers of workers want a fight — it was smaller and less militant than March 2011.

This is not a surprise. The 26 March demo came at a time of “ascent”, a few months after huge student protests and just before the first strikes to defend public sector pensions.

• Full report of the London and Glasgow demonstrations: workersliberty.org/tucdemo

Jobs massacre at Ford plants

By Darren Bedford

Ford has announced plans to close two UK plants, with unions putting estimates for the resulting job losses at around 2,000.

Unite leader Len McCluskey said that union thought that 10,000 further jobs along Ford’s supply chain could also be threatened.

“Ford has betrayed its workforce”, he said. “Unite is going to fight these closures. This announcement has been handled disgracefully. Only a few months ago Ford was promising staff a new transit model for Southampton in 2014.”

The transit van factory in Southampton and the stamping plant in Dagenham are set for closure, with transit van production potentially moving to Turkey.

The announcement came a day after Ford closed a plant in Genk, Belgium.

More than 4,000 workers lost their jobs.

Justin Bowden of the GMB said: “Ford’s track record in Britain is one of broken promises and factory closures.”

Ford workers in the UK have already struck this year over attacks on pensions.

The company has said it plans to shut the plants next year; stewards should immediately begin planning an industrial and political campaign to resist closure, up to an including sit-ins and occupations.

Former Birmingham council workers’ equal pay win — bit.ly/XZonMi

Pay-outs to wealthy on the rise

Dividends are the portion of profits which companies pay out to shareholders instead of investing in expansion, holding the money in reserve, or handing it over in the guise of top bosses’ pay and bonuses.

Dividends paid out in 2012 will total around £78.6 billion (*Financial Times*, 22 October). This is a 16% increase on 2011, and to a level way above the pre-crisis in 2007.

Some dividends go to pension funds, which in held 5.1 per cent by value of UK shares, and some pension funds pay out to working-class people. But even in pension funds the big pay-outs go to the well-off; and it is only 5.1% of the share value which they hold (on the latest official figures, from 2010).

The great bulk of dividend payments go to the rich. Their total in one year, almost £80 billion, is about twice the total reduction in all annual government spending (including cuts in military spending, which socialists do not object to) which the Government plans to achieve by 2015.

Learning the wrong lessons from BBC Savile scandal

Press

By Pat Murphy

Anger and outrage at the vile crimes committed against children is of course universal, as is shock that the widespread rumour about Savile were never acted upon and the victims were ignored. If you read any of the *Mail*, *Express* or *Sun*, however, there is no avoiding their sense of glee that the organisation at the centre of the controversy is the BBC.

The publicly-funded broadcasting corporation is a target for the right-wing press at the best of times, portrayed as the main source of left-wing propaganda, purveyor of loose morals and a tax-payer funded competitor to the privately-owned and profit-making media corporations. In the aftermath of Leveson, when the tabloid press are at their lowest standing for decades, a chance to redress the balance by lambasting the BBC is one not to be missed.

That said, the substance of the criticism of the BBC, even in the right-wing tabloids, is actually fair.

On the day after BBC Director General, George Entwistle appeared before the Media Select Committee the *Mail*, for example, chose to emphasise three key failings at the BBC.

There was, they said, a culture of sexual harassment, citing among other witnesses, Liz Kershaw who reported being groped by a fellow DJ while live on air.

There was a pattern of belittling the victims of harassment summed up in a leaked email which revealed that one Beeb executive argued that the alleged victims were teenagers so they “were not that young”.

And there was a reliance on unacceptable and lame excuses including the statement, in the same leaked email, that it was all a long time ago, similar behaviour went on

elsewhere and things were different then.

The problem with the right-wing attack on the BBC is not that it is inaccurate or even that it is partial. The fact that other organisations may have allowed the same behaviour and been guilty of the same excuse-making doesn’t lesson one iota the culpability of the BBC.

The problem is inconsistency and hypocrisy. There are lessons to be learned from the Savile affair but the right-wing press is determined not to learn them.

BLAMING VICTIMS

Jimmy Savile, Gary Glitter and others like them got away with their crimes in large part because they were at the height of their fame in a time when children were expected to know their place, when allegations made by children against adults were not taken seriously let alone believed, when rape victims were blamed not defended.

In almost every edition of the *Mail* and *Express* you will read highly-paid columnists bemoaning the end of that era and urging us to go back to it. Melanie Phillips and Peter Hitchens in particular date the end of modern civilisation from the 1960s with the advent of the pill, legalised abortion and the permissive society. They don’t acknowledge the link to, or consciously wish for, the bad bits of their imagined golden age, but they do work for a return to the culture of deference and patriarchy within which the likes of Savile thrived.

A stark and shocking example of this could be found in the belated confession of columnist Anne Atkins. Having preached her peculiarly reactionary morality at us on Radio Four’s “Thought for the Day”, over breakfast for years, Atkins revealed in the *Mail on Sunday* that she had failed to report a known paedophile because he was a family friend.

She described how a friend told her he had been sexually

abused by another, older, mutual friend, a man who “was then, and to some extent still is, in a position of authority over other teenagers.” When asked why she didn’t report him she said, “the shocking thing is that it never occurred to me”. So all that faith and God turned out to be useless in the face of a moral no-brainer.

Melanie Phillips has decided that the cause of Jimmy Savile’s crimes and impunity was “the increasing sexualisation of young girls”. A growing issue in the 21st century, but can she really believe this was any kind of explanation for the 1970s and 80s? And the early sexualisation of girls is a problem mainly because of the way it denies and cuts short childhood not because of the “temptation” it places in the way of predatory adults. To suggest otherwise is just another variant of the idea that scantily-clad women cause rape.

In fact Phillips’ argument develops into a wholesale objection to sexual freedom and openness, seemingly oblivious to the way in which sexual repression and ignorance allows abuse to flourish.

On the more grimly amusing end of tabloid coverage was the *Sun*’s reaction to Entwistle’s select committee appearance. Under the headline “Baffling, Bumbling, Clueless” the paper mocked the Director General for his poor memory and lack of curiosity when he was alerted to the *Newsnight* item on Savile which was pulled by the programme’s producer. He failed to ask what the contents of the programme were. He couldn’t remember why he hadn’t asked.

Fair criticism, perhaps. But it is not just Entwistle whose memory is failing him. What other chief executive of a major media corporation has recently displayed a startling lack of curiosity and memory loss in the face of serial wrongdoing at the heart of their organisation?

Answers on the back of a postcard please, to the editor of the *Sun*.

Balls: learn from the right?

By Martin Thomas

The *Financial Times* reports that one European state has broken ranks with the neo-liberal consensus and started Keynesian policies of extra state spending rather than cuts to deal with the crisis.

It is... the solidly right-wing government in Sweden. It has announced plans to spend SKr23bn to boost growth, and said it will invest more if the downturn gets worse.

Swedish prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt says he can do it because Sweden's debt and deficit levels are much lower than others'. But if he's right (as he is) that extra state spending can help drag capitalist economies out of recession, that truth holds also for more indebted states.

Back in 2010, running for the Labour leadership, Ed Balls was an aggressive Keynesian, arguing that the British government should spend more on economic expansion rather than cutting, or at least rather than cutting as "far and fast" as the Tories.

Since then Balls has rather been proved right. The Tories' cuts have produced renewed recession and an increase, not a cut, in the budget deficit. But Balls has toned down his "Keynesian" line. He has not made it more strident.

In Sweden the leader of the opposition Social Democrats, Stefan Löfven, responded wretchedly by warning darkly that Reinfeldt's growth policies could harm Sweden's budgetary discipline, and moaning that the right had "had stolen many of the left's ideas". There are a few differences, he whined: the Social Democrats want to increase benefits, not cut employers' taxes.

But if Balls would say even that, it would be an advance.

Italy: scandals deepen crisis

By Hugh Edwards

In the early 90s, Italy — in the midst of a deepening economic and financial crisis — was shaken by the most serious political events since the rise of fascism in the 20s.

A systematic and widespread network of corruption amongst the political establishment and big business was exposed. Bribery and embezzlement were now the *modus operandi* of the Government itself, orchestrated cynically by the then coalition-Socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi.

The "Tangentopoli" ("Bribesville") scandal brought down the post-war political order of the First Republic and the centre-right Christian Democracy under whose hegemony Italian capitalism and its bourgeoisie emerged as a significant force in Europe and the world.

The "self-made" billionaire entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi and his new party, Forza Italia, in alliance with the populist Lega Nord, won the first post-Tangentopoli elections.

On his government rested the hopes — the fantasy! — of not only the economic and financial world in Italy (and elsewhere), but every vehicle of the most profound reaction in the country — led, of course, by the Vatican — that Berlusconi, the corrupt, depraved criminal and Mafia associate from Milan, would whip into competitive and moral shape a society the Christian Democratic burghers of its First Republic had brought to the edge of the abyss.

The truth is, as current events graphically show, "Bribesville" never disappeared. The "fundamentals" that have long defined Italy's obscene reality have swollen exponentially to an unstoppable, poisonous tide, sweeping across every part of economic and social life — tax evasion, fraud, embezzlement, bribery, blackmail and, as Roberto Saviano's novel *Gomorra* indicated, the influence and consolidation of the criminal world at every point.

It needed the markets to unseat Berlusconi, and the arrival of the technocrats led by the pious Monti, a denizen of some archaic

Vatican sect, to provide a focus for the despair, frustration, impotence, and confusion at the heart of the widespread "anti-political" sentiment in the country.

Though from the financial sector he was popularly received as an honest man! Even the fact that the most enthusiastic support for the savagery of his austerity measures came from the now dismissed political forces did not, initially, qualify that.

FEROCITY

But as the ferocity of the attacks on conditions and rights have continued to fall on the working masses, and the paucity of the measures, despite the rhetoric, against the rich and powerful everywhere, a sea-change is observable.

It began with the corruption scandals that have rocked the Lega Nord, then the dissolution of the council of Reggio Calabria for mafia infiltration (the 52nd time it has occurred!).

Most recently, the collapse of the regional government of Lazio in Rome, and Lombardia (Milan).

Lazio, led by a neo-fascist governor in Berlusconi's party, involved literally and "legally" the wholesale theft of millions of public funds (Italians are compelled to contribute to all major political parties, as they also must make to all the major bourgeois newspapers) by council members.

Lombardia, again of the right unchallenged in power and mired in filth of every kind since 1995, revealed a thriving network of votes for cash, run by the Calabrian mafia, securing both the election of officers and the mafia grip on the lucrative market of public administration contracts.

A recent report states that half the regional councils may be in their hands in the north. Similar eruptions are occurring in regions like Piedmonte, Emilia Romagna, and other cities. Symptomatically the opinion polls speak of the end of the honeymoon with Monti and the collapse of the centre-right parties. The centre left leads, just ahead of the "5 Star Movement" of Beppe Grillo. The abstentionist current stands at nearly 30%!

With new elections following the end of Monti's term in office in March, such a picture is anything but reassuring to the EU/ECB/IMF Troika and the markets. So far, from their point of view, Monti has done well, with the spreads on Italian bonds at their lowest since the crisis began.

But a political crisis is looming, if the "anti-political" anger grows side by side with widening social protests and disorder. With the eclipse of the right, the spineless centre left looks to be the only political base for the bourgeoisie to offer the "democratic" option. That is why the pressure on Monti increases, as a rallying point for a "responsible" opposition.

The putrefaction of Italy's institutions and political life has always been evident underneath a veneer of bourgeois civility.

What happened in Genoa in 2001, when Italian police violently repressed anti-capitalist demonstrators and murdered Carlo Giuliani, a young activist, should warn us of what may be in store.

French car workers defy plant closure

From *Convergences Révolutionnaires*

The announcement by the PSA group (Peugeot Citroën) of their decision to close the Aulnay-Sous-Bois factory was officially made in July.

But since June 2011, with the exposure of a secret document [about the closure], activists in the factory had been preparing the struggle against the closure.

On 12 July, a general assembly brought together 800 workers; daily meetings followed. The experience of strikes in 2005 and 2007 pointed the way, in the following week, for a committee for preparation of the struggle to be created.

Around 160 delegates were elected across all sectors: trade union reps, rank-and-file union members and many non-union workers.

The "house" union, SIA, had up until that point joined in action with the CGT [France's biggest

union confederation], but this time refused to join the committee, apart from delegates from Ferrage.

On 25 July the unions of the PSA group unanimously refused to make any declaration regarding the redundancy plans; this blocks the whole procedure for the time being and gives time to organise a response.

In July, Hollande like Montebourg [government Minister of Industrial Renewal] had feigned indignation against PSA. After the summer [the government changed tack].

On 11 September, the expert nominated by the government, Mr Emmanuel Sartorius, gave the green light to PSA in their decision to close the factory.

The bosses have recruited extra security, some of whom have on their CV... fighting in Chechnya! They have also brought over staff from other sites on certain days to "protect industrial tools at Aulnay"!

The press focussed on the

"social return" [demonstration] on 4 September at Aulnay, but several days were needed to relaunch the mobilisation, to which end meetings of the struggle preparation committee took place.

On 11 September, the day of the hand-in of the government expert's report, general assemblies of two teams in the morning and the afternoon, plus a rally at shift change, brought together around 800 workers.

Decisions were: opening the toll booths at Senlis [i.e. organising free entry], demanding a meeting with Hollande, and a demonstration at the complex in Aulnay on 29 September, with participation from Sanofi, Air France, and all the enterprises confronted with the redundancy plans.

The action at the Senlis toll booth on the A1 road brought sympathy and money from motorists and lorry drivers!

On 20 September, 400 Aulnay workers met with Hollande, without many illusions, given the surprise smack of the Sartorius report, but nevertheless with some hopes.

In fact the response must be organised in a different direction: joining up struggles on all PSA sites, and more broadly, all sectors. That process was begun at the 29 September meeting, as workers from Roissy, Carrefour, Ikea, Magneto and Sanofi were present as well as Ford workers from Bordeaux.

Preventing job losses can only be imposed by struggling together. Workers from threatened workplaces must meet to develop co-ordination.

The day of action and the demonstrations of 9 October will give us the opportunity to do this.

• *Convergences Révolutionnaires* is the magazine of L'Étincelle, a faction within France's New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA)

Capital versus labour in South Africa

By Martyn Hudson

"The worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class which he represents, and for the realisation of the measures which that domination implies... Thus he necessarily finds himself in an unsolvable dilemma. What he can do contradicts all his previous actions, principles, and the immediate interests of his party, and what he ought to do cannot be done. In a word, he is compelled to represent not his party or his class, but the class for whose domination the movement is then ripe. In the interests of the movement he is compelled to advance the interests of an alien class, and to feed his own class with phrases and promises, and with the asseveration that the interests of that alien class are its own interests. Whoever is put into this awkward position is irrevocably lost."

Friedrich Engels, *The peasant war in Germany*, 1850

At the KDC East gold mine outside of Johannesburg 8,000 workers were sacked this week for refusing to return to work.

At the same time, the commission of inquiry into the killings of the 34 miners at Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana was opened. Initial evidence presented to the enquiry indicated that 14 of them were shot in the back as they turned to run from the police gangs.

As the inquiry opened there were several shocking detentions of Marikana leaders and the leader of the local Marikana solidarity campaign. The police wanted to intimidate those giving evidence about the police and the vicious gang regime of the mining companies.

They Marikana leaders were detained as they returned from the commission. They were taken from their taxis, kicked and beaten as they lay on the ground and were threatened with being killed. They were all key witnesses.

A class war is being consciously waged against the workers by the forces of law and order. Far from the ANC reining in its bootboys it is avidly proselytizing for

Marikana miners won their demands. Now their leaders are being hounded by the ANC regime

its own version of events, in which the miners were murderous gangs evading the control of the officially-sanctioned trade unions.

Meanwhile, the labour dispute is spreading throughout the mining territories and, according to observers on the ground, is turning into a generalised struggle against the corruption of the ANC and its backers in the international mining corporations.

Mining corporations like Lonmin are not only enemies of working class self-organisation but also actively foster the genocidal cliques in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There, the sourcing and mining of mineral wealth by the corporations goes hand in hand with the destruction of whole communities.

But in South Africa the democratic settlement of 1994 was also a ruling *against* the working class and *for* corporations then nervous about some kind of transition to social democracy or "soviet power" under the ANC.

In the wake of the collapse of the Stalinist states in eastern Europe F W De Klerk calmed the fears of international capital and negotiated the transition to the governance of the tripartite alliance of the South African Communist Party, the COSATU union federation, and the ANC.

This week even the *Economist* waded in to criticise the ANC leadership arguing that its nepotism was bring-

ing South Africa to the brink of political and economic collapse. It pointed to the "declining quality of the government, growing social stresses and worsening conditions for investment". The incompetence of the government in dealing with the mining catastrophe was making corporate investors nervous.

Certainly the strikes and the burgeoning call for workers' ownership and control in the mining areas are a sign that the two golden decades of neo-liberal governance is now being tentatively overcome.

**ANC
Ironically for both capital and labour the problem lies in the nature of the ANC itself.**

Governing in the name of a black working class which had hoisted it to power on the back of its liberation struggle but unable and unwilling to challenge the rule of capital, it eased and developed capitalism in South Africa rather than satisfying the urgent and growing needs of the working class.

As the *Economist* has pointed out, ANC membership is "a ticket for the gravy train. Jobs in national and local politics provide access to public funds and cash from firms eager to buy social influence". The dishing out of contracts to public works programmes to the cliques provide comfort and finance for a one-party state enriching itself.

Yet, for all its faults Mandela's "Freedom Charter" of

the early 90s pointed to the need for vast public works programmes, proper housing for the majority of black South Africans, education, and a development programme for the South African economy based on the recognition of the needs of labour. Even in 1997 COSATU was arguing for a state in which the ANC was "transforming how work was managed — towards workers' control and worker self-management — to empower working people". Theoretically this is still COSATU policy. Yet far from delivering reforms and empowering the workers, ANC has stabilised capitalism in South Africa.

This is why the eruption in the mining territories is so significant — it threatens capital and free trade at the same time as it undermines the social base of the ANC itself, and the idea that it is the force for working-class emancipation.

The political revolution, regime change and transition to democracy in 1994 was for the socialist Neville Alexander about the intersection between national-liberationist, liberal-democratic programmes, and the socialist left, each with its own base in a variety of social forces.

The "National Democratic Revolution" as it was perceived on the left, was an attempt to square the circle of these competing programmes, ultimately without success.

Success came to the corporate backers of the ANC

state and economy and the international investment in the system by transnational corporations. Mining in particular continued with the same relationship with free trade as it had done under apartheid.

The rhetoric of anti-colonialism issued by the ANC left and its social forces represented by Malema is itself a smokescreen. Its focus on race actually undermines workers' self-understanding, and entrenches the power of the black middle class of the ANC. The at-

tempt to forge a democratic multi-linguistic and non-racial South Africa is not served by tribalist cliques continuing their reliance on what Neville Alexander called "the technical hocus pocus of the apartheid racial ideologies".

The task is to support working-class self-emancipation through a working class seeing itself as a class against, physically and ideologically, the power of the ANC and capital.

The search for national unity and a national ideology was always doomed to fail in South Africa — the contradictory racial and class genetics inherited from colonialism meant that the Rainbow Nation was never going to last much longer than Mandela himself.

Socialists should continue to agitate for consistent and extreme democracy in the industries, housing projects, inquiries, and political congresses. They should address the key question of the differing needs of the urban and rural poor.

They should educate the new generation of militants into a socialism free of the taint of personal enrichment and the intolerance of dissent represented by the tripartite alliance.

Health care in China

By Rhodri Evans

Despite becoming the favourite hunting-ground of global corporations greedy for cheap labour stripped of rights, China still claims to be "communist" or "socialist".

So it has a good health service? Better, surely, than shamelessly neo-liberal Britain?

The Chinese people don't think so. So great is their frustration that in 2010 (the latest year with official figures) there were 17,000 protests or attacks directed against doctors or hospitals in China.

In a recent case, Wang Hao, a trainee doctor at a hospital in northern China, was stabbed and killed by a 17-year-old whom he had never even treated: Dr Wang was just

unlucky to be in the way when the exasperated patient lashed out.

Yet so exasperated are many more Chinese that a poll by the official *People's Daily* found two-thirds of the people it asked saying that they were "delighted" to hear of the attack.

There is practically no primary health care — GP surgeries, clinics — in China. If you want medical help, you have to go to a crowded hospital. There, you have to pay, and on top of the official payment you usually have to pay a bribe to get a doctor's attention.

The doctors are so low-paid that they take bribes and are widely suspected of prescribing additional, useless but expensive, treatments to those patients whom they do see.

ANTONIO GRAMSCI: WORKING-CLASS REVOLUTIONARY

Antonio Gramsci was a leader of the Italian Communist Party in its revolutionary days, and spent all of his last years bar a few weeks in Mussolini's fascist jails. *The Prison Notebooks* he wrote in jail have been quarried to justify many varieties of reformist or liberal politics.

This booklet discusses a major recent study on the *Notebooks* — Peter Thomas's *The Gramscian Moment* — and argues that the *Notebooks* were in fact a powerful contribution to the working-out of revolutionary working-class strategy in developed capitalist societies.

£4 from AWL, 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG. Order online at www.workersliberty.org/gramscibook

Book launch

Speakers: Martin Thomas in discussion with Peter Thomas, author of *The Gramscian Moment*.
7pm, Wednesday 31 October, at University of London Union, Malet Street WC1

Books from Workers' Liberty

What is capitalism? Can it last?

With articles from Leon Trotsky, Max Shachtman, Maziar Razi and many more. Edited by Cathy Nugent. £5 — buy online from tinyurl.com/wiccil

Working-class politics and anarchism

Debates between members of Workers' Liberty and comrades from various anarchist traditions. £5 — tinyurl.com/wcpanarchism

Treason of the Intellectuals

Political verse by Sean Matgamna.
£9.99 — tinyurl.com/treasonofintellectuals

October 20: media blackout

Eric Lee



Mainstream media coverage of the labour movement is, as we all know, awful. But just how awful it is became clear following the TUC demonstrations on Saturday, 20 October.

The BBC, to its credit, led the news at nine o'clock with coverage of the march and rally. But it chose not show any of the trade union speakers — not even a soundbite — and instead showed a few seconds of Labour Party leader Ed Miliband saying something stupid and being booed. That was so predictable that it could almost have been written before the event even took place with the film clip of Miliband added later. That was the story the BBC was going to run with all along.

Sky News, unsurprisingly, ran the exact same clip. Miliband getting heckled and booed by the crowd. It looked like he was the only speaker, and the only message anyone heard was his commitment to a "realistic" policy of painful cuts and more austerity.

One almost wonders why people were in the streets demonstrating if all we wanted was more cuts, except under a Labour government. The TUC's message was completely ignored.

Sky of course went looking for trouble, and found a clip of some police wrestling with anti-tax-avoidance demonstrators on Oxford Street. This actually had nothing whatsoever to do with the TUC demonstration, which was quite peaceful. But it made for exciting television, I guess.

The BBC and Sky, it must be said, at least acknowledged

that something like 150,000 people had taken to the streets, though neither gave a very clear picture of why this happened.

But the *Guardian's* sister newspaper, the *Observer*, completely ignored the march and rally. It wasn't buried — it wasn't deep inside the paper somewhere — it was as if never happened.

I admit that I didn't buy the *Sun*, *Mail*, *Express*, *Independent*, or *Telegraph*, but from what I can tell, none of them put the march on their front pages either.

The front page stories in the *Observer* focussed on Tory disenchantment with David Cameron's leadership and an article on racism in football.

One would have thought that a colourful photo of the demonstration might grace the *Observer's* front page, but that didn't happen.

Now here's the odd thing about the *Observer* (and *Guardian*): they appear to be newspapers for those people who see themselves as caring about injustice and wanting a better world. They are full of articles bashing the Tories and ads for charities promoting social justice.

People who read these newspapers will in many cases even think of themselves as progressives, as people of the left. But the newspapers themselves have no interest whatsoever in the one social force that is actually challenging the Tories in the streets — the trade union movement.

Unions, it seems, are just not newsworthy. Not even for newspapers read by people who think of themselves as progressives.

Britain's unions desperately need a daily newspaper of their own — and that newspaper is not the *Morning Star*.

A European general strike?

Letters

The TUC General Council is supposed to be committed to investigating the practicalities of a general strike. Unite's general secretary Len McCluskey asked the crowd in Hyde Park on Saturday if they wanted a general strike. and got a resounding yes.

The National Shop Stewards Network and the Socialist Party are asking the TUC to name the day. In fact we already have a day: 14 November. As things stand, there are plans for simultaneous general strikes in five countries, three major — Spain, Portugal and Greece — two minor — Cyprus and Malta.

Saturday's large CGIL rally in Rome heard calls for a general strike from the crowd in Piazza San Giovanni — unfortunately, CGIL general secretary Susanna Camusso has said that she needs to discuss this with the leaders of the CISL and UIL, who are likely to sabotage plans for Italian involvement; CISL did not even participate in the recent Italian public sector general strike.

If this international general strike goes ahead, it will be unprecedented in the history of the European labour movement. The only previous attempt at something of this sort — on the initiative of the Comintern in July 1919 — flopped due to the last minute treachery of the leaders of the French CGT and of many, but not all, Italian trade unions.

The bosses' austerity offensive is being conducted on a European scale. Our response must be European, not national. The EU/ECB/IMF Troika can not be beaten in one country. Nor can the UK escape from the austerity agenda by simply withdrawing from the EU as certain of our more militant union leaders — the RMT executive in particular — believe. An independent capitalist Britain would be more closely linked to the American neo-liberal agenda, rabidly hostile to trade unions and the welfare state.

Equally an independent capitalist Scotland, like an independent capitalist Catalonia, is a blind alley. The problem is

not the English or the Castilians but international capitalism.

The ETUC is committed to a "day of action" against austerity on 14 November. Whilst its demands and plans are, predictably, inadequate, we must take advantage of this call to urge the maximum of solidarity action with our brothers and sisters in Southern Europe.

Even if we can not push the union leaders into calling for a general strike in the United Kingdom, we must make sure that as many activists as possible are aware of what is going on across the channel and that any "day of action" over here is not limited to some poorly attended lunch time rallies in a handful of locations.

Toby Abse, south London

Hobsbawm, Labour, and the popular front

I agree with the thrust of what Sacha Ismail wrote in his letter in *Solidarity* 261 ("Hobsbawm, party and class", 17 October).

I could have been more precise with my phrasing, because in the article I unintentionally conflated the debate about party and class in Marxism with Hobsbawm's support for the Labour Party machine in the 1980s.

With reference to Hobsbawm and the 1980s I meant that in his autobiography where he justifies his support for Kinnock, Hobsbawm was overly concerned with the continuing integrity of the Labour Party, as against the prospect of it splitting up in the course of left-wing struggle.

Sacha is correct in saying that the deeper roots of why Hobsbawm thought this were more to do with his political popular frontism than any understanding of the nature of the proletarian vanguard.

This is not least because, in the absence of any sizeable Communist Party, the rightwards-moving Labour Party was clearly central to any sort of "broad popular alliance" in Hobsbawm's popular frontist schema.

Liam McNulty, east London

Rebuild from the base!

is part can do that. A re-run of 30 November, by itself, can't.

SWP's and SP's invoking of the future 24-hour general strike as the sunrise which will dispel all Tory darkness is misleading in two ways. Firstly, no government would give up just because of a 24-hour general strike.

Secondly, the agitation evades the issue of what replaces the current government if the coalition does break up.

A Labour government pushed to deliver improvements by strong pressure from the unions which fund Labour and control 50% of the votes in its conference would be a step forward.

But no 24-hour strike can guarantee that. If the labour movement does not have a better political option than the current miserable Labour leadership, then the Tories could well win a general election even after industrial militancy had broken up the current government coalition. Strikes can do many good things; but they are not a tool to win elections.

And if the Tories lose...? Ed Miliband is aiming for a Labour/ Lib-Dem coalition, or a right-wing Labour government continuing many Tory policies, and the unions are not seriously challenging him on that. Strikes are not a substitute for political action to change political options.

The SWP and SP slogans express wishful thinking rather than a clear idea of means and ends.

What about a full, open-ended, continuous general strike rather than just a 24 hour one?

An open-ended, continuous general strike, though still not a substitute for politics, would indeed change the political framework.

Unless cut short by bourgeois concessions or working-class exhaustion or betrayal, a full general strike would, by its own momentum, develop towards a direct challenge to capitalist power in general, not just to the current government.

A full-scale general strike is a serious thing! If it were on the agenda now, the worst thing for the labour movement would be slippery, demagogic agitation, drawing out none of the implications, such as SWP and SP provide.

In fact no-one campaigns for a continuous general strike now.

If by some freak the TUC were to call "now" for a full general strike, then not enough workers would come out for it to be effective. It would be a fiasco.

This year looks like being the lowest for strikes since the record lows of 2005 and 1997-9. In the first eight months of 2011 there were 225,000 striker-days. Compare: 2011, 1,388,000 — 2010, 365,000 — 2009, 456,000 — 2007, 1,040,000.

In a time of social crisis, this ebb can change quickly into flood-tide (perhaps, for example, by big battles elsewhere in Europe stirring up Britain). But such change will not come through a call by the TUC.

If you need ideal conditions before you call for a general strike, then you will never do so.

AWL's forerunners did agitate for a general strike in 1972 — when, in July, there was a spreading mass strike movement to force the release of five dockers jailed under Tory anti-union laws, and the TUC called a one-day general strike, cancelled when the dockers were set free.

We agitated for a general strike during the miners' strike of 1984-5.

At both those times SW rejected a general strike slogan as too advanced. In 1972 it eventually started talking about a general strike — but only, it emphasised, "as propaganda", not as agitation, and only after the TUC had made its call. In 1984-5 it glumly insisted that "the downturn" (average annual striker-days for 1980-5: 9.8 million, about 30 times as many as 2012) made large action impossible.

The SP, then called Militant, has advocated "24-hour general strike" in all times and tides.

In 1984 they could have made a difference by using their strong position in Liverpool Labour council to pull the Liverpool labour movement into a local general strike against cuts, a move for which there was wide support. Instead they made a rotten compromise with the Tories.

Against both catchpenny opportunism and timeless formula-mongering, we recommend Trotsky's precept: "to base one's programme on the logic of class struggle".

Does it make sense to make calls for a "24-hour general strike" our focus now?

The chief things to press in the unions are mobilisation now against the attacks now; democratic discussion of a strategy of ongoing action to win; and clear union demands on a Labour government to replace the Tories.

With those, a 24-hour general strike — in other words, a bigger version of 30 November 2011 — could greatly increase confidence and solidarity. Without them, it would be just a protest.

The TUC congress in early September voted to consider a general strike. Len McCluskey of Unite, Mark Serwotka of PCS, and Bob Crow of RMT, backed that call on 20 October. *Socialist Worker* and the *Socialist Party* picked up on that and went for "General Strike Now" (SWP) or "24 Hour General Strike Now" (SP)?

The SP is strong in the leadership of the civil service union PCS. It wriggles out of fighting now against pay freeze, job cuts, pension cuts, etc., by saying that that only a general strike, or something close to a general strike, will do.

The invocation of a general strike (and not in fact "now") becomes not a means of advance, but a means of evading or downplaying the immediate struggles whose escalation is the way we might get to a general strike.

In 2011, SWP and SP focused on hyping up the 30 June and 30 November strikes. SW headline: "November 30: our day to smash the Tories".

The SWP decried (as "boring") calls from AWL for democratic mass meetings of strikers on those days, to debate future strategy and demands. They opposed calls from AWL for self-controlling strategies of rolling and selective strikes.

The effect was to leave workers, after the great mobilisation on 30 November, passively waiting for the union leaders to name another day, and easily sold out on 19 December 2011. We don't want a repeat in 2013.

You think a 24-hour general strike is unrealistic?

150,000 was a big turnout for the TUC's 20 October 2012 demonstration. But it's smaller — unsurprisingly so after 19 December 2011 — than the 500,000 on 26 March 2011. (Both figures TUC estimates).

Demanding the TUC call a general strike can't reverse the ebb. Organising and winning battles now, and fighting effectively for rank-and-file control in the unions, can.

Maybe some unions are considering another big multi-union one-day strike in early 2013, primarily against the public sector pay freeze. That's better than nothing.

But for it to be more than a lower-key re-run of 30 November 2011, the movement must be remobilised.

On 20 October AWL headlined "Fight for a workers' government". That's even further away than a general strike.

We are for advanced slogans which raise our sights above the humdrum of immediate possibilities. Only, we're against slogans which tend to divert away from tackling the hard tasks of today by way of abstractly appealing to a future great dawn which will make them all easy.

A 24-hour general strike could defeat or beat back the Tories!

An escalating movement of which a 24 hour general strike

Help us raise £15,000

AWL members sold several hundred copies of this newspaper on the 20 October TUC demo in central London.

Our paper has two prices — 80p waged and 30p unwaged — to make it more accessible to people on low incomes. But on the demo, and regularly on street and estate sales, people ask us why we don't copy the *Metro*, a paper read by hundreds of thousands of people, and give *Solidarity* away for free? Wouldn't we then be able to "compete" with the mainstream media?

In a word — no. A revolutionary socialist paper produced by a small group is never going to "compete" with the reach of a mainstream publication, owned by a huge capitalist corporation, with millionaire backers, and financed by advertising.

But how seriously do people take the *Metro* or the *Evening Standard* anyway? Certainly they have some role in influencing and shaping people's opinions. But articles read in a publication acquired for free on a tired journey to or from work are unlikely to make much of an impact.

We want *Solidarity* to make a different kind of impact, and asking for a small financial contribution is one way of making the act of obtaining a copy a more serious exchange than picking up a free-sheet.

But the money we make from selling copies of *Solidarity* is only to cover our costs and is just part of the financial support the AWL relies on to survive. We rely much more on regular financial contributions and donations, so we're able to continue producing the paper and other materials, and sustain our activist work.

Help us raise £15,000 by May Day 2013. You can contribute in the following ways:

- Taking out a monthly standing order using the form below or at www.workersliberty.org/resources. Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.

- Making a donation by cheque, payable to "AWL", or donating online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

- Organising a fundraising event.

- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.

- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL. More information: 07796 690874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.



Total raised so far: £1,861

We raised £778 this week from sales of literature and merchandise on the 20 October demonstration and increased standing orders. Thanks to Duncan and Dan H.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

.....

Account name:

Account no:

Sort code:

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

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20

(year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

An avalanche of cuts

The TUC's "A Future That Works" march, 20 October: PCS "tax justice" banner; Unite union contingent; trade union leaders lead the march — but what about opposition to the cuts?

By Colin Foster

Birmingham City Council's Labour administration has forecast it will lose almost half its current controllable expenditure by 2017.

The council spends about £3.5 billion each year, but much of that is set by central government policies beyond its control. The "controllable" part of the council's budget is about £1.2 billion, and it is set to lose £600 million.

Council leaders warn of "the end of local government as we know it".

Northamptonshire's Tory council has presented council unions with a choice for April 2013: 3.6% pay reduction and other cuts; or more than 300 compulsory redundancies.

Sometimes councils hype up such warnings so that, closer to budget day, they can push through horrible cuts with the excuse that they are, after all, less than the meltdown first predicted.

The underlying fact, though, is that local services are the hardest-hit major sector in the coalition's planned cuts. Central government funding for local government is being cut 27% from 2011-2 to 2014-5, while council tax is effectively frozen.

CRUEL

April 2011 and April 2012 council budgets saw cruel cuts. April 2013 will be more cruel. With each year the cuts get closer to the bone.

Labour councils which think they can pass on Tory cuts and still be "fair" will get a shock. They will box themselves in to making, not just cuts, but some of the sharpest and most hurtful of the Tory cuts.

Also in April 2013 comes what at least one Labour council leader, Catherine West in Islington, has called "the new poll tax".

"Next April, when high income earners start to benefit from the Tory-led government's cut to the 50p tax rate, millions of people with the lowest incomes will receive council tax bills they cannot afford to pay because of the government's changes to council tax benefit.

"5.9 million low-income households benefit from council tax benefit — more than any other means-tested benefit in the United Kingdom. [But] the Government will cut the funding councils receive by 10% and ask local councils to develop their own local scheme to collect the council tax required to make up the difference".

On average, people who currently don't pay council tax are likely to be made to pay £4 or £5 a week.

Overall, about 70% of the cuts the Government planned in 2010 are yet to come through. The planned cuts in welfare benefit spending in 2013-4 are over twice as big as in 2010-3 combined.

Two of the biggest items in 2013-4 are the phasing-out of child benefit for households with a high-waged member (from January 2013) and the rolling-on of the cut in contributory Employment and Support Allowance (what used to be Invalidity Benefit) which results from that allowance being automatically stopped after a year for disabled people who are told that "their condition means they should be preparing for work".

In April 2013 the Government's cap on the total benefits that a household can receive comes in. Housing benefit cuts which started in April 2011 are still rolling on. The final transitional protection for people who were already claiming will expire at the end of 2012.

Even a *Daily Telegraph* blog post aiming to show that the left had been needlessly scaremongering about those housing benefit changes found that Westminster's Tory council reckons on about 1,200 extra people becoming homeless as a result of the cuts. Homelessness has risen by 26% over the last three years. Many other people will be holding on to their homes by taking more money out of their other benefits, or low wages, to make good the gap now opened up between housing benefits and rents.

Still only a proposal, but reaffirmed by George Osborne in October as part of a wish for £10 billion extra welfare cuts, is the withdrawal of all housing benefit from all under-25s. The Government has cut the budget for new social housing by 60% over four years, and is pushing councils to set rents for new tenants at or near private-sector rates.

Another new measure from April 2013 is the replacement of Disability Living Allowance, for working-age people, by Personal Independence Payments. The government's own estimate is that harsher criteria will throw 500,000 people off this benefit by 2015-6.

Increases in public-sector workers' pension contribution rates from April 2013 will be much larger than in 2012-3, and the cumulative effects of the Government's paring-away at Working Tax Credit will also be bigger in 2013-4.

INEQUALITY

The British Social Attitudes survey, published in mid-September, found the proportion saying that "unemployed benefits are too high and discourage work" had risen to 62%. It was only 24% in 1994.

Behind that finding, almost certainly, lies the big fall in average workers' real wages since late 2009, a fall which is set to continue for several years more.

This is the first time there has been a sizeable and sustained fall in real wages in Britain since the 1920s. It must make some workers think that if wages are falling, then benefits should be cut too.

Over time, more and more will realise that most of the benefit cuts hit, not some special class of idlers, but people in working households on low wages; and some of them hit a lot of people on middling and higher wages too.

After being bailed out by the taxpayer in 2008, banks are set to make about £35 billion profits this year. That is a sum comparable to the total cuts planned by the coalition government in education and welfare by 2014-5.

Despite a few high-profile bankers such as Stephen Hester of RBS being shamed into not taking bonuses, the banks and other financial firms paid out £13 billion in bonuses in 2011-2.

Dividends paid out to shareholders in 2012 will total around £78.6 billion. This is a 16% increase on 2011, and to a level way above the pre-crisis in 2007. Directors' pay at the top 100 companies rose 49% in 2010-11 and 14% in 2011-2.

In short, top bosses and profiteers are doing very well. The cuts in benefits and the driving-down of wages are not alter-

Syriza supporters, TUC march

and schools would be protected from its cuts. But in October 2011 the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that around two-thirds of primary schools and over 80% of secondary schools would see real-terms cuts between 2010–11 and 2014–15; and that estimate didn't include, for example, the impact of diversion of resources to the Government's favoured "free schools".

The Government plans £50 billion cumulative cuts ("efficiency savings") in the Health Service by 2019-20, at the same time as costs of administration and amounts paid out to private profiteers rise steeply with its Health and Social Care Act.

The damage to the fabric of the NHS from these cuts is certain to step up in the financial year beginning April 2013.

The Government's NHS measures are of a different order from its other cuts, because they threaten to change the whole nature of the NHS, changing it from a public service which provides for all into a marketplace with government subsidies which allow most people access only to some treatments.

But they mesh into a broad picture of a severe squeeze not only on the "middle", but on the working-class majority of society, operating simultaneously through service cuts, benefit cuts, tax rises, and reduced real wages, which in straight money terms are the biggest factor of all.

Individual scraping-by and misery, or collective resistance: those are the choices for us as to how to respond.

And with collective resistance we can win.

THE DEFICIT

It is not true that the government budget deficit makes these cuts inevitable.

At present these cuts are *increasing* the deficit, not reducing it. The cuts reduce government tax revenue — by reducing income and spending across the economy — more than they reduce government spending.

And, cruel though the cuts are, their financial amount is quite small compared to the loot of the wealthy.

The Government's total cut in annual social budgets (not counting reductions in military spending, for example, which socialists do not object to) is planned to rise to maybe £65 billion by 2014-5. A 16% super-tax on the incomes of the top 10% (not touching their wealth), or a 1.3% tax on their wealth (not touching their incomes), or a combination, would be enough to put that £65 billion back in.

The first step is to prepare the fightback for the new cuts avalanche which faces us in April 2013.

TSSA banner, TUC march

natives, but part of a single drive by the Government to use the crisis to reduce costs for capital, to push down the working class, and to make society more unequal

In October 2013 will come another shock to the welfare system, when Universal Credit is brought in as a compendium replacement for Jobseekers' Allowance, housing benefit, council tax benefit, child tax credit, and working tax credit.

It will be introduced for new out-of-work claimants from October 2013, for new in-work claimants from April 2014. All claimants who report a change in circumstances after October 2013 will be moved onto it, and all working-age claimants will be moved over to Universal Credit by 2017. Households will get some transitional protection from cash losses as long as their circumstances do not change.

Universal Credit will be paid monthly and will be based on monthly assessments of income.

In theory, the idea of simplifying benefits and reducing perverse cut-offs (where a wage rise can leave you worse off, or no better off, because you lose benefits) has merit. But Universal Credit is being introduced within a regime of general and large cuts in welfare, by a government which, in George Osborne's speech to Tory party conference in October 2012, has already said it wants to cut yet a further £10 billion from benefits. Millions will lose out.

Universities and older school students have already been hit by the drastic cut in government funding for university teaching budgets, the introduction of £9,000-a-year university fees, and the scrapping of EMA paid to 16 and 17 year olds.

The Government initially claimed that the Health Service

Southampton

Labour councillors oppose the cuts

By Darren Bedford

Labour councillors in Hull and Southampton have broken the cuts consensus by responding to labour-movement and community pressure and vowing to defy cuts.

In Southampton, two councillors have been suspended from the ruling Labour group after they refused to vote for cuts to Oaklands swimming pool. Councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas have formed a "Labour Councillors Against The Cuts" group on the City Council. The cuts to Oaklands were part of a "mini-budget", and although the fight currently focuses on reopening the pool, the councillors are clear that the attack on Oaklands is just the first of many.

Morrell and Thomas said: "We refuse to be silenced, and are determined to continue speaking out on behalf of constituents and users of the pool, and continue demanding that the City Council finish off the stalled repairs, recall the staff and immediately re-open the pool."

They said that they hope Labour Councillors Against The Cuts will "provide a focus of opposition to the claims by the three main political parties that 'there is no alternative to cuts', that 'we have no choice but to make cuts', and that 'tough decisions have to be made'.

"Labour Councillors Against The Cuts demands that the City's Labour administration immediately announces that it will refuse to do the Government's dirty work of forcing through massive cuts in public services, and that the City Council will lead a national campaign to demand that the Government restore the money it has stolen from local authorities."

The councillors' stand was backed by town hall unions. Southampton District Unison branch secretary Mike Tucker told *Solidarity* in August that his union supported the fight against cuts at Oaklands and was backing the rebel councillors. Since then, the Unite Executive ratified a motion from its Local Authorities National Industrial Sector Committee backing the councillors, and calling on the Labour group not to take any disciplinary sanction against them for their stand.

A similar movement could be developing in Hull, where 250 people lobbied the Labour-controlled council on 18 October, demanding they refuse to make £100 million of proposed cuts. The anti-cuts movement includes Unite, GMB and the National Union of Teachers locally as well, crucially, as seven Labour councillors. At the lobby, Councillor Gareth Wareing calling on Labour Party members in their branches and CLPs to hold councillors to account and demand that they refuse to pass on central government cuts to local working-class communities.

In Glasgow, a joint campaign between council unions (Unison, Unite and GMB) is demanding that the city's Labour-controlled council defies cuts and sets a "needs budget".

One Labour council taking a stand against Tory cuts could be the spark for a much wider fightback.

Local activists, Labour Party members, and rank-and-file activists in public sector unions should use every channel available to demand that Labour councillors take a stand against cuts, even if it means defying central government and facing sanctions.

Bring back the pamphlet!

By Martin Thomas

Material conditions for socialist education and self-education are better than they've ever been. Much socialist literature which previously you could read only if you could get into a good library is now freely available on the web. Vastly more has been translated.

Thanks to second-hand book sales moving onto the web, printed books which you'd previously find only by searching second-hand shops are now also easily available.

Thirty years ago, if a newcomer started reading the *Communist Manifesto*, and wondered who Metternich and Guizot were, they were on their own. These days the Workers' Liberty website alone has more study guides and aids, available free on any internet-connected computer, than the whole of the left could offer then anywhere or at any price.

Even without a study guide, Google will tell you in seconds who Metternich and Guizot were. And Marx's declaration, "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves" — maybe you thought it was in the *Manifesto*? You can check in a minute where he wrote it, what the context was, how exactly he put it.

Today 52% of young women, and 42% of young men, go through university. Not so long ago, many new recruits to the socialist movement would have left school at 14 or 15, and would at first find the language of the Marxist classics difficult.

Today many socialists have been trained as teachers, learning techniques which they can bring over from their paid work into our study sessions. In the old days it was often the straight lecture, or just collectively reading aloud.

It's a lot easier to be a well-read socialist now than it used to be. Yet active, intelligent, university-educated young people in the AWL today usually read less than our young activists did 35 or 40 years ago. (We collected statistics).

Even the better-read young activists do not own their own little library of the classic Marxist texts, ready to lend out to new people who show interest, as they automatically would

An AWL literature stall on the 20 October demonstration. We should rebuild a literary and pamphlet-based culture on the left!

have done decades ago.

To do better, I think, we have to make a deliberate effort to bring *reading pamphlets* back into daily political life.

The root of the problem, I think, is that social-science and humanities university education today often works to *deter* people from serious study rather than help them towards it.

I have a daughter about to finish a university degree in psychology. She is a conscientious and competent student. Yet her course has never required her to read a single book on psychology, rather than bits and pieces from the web.

Her university campus has a good library. The newer campus of the same university has a library with hardly any books. Most of its space is taken up by computers.

With the huge expansion in academic publishing, no university degree can cover more than a small fraction of the literature in its subject. So lecturers go for the easily available, the quick summary, the overview, the extract, the digest.

Research shows that on average people reading things from the web take in only one-sixth as much as when reading print. So what? The skill of quickly skimming a range of material, taking in a suitable one-sixth of it, and rehashing it fluently in an essay or assignment, is what employers want, not deep specialised knowledge.

SUBSTANTIVE

The system thus works to deter people from deep study of substantive texts, rather than processed rehashes, and to train them in the idea that the deep study is too difficult.

Then, if the student comes into the socialist movement, the way to seem on top of the current debates is to skim blogs and Facebook, not to read books.

In the 1960s, by contrast, socialist meetings would have stalls piled with pamphlets. For Trotsky and Luxemburg we depended on pamphlets printed in Sri Lanka, which at that time had the world's strongest English-language Trotskyist movement, but we had them.

The serious activist would always have one or another pamphlet in her or his bag or coat pocket; anyone who attended socialist meetings at all often would check out at least the main pamphlets.

There is no cause to idealise the system of socialist education which depended on pamphlets. Still, pamphlet-reading did something. It inserted serious study into the main flow of socialist activity. The pamphlets were in every activist's bag or coat pocket, on every stall. If you wanted to know more than the minimum, your course of action was clear and ready to hand, and involved serious study, not one-in-six skimming. It gave a frame of more-or-less known references for debates.

We should use the new possibilities, but also bring back the pamphlet.

A revolutionary for reproductive freedoms

Our Movement
By Micheál MacEoin

Antoinette Konikow (1869-1946) was a feminist activist and founding member of both the Communist Party USA and the American Trotskyist movement.

Born in the Russian Empire, Konikow attended school in Odessa, in the Ukraine, before emigrating to Zurich, where she attended university. It was in Switzerland that she became politically active, joining Georgii Plekhanov's Emancipation of Labour group, the first Russian Marxist group and a forerunner of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party.

In 1893, Konikow came to America and studied as a physician. Almost immediately she joined the Socialist Labor Party of America (SLP), attending the 1896 conference that founded the revolutionary trade union, the Socialist Trade and Labour Alliance, which later became the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Increasingly disillusioned with the dogmatic politics of the SLP as it came to be dominated by Daniel De Leon, Konikow followed Eugene V Debs and became a founding member of the Socialist Party of America. She involved herself in the socialist educational movement, helping to run Socialist Sunday Schools, aiming to provide an alternative to religious instruction for children.

The Socialist Party split at an emergency convention in 1919 over the question of affiliation to the Communist International. Konikow sided with those who supported affilia-

Modern-day abortion rights campaigners are building on Konikow's legacy

tion, and thus became a founding member of the Communist Party of America, later the Communist Party USA.

The nascent Communist Party was soon driven underground by the "red scare" in the US which followed the Russian Revolution in 1917. In addition to its underground networks, however, it used a legal party organisation, the Workers' Party of America, to promote "above ground" activities such as elections. Konikow was involved in this work, and stood as the Workers' Party candidate for the US Senate in Massachusetts in 1924.

As a physician and a feminist, Konikow was committed to the then-taboo cause of birth control.

She was a member of the Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis and, along with her son-in-law and fellow Communist, Joseph Vanzler, she developed an inexpensive contraceptive which she shared with Soviet officials on a visit to Russia as a birth control specialist in 1926.

It was while she was in Russia that Konikow was won over to the ideas of the Leon Trotsky against Joseph Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin — the leadership of the Russian Communist Party and the Communist International.

She became an outspoken supporter of the platform of the United Opposition of Trotsky, Gregory Zinoviev, and Lev Kamenev, and as a consequence she lost her position as an instructor in her local CPUSA party training school.

In November 1928, Konikow was expelled as a Trotskyist by the Executive Secretary of the CPUSA, Jay Lovestone. Lovestone was soon expelled himself as part of the Bukharinite Right Opposition, and later became a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent.

Upon being summoned before the party's Political Committee, she wrote a defiant letter to Lovestone which stated: "I did work for Trotsky's ideals and tried to arouse sentiment for the Opposition in our party, and I consider I have the full right to do so according to the party's stand on inner party democracy.

"But it is useless to expect your committee to accept this viewpoint, for your leadership would not last long under rules of real democracy in our party. I consider that the party has taken an outrageously wrong standing on the Trotsky situation in Soviet Russia. This stand is a result of the servile submission to the Stalin faction."

Konikow then formed a small group in Boston called the Independent Communist League, which merged with the Communist League of America at the time of its foundation by James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman, and Martin Abern in May 1929.

She remained active in the American Trotskyist movement until the end of her life. In 1938 she was named an honorary member of the national committee at the founding conference of the American Socialist Workers Party.

How democracy was tamed

In 1951 Eric Hobsbawm, who died on 1 October 2012 full of fame and honours, wrote an article in which, for once, the imperatives of his Stalinist politics worked to mobilise his great talents as a historian in favour of enlightenment in current politics.

Since about 1935, and especially in World War 2, the Communist Party had been very moderate and full of praise for anti-fascist Tories. In 1951 it published a new programme in which for the first time it explicitly disavowed its revolutionary origins and declared that the "British Road to Socialism" would be via parliamentary vote.

In between times, however, from about 1947 to 1951, the CP had a leftist phase. Apparently Hobsbawm was reluctant to switch onto the new "British Road", and he wrote an article which, without mentioning the new CP programme, outlined the history of how parliamentary democracy had been "tamed".

In the article Hobsbawm said nothing about how the working class, when it overthrows entrenched capitalist power, can create a wider democracy — nothing about the ways of the Paris Commune of 1871, or the Soviets of 1917-8, with their recallability of delegates, direct control of executive functions by the legislature, officials on workers' wages, and information free of bourgeois domination.

No wonder: politically, he was tied to presenting the Stalinist police states in Eastern Europe as "people's democracies". Yet his critique of what the British capitalist class did to democracy remains valuable.

The article is abridged from *The Modern Quarterly*, autumn 1951. The full text is online at tinyurl.com/demtamed

For *Solidarity's* obituary of Hobsbawm, see tinyurl.com/hobsbawmobit

Martin Thomas

Two or three generations of middle-class parliamentarism and newspaper writing in Western Europe have almost drained the word "democracy" of any serious content.

Yet if we are to investigate how ruling classes attempted to manipulate political systems based on a wide suffrage, we must abandon the jargon of contemporary cabinet ministers and leading articles and ask ourselves what "the rule of the people" meant to its friends and enemies in an earlier and franker age.

In the eighteenth and a good part of the nineteenth century, for instance, men kept their eye firmly fixed on the social reality behind "majority rule," the fact that the majority was poor, the minority rich. Democracy ever since the English Revolution had what an American scholar rightly calls "a levelling tendency that ran in the direction of communism." The French rationalist Condorcet took it for granted that in a popular government "all social institutions must aim at the social, moral, physical and intellectual improvement of the most numerous and poorest class."

The Chartists, who demanded on the face of it purely electoral reforms, were less interested in the abstract right to vote (let alone the prospect of alternative party governments) than in the knife-and-fork question they hoped to answer through their possession of the vote.

The men of property and privilege were equally clear about the matter. Lord Salisbury, arguing against the Reform Bill of 1866-7, warned his readers that democracy must inevitably bring with it "a system of ateliers nationaux." The Red Peril could not be envisaged in more flaming terms by a peer of the mid-century.

A long and anxious debate raged in the early 1880s — before the Third Reform Act, which enfranchised ratepayers in the counties and extended the franchise in the towns — as to whether democracy must inevitably lead to socialism.

The simplest conclusion from these unpalatable facts would have been to steer clear of universal suffrage altogether; and the classical versions of Liberalism — the French Constitution of 1791, the regimes set up in France and Belgium by the revolutions of 1830, the Reform Act of 1832 in

The massacre of the St. Peter's Fields demonstration for suffrage (the "Peterloo Massacre" in 1819). Both the working class and the bourgeoisie understood the potential political power of democracy.

Britain, the American Constitution as originally framed — did so. Oligarchy and property qualification were to be the safeguard of "free institutions".

It is worth noting how late, how slowly and reluctantly universal suffrage was introduced even in the typical countries of what is today called "western democracy." In France the Constitution of 1875 marks the decisive step; in Britain manhood suffrage was achieved in instalments in 1867, 1884 and 1918, in Holland in the 1880s and 1890s and 1917. In Belgium the decisive advance was won by the General Strike of 1893. In Scandinavia, Norway did not get manhood suffrage until 1898, Sweden till 1907, and Denmark, where for a time an exceptionally advanced Constitution had been won in 1848, did not establish the supremacy of the Lower House until 1901.

DECISIVE

Even Switzerland, which had taken the decisive step forward in the Revolution of 1817, did not get its modern political regime until the 1870s.

In the remainder of Europe bourgeois democracy was not formally adopted until just before or after World War I, and was, in the main, a temporary phenomenon.

The adoption of this new system faced all capitalist classes with extraordinary problems, but none with greater ones than the British, for in Britain alone of major states would universal suffrage give proletarians by themselves a majority.

In France, Germany and the USA, for instance, masses of farmers, peasants or petty-bourgeois could be used to outvote the actual workers.

To safeguard minority rule in a state in which, theoretically, the working class can vote whom it likes into power, two things are necessary: to prevent them voting for effective enemies of capitalism, and to prevent the business of state from being interfered with by parliament and public opinion at all.

That the state machine has been strengthened, and been increasingly insulated against parliamentary and public control, against every advance in the political consciousness of the working-class, and every growth in the danger to the stability of capitalism, is not to-day denied by anyone except newspaper hacks and campaign speakers. "Parliament," says so orthodox an authority as Sir Ivor Jennings flatly, "cannot govern; it can do no more than criticise"; and not very effectively at that. Our government is indeed, he admits, a dicta-

torship of Cabinet and Civil Service — both, as any number of constitutional students show, effectively insulated against popular pressure, or the membership of "undesirables."

At no time has the British ruling class let the levers of power out of its hand, or relied entirely on its power to make universal suffrage "tame." The machinery of non-parliamentary rule exists, perfected, well-oiled, ready for use when necessary (and against real dangers to the status quo, like the Irish in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the revolutionaries and Communists since 1914, it has been used without hesitation).

For, as one of the wisest of ruling-class statesmen, the late Lord Balfour said, "democracy" is tolerable only while it is harmless; while the people are "so fundamentally at one that they can safely afford to bicker; and so sure of their own moderation that they are not dangerously disturbed by the never-ending din of political conflict."

In the "Golden Age" of British capitalism [mid 19th century] the problem was simple. Bagehot rightly saw the strongest safeguard of ruling-class policy in the "deference of the old electors to their betters," i.e. their willingness to follow the ruling class lead. Radical middle-class theorists like James Mill put their money on parliamentary government precisely because they were so sure that workers must always follow "that middle rank which gives to science, to art and to legislation itself, their most distinguished ornaments, the chief source of all that has exalted and refined human nature."

But in the period of crisis since 1917, the rulers of Britain discovered that they had in fact failed to keep the decisive groups of working-class voters behind the old parties. If the labour movement was not yet a political class movement in the real sense — the new Communist Party was and remained small — it revealed a growing distrust of capitalists, a growing hostility to the system, a growing support of the potentially explosive doctrines of ending it, among the rank and file of organised workers. The problem therefore became one of making this new movement harmless through its own leaders.

The safest way to keep the working-class practically harmless is to keep enough of it, or decisive sections of it, satisfied within the capitalist system; better still, to persuade them that

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

their prospects depend, not on the destruction of the system, but on the contrary, on its prosperity as a profit making concern.

A moderately contented "aristocracy of labour" did develop in Britain after the 1840s: an upper stratum of workers, sharply distinct from the "labourers," but shading off into the lower middle class of small masters and shopkeepers, and through them, into the fairly small owner-managed provincial mills and factories which were still typical of capitalist production. They fought a two-front war: against employers, for a small share of profits and trade union recognition; against the rest of the working population, for the enjoyment of the relative monopoly which allowed them to claim even that much.

The more British capitalism expanded, the better for the "aristocrats of labour." Hence they willingly tied their wages to the movement of prices (e.g. in the iron and steel industry), and habitually took the same attitude to foreign competition as their masters; for instance, the cotton operatives to Indian cotton manufacture.

Perhaps the extreme case of such a "partnership" is that of the Bolton cotton spinners who, between 1897 and 1906 invested their union funds — an average of some £16,000 per annum — in the cotton spinning industry. Other cases, almost as extreme, could easily be given. Patently such men were unlikely to challenge the capitalist system as such.

The extension of the franchise [to wider sections of the working class, especially after 1884] faced the ruling class with only one immediate problem: how to humour and organise the new (but politically as yet harmless) electorate, and devise suitable tactics and propaganda for it. Up to the end of the nineteenth century this did not require any major changes in programme, any major shifts in political personnel or organisation.

POWERFUL

The British ruling class disposed of powerful assets for the job, mainly concentrated in the Whig-Liberal-Radical party.

There was the memory of common struggles with Whig aristocrats against the monarchy; with radical mill-owners against Church and Squire; the extraordinary latitude which 18th century oligarchy had allowed popular movements which did not constitute a real political danger; the propagandist symbol of the bluff John Bull enjoying roast beef and freedom, which had been formed in 125 years of expansionist wars against the French.

Naturally the interests of capitalists and workers diverged, as the manufacturers won the freedom and power they wanted, and turned it against their employees. But "after the artisans are once satisfied with the sympathy, ability and honesty of their leaders, no class is so tolerant of differences of opinion, or so willing to be faithful to leaders with whom they cannot wholly agree," as a Liberal observed smugly in 1867.

Given the social bases of the late nineteenth-century labour movement, only a little reassurance was needed to keep it safely behind Liberal leaders. No man learned the rules of this new game to better purpose than the Grand Old Man himself. Gladstone, who made no secret of his belief that all desirable reforms (outside Ireland) had been achieved by 1874; who opposed trade union rights and all social legislation; who supported the extension of the franchise only to those "not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or political danger" was and remained the idol of British workers.

In the main, the effort of the ruling class was concentrated on maintaining the support of the workers without giving anything concrete in return through conscious concessions. The period of the Great Depression and early Imperialism thus saw above all the invention of modern demagoguery. Two aspects of this deserve brief mention: the bowdlerisation of the term "democracy", and the rise of irrational propaganda.

Some time after the passing of the Third Reform Act (1884) which first extended the vote beyond a limited circle of better-off artisans, ruling-class politicians ceased, on the whole, publicly to admit that they did not like democracy, and to spout instead the platitudes with which we are so familiar today.

"Democracy," as [George Bernard] Shaw, a sharp critic of its bourgeois version saw, was a most valuable slogan: "I talk democracy to these men and women. I tell them they have the vote and that theirs is the kingdom, the power and the glory. I say to them, 'You are supreme; exercise your power.'

They say 'That's right; tell us what to do'; and I tell them. I say, 'Exercise your vote intelligently by voting for me.' And they do. That's democracy; and a splendid thing it is too for putting the right men in the right place." It is indeed.

In spite of the fact that the population of Britain almost doubled, and the electoral system was transformed, the number of Old Etonians and Old Harrovians in the House of Commons in 1918-36 was scarcely inferior to that in 1865 (an average of 148 per Parliament, compared to 157).

Yet clearly, this was not enough — especially not for the masses of non-privileged workers who also, increasingly, had to be granted the vote from 1885 on, who had no special traditional link with middle-class Radicalism, and were becoming more and more politically conscious.

"We must educate our masters," Robert Lowe had said after 1867; and the Education Act of 1870 was justified by the argument that voters had to be suitably educated in what would to-day be called "the western way of life."

TORIES

But it was the Tories, unencumbered by the Whig-Radical belief in reason and knowledge, who supplemented education by a daring and successful use of irrationalist propaganda, which fitted well into the framework of early imperialism, with its mysticism of flag, blood, race, and monarchy.

The Jubilees of 1887 and 1897, the foundation of the *Daily Mail* and its competitors, the Mafeking hysteria are so many steps on the miserable road from reason to instinct and magic. From 1900 on the "stunt election" appears.

It is worth remembering how much of a retreat all this meant from the tactics of the classical radical politicians, with their honest belief that the workers could be held to middle-class leadership because Free Trade, Free Enterprise, etc., were invincible in argument.

Moreover, the changing structure of the economy produced new "aristocracies of labour" in addition to (and sometimes instead of) the old-for instance, those managerial and office-workers to whom the new Northcliffe, Rothermere, and Beaverbrook Press appealed, and on whom the Conservative Party relies so heavily for mass support.

The imperialist era has also seen the rise of a social group whose function is to keep the rank and file firmly tied to the capitalist wagon: the body of labour leaders and officials. For these the mere creation of a state-monopoly capitalism provided new functions, new status, new jobs. With every advance in the strength of the labour movement, the politeness with which they as individuals are treated, grew. Whatever the fortunes of the rank and file in the imperialist era, for them it has quite clearly brought an almost unqualified advance.

Under these circumstances, then, as soon as the mass of workers ceased to follow leaders who frankly supported capitalism, social democracy became the main pillar of the orthodox parliamentary system. Between 1918 and 1924 the Labour Party entered on the heritage of Liberal-Radicalism in most parts of the country. However, we sometimes forget that there are two sides to reformism as a policy. It requires not only a labour movement (or a body of labour leaders) willing to remain within the frontiers of capitalism, but also a bourgeoisie willing to play this particular political game.

The decision of the British bourgeoisie to play the reformist game showed great political acumen.

It secured them three major advantages, at the cost of some unavoidable expense: a smooth switch of the political system from a Liberal-Conservative to a Labour-Conservative pattern, a collaborative Labour Party capable, broadly speaking, of keeping its supporters under control; and the possibility of operating the state largely through cadres drawn from the ruling class itself, yet still enjoying a fair measure of popular confidence.

In these matters the British bourgeoisie, whose Wykehamists and Etonians have to a large extent maintained a solid and unbroken grip of both parliamentary and non-parliamentary positions outside, and even within the Labour Party, has a distinct advantage.

DISPATCH

To take merely one striking example: it managed the abdication of a King in 1936 with smoothness and dispatch, while in Belgium a similar problem brought the country to the verge of civil war.

The inter-war years are notable for the development of a catchment system within Parliament and party organisations (notably the Labour Party). A multitude of channels were dug through which popular agitation might be distributed harmlessly, sped by "assurances" and "promises," until it had, for the time being, subsided.

These devices still retain their usefulness; but they have ceased to be adequate in themselves. Since the war parliamentarism has had to be played in its most difficult version. The business of a capitalist economy has had to be conducted through a Party whose members expected it to abolish capitalism (though they were not always clear what this implied). Moreover, this had to be done at a time when tactics were becoming less flexible. The grave crisis of the economy no longer permitted Labour leaders to put forward, even for platform purposes, a very different programme from that of frankly capitalist politicians.

Three devices, therefore, are characteristic of this latest phase of parliamentarism: a greatly increased amount of parliamentary shadow-boxing; a greatly increased propaganda barrage against the left; and the "welfare state." In a sense, none of these is new. There have always been rhetorical duels between Belloc's "accursed power that stands for privilege (and goes with women and champagne and bridge)" and "democracy" (which goes with bridge, and women, and champagne). Only today they are both more unreal (for the fundamental identity of interest is much more frankly admitted by representative leaders on both sides), and more necessary, for in spite of the virtually complete bipartisanship on all major issues of policy, the rank and file of labour is increasingly intolerant of open union with the capitalists.

There has always been propaganda against the left. Only today it is necessarily shriller and more intense (especially from the official Labour side).

A government which has so largely abandoned the traditional policies of Labour's founding fathers (and of traditional British Radicalism) on foreign, imperial and trade union affairs, must make a rather big noise, if it wants to distract attention.

Class war, but not as it should be

Jill Mountford reviews *The Casual Vacancy* by JK Rowling

After 15 years of writing about wizards, magic and sorcery, ostensibly for children, J K Rowling has turned her hand to writing a novel for adults.

The Casual Vacancy had no magic for me, although Rowling's magic touch meant 2.6 million copies were sold before the book actually hit the streets.

Poor old Rowling is rightly angry (and very frustrated) about class-ridden Britain. She's angry about racism and sexism, the small-minded petty bourgeoisie, the smug self-righteous middle class. She's angry about violence against women and abuse of children.

And oddly, given Rowling's proven ability to conjure up some loveable boy characters, she's on a big downer about men. A more miserable bunch of male caricatures it's hard to imagine — violent, bullying and humiliating, or limp and weak.

From early on, the story is a litany of flinchingly violent blows interspersed with the some vile characters who are just so easy to detest, such as the bumptious, obese petty bourgeois Howard Mollison, and his wife, the mean-spirited, ma-

licious and over-groomed Shirley Mollison.

The title of the book refers to a place on the Parish Council that has become vacant after the death of one of its members (the good guy, Barry). A battle for this seat ensues.

The two sides in the fight are divided over the issue of The Fields council estate and whether it should be included or excluded from the parish catchment area.

On one side are the selfish, self-satisfied and conceited middle classes and the petty bourgeoisie; and on the other, the poor working class (who are portrayed largely as an uncultured underclass), and their supporters such as Parminder the doctor and Kay the social worker.

It's all a bit Dickensian. I feel like I've already watched the TV mini-series. It was okay, but it could have been so much better — more optimistic, more representative of the working class, less of the grotesque caricature, less of a modern-day soap opera.

Jan Moir of the *Daily Mail* denounces the book for being a "relentless socialist manifesto". This it is not. It does at times feel relentless, though not with socialism, rather with all that is grim and bleak.

Though Rowling has clearly not forgotten her roots — she

loathes social injustice and sees class at the centre of inequality, ultimately she's too despairing.

Like millions of us she's looking around Tory Britain in the midst of a world economic crisis and doesn't like what she sees. But there's stuff she can't see, none of us can, such as a confident, organised working class able to stand up and articulate and fight for what it needs and deserves. She cannot see all the dignity that comes from this.

It is, perhaps, of no surprise that Rowling's gut socialist politics are underdeveloped. She could do worse than use the freedom she's won from being the richest novelist in history to better understand class politics, how capitalism works and who are the agents for change; she would not be wasting her time to study some of our past battles — victories and defeats — as an antidote to her grim despair.

During the 1980s a feminist publishing house, the Women's Press, used to publish stuff a bit like this. Much of it was not very memorable but many of the novels it published spoke plainly and simply of women's experience from a feminist perspective. *Casual Vacancy* reminded me of this kind of novel. Worthy but dull and rather bleak.

The outsider

Hilary Mantel has become the first woman to win two Booker prizes — for her novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* (the first two parts of a trilogy about Henry VIII's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell). Cathy Nugent reviews the books.

Historical novelists have used the form to discuss contemporary ideas and issues. And the practice has become very popular in recent historical novels.

Sarah Walters has written about how sexual politics and mores were loosened and transformed in the 1890s (*Tipping the Velvet*) and during the Second World War (*The Night Watch*). A S Byatt's *The Children's Book* also mines the 1890s — for ideas about middle-class social conscience.

There is none of that in either of Mantel's Cromwell novels. She is more focussed on recreating the Tudor world and world view. Here is the body politic of the 1530s. It is not *what the body politic of the 1530s can tell us about the 2010s*. But then the shallow PR world of modern politics is nothing to take seriously. That's material for *In the Thick of It*, not books which discuss the Divine Right of Kings or the decline of chivalry.

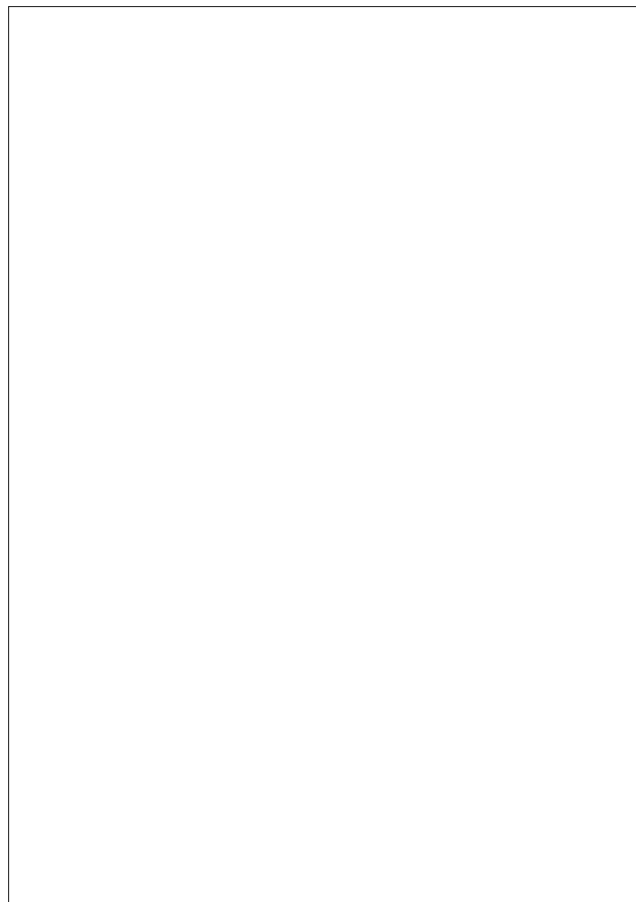
Mantel's fictional world is so perfectly imagined it induced a bit of nausea and fear in me. But don't let me put you off. Mantel puts her reader into a time machine, straps her in, and takes her on a thrilling ride.

Vicious intrigue among the babyish narcissistic aristocrats at Henry's court drives the action. The constant threat of death by untreatable disease or beheading (or worse) infects the story. International political alliances, religion (Henry's split from the Pope) and business (the growth of trade) are fused together in this story, presided over by Henry and facilitated by his Mr Fixit, Thomas Cromwell.

Mantel's Cromwell is not the real Cromwell. No one really knows who he was because there are not enough records, or the right kind of records, to tell us that. Mantel's Cromwell is rational, ambitious, even-handed... sympathetic even. Yet this is man who, with his control of information, the wealth to lend and call in loans, and powerful influence over Henry's law-making, was responsible for ruining lives and taking lives.

But as the story is told from Cromwell's point of view Mantel is obliged to give us a balanced, subtle character. We also see his self-delusion. Cromwell longs to be, believes himself to be, part of the establishment. Yet, as the son of a blacksmith, in this time, he will always remain an outsider.

And what happens to outsiders — as much as it does to up-pity queens like Anne Boleyn or impudent Dukes? They get



Thomas Cromwell by Hans Holbein

their heads chopped off. Cromwell is in the end not spared Henry's axe.

Too simplistic perhaps to see the fictional Cromwell as a stand-in for a nascent bourgeoisie. Nonetheless it is clear in the novel that the time is up for the aristocratic fools who cling on to the old ways — popery, the expectation that their estates will always provide them with a life of idleness. As Cromwell dispatches them to the Tower is he not doing historical progress in England a service?

Many TV series, bodice-ripper novels and lavish films have been made about the Tudors. The houses, customs and heredity of the period are popular in primary schools. The Tudors are intrinsically gory, and are a safe reminder of our own mortality. But Mantel's retelling of the Tudor story is deeper, more interesting and more poetic.

The spin doctor's verdict

The Left

By Pat Yarker

Last Saturday I had the chance to sell AWL material to a famous person when I inadvertently bumped into the spin-doctor's spin-doctor, Malcolm Tucker.

I'd knocked the mobile phone from his hand, but managed to field it before it squelched in the mud, and so seized the moment to launch my sales pitch. He listened for all of the second it took him to check his phone before interrupting. "Is it today's issue, laddie?"

I began to explain why *Solidarity* was a weekly paper, but: "Look at the date on this!" exclaimed Tucker, with his characteristic edge-of-losing-it menace. "Fucking June!"

He waved a leaflet I saw had been put out by the CPGB-ML urging the organised working class to "Ditch Labour To Fight The Cuts!" At the bottom, the date read 9 June 2012.

Tucker gestured at the nearby trees. "Does this look like June to you?" he asked. "Are those leaves green with high summer or are they yellow as a Lib Dem's oilskin and plummeting like their fucking poll ratings?"

"And what about this?" He waved another, smaller leaflet. "Some sprog surprised me on Piccadilly. Now, I'm an anarchist myself, but at least I know what fucking day it is!" He stopped waving the leaflet so I could read: "Symbolic Protest or Fight To Win? Strike Now November 30". It had been produced by the Anarchist Federation.

"But here's the one," he said, showing me a Socialist Party leaflet: "24-hour General Strike Now! TUC Name The Day." I started to argue the emptiness of such a slogan, but Tucker cut me off. "No, no. Not the fucking strike-call. Rosa Luxemburg on a bike! A General Strike's a prelude to fucking insurrection, not wished for like an iPad at Christmas! TUC name the day? That'll be the twelfth of fucking Never! No, this is the good bit!"

And he pointed to a tiny line of print: "Text JOIN with your name and postcode to ..." "You can join by text! Fucking genius! No chat, no boring meetings, no exchange of fucking ideas, no dues to pay, fuck-all to think about. Just text your fucking postcode and you're in! Think I'll do just that. Build my network. Polish my street-cred. Are your lot not doing this?"

His thumbs were a-twitch over his phone, and I realised sadly my chance of a sale had gone.

Total policing

Ira Berkovic picked up a copy of the Metropolitan Police's "Total Policing" leaflet on the 20 October TUC demonstration. If it was more honest, it would have said something like this...

The Metropolitan Police Service hopes that you stay at home.

However, if you insist on demonstrating, we are here to make sure you only do it within strictly defined parameters and with constant reminders that we are in charge. This leaflet explains how the demonstration will be policed.

What you can expect to see?

A large police presence. We're clever about this, because we'll do a "good-cop" thing by having the nice, smiley cops in the sky-blue tabards wandering around giving out these leaflets, but we'll also make sure you get a look at mounted cops and the Territorial Support Group, who might be filming you, so you won't get any dangerous ideas about deviating from the planned route or taking any more impacting direct action. Don't fuck with us.

You can also expect to see us maintaining heavy presences around shops that we think you might target. Because although we say we're "here to facilitate a safe and peaceful protest", we're really here to protect the interests of private property. Don't fuck with it... or us.

What will officers be wearing?

In the main you can expect to see officers in yellow jackets and traditional police hats. If violence or disorder takes place, however, we will tool up.

We're talking visors, shields, night-sticks, and specially-trained two-tonne animals. We also have 50,000 volt tasers, and we're not afraid to use them... especially if you're a 61-year-old, blind stroke victim.* Don't fuck with us.

What if I become a victim of crime?

Depends who commits it. If it's us... forget about it. Since 1990, more than 1,400 people have died in police custody or after contact with the police. Not a single police officer has ever been convicted for any of this. On 9 December 2010, we beat student protester Alfie Meadows to within an inch of his life. But he was the one who ended up in the dock. Don't fuck with us.

What if there is violence or disorder?

We can't be held responsible. And we won't be. Don't fuck with us.

What if I want to make a complaint?

Haha. Good luck.

* Colin Farmer was recently tasered in the back by police after they mistook his white stick for "a samurai sword".

Remploy strikes need solidarity

land, was timed to coincide with a meeting of the Remploy Task Force in the Scottish Parliament.

Following a wave of closures of Remploy factories under the last Labour government, recent months have seen another round of closures, based on the argument that Remploy "ghettoises" disabled workers, who should instead be integrated into "mainstream" employment.

By Dale Street

For the fourth time this year, pickets were out in force at the Remploy factory in Springburn (Glasgow) on Monday 22 October as workers there kept up their fight in defence of jobs and terms and conditions of employment.

The only person crossing the picket line was one of the £300-a-day consultants brought in by the company to "facilitate" the rundown and possible closure of the factory.

The 24-hour strike, which also involved the five other Remploy factories in Scot-

land, was timed to coincide with a meeting of the Remploy Task Force in the Scottish Parliament.

Some Remploy factories, including the company's Springburn site, have been the target of possible buyouts. But the price of any such buyout is unacceptably high for the workers involved.

Workers at the Springburn site fear that the po-

tential new owners plan to cut the number of staff from 47 to 15, and also attack terms and conditions such as sick pay and holiday pay. Slashing the workforce could even be the prelude to complete closure and transferring the work to a site in England.

According to a statement issued by Remploy last month, the "preferred bidder" for its Springburn and Chesterfield sites is a company called RLink.

RLink has already announced that if it takes over the Chesterfield site it will cut the workforce from 70 to 40, cut terms and conditions, derecognise the union and replace it with a "works council".

The transfer of ownership of the Springburn and Chesterfield sites from Remploy to RLink, if it goes ahead, is due to be completed by the end of October. But RLink has yet to even meet with representatives of the Springburn workforce.

Springburn workers want guarantees for their jobs and terms and conditions, whoever runs their factory. Remploy workers from the other Scottish factories, which have not been the offer of potential buyouts and where 200 jobs are at risk, are demanding government intervention to save their jobs.

Unfortunately, one sour note to the events of the strike day was the lack of support for the Remploy picket lines from the wider labour movement.

Although Remploy GMB members had been in the lead of the anti-austerity demonstration in Glasgow just two days earlier, there was no turnout last Monday to demonstrate solidarity on the picket line.

This certainly does not devalue the strike action by the GMB members. But it does raise a question about the value of all those wordy speeches in Glasgow Green on Saturday.

Joint action fights union busting in schools

By Patrick Murphy, NUT Executive (pc)

The joint action by the two biggest teacher unions is creating some sharp battles between classroom teachers and their immediate bosses across the country.

For the most part, it seems that workers are winning back some control over their own workplaces and challenging the endless expansion of their workload demands.

SUCCESS

Probably the most common success is that limits are being put on the number of formal observations of lessons to which teachers are subjected.

Union groups have also drawn a line under excessive planning, meetings and reports. Schools in several areas have cancelled mock inspections ("Mock-steds") after union members decided they would not co-operate.

The most impressive examples of this have been where Heads insisted the inspections would go ahead regardless and teach-

ers decided to escalate the dispute to strike action. The first national victory on this was at Bishop Challoner School in Tower Hamlets and that has sent the message out that members will be supported in pushing for their demands.

There are further schools where strike action has been called to win our demands.

At Mount Carmel School in Islington, teachers voted to refuse all co-operation with lesson observations and requested strike action after the Head refused to agree to a maximum of three observations per year.

At Deptford Green School in Lewisham, the Head took a bullish and dismissive attitude to requests for a more acceptable monitoring regime, insisting that he would carry on as he pleased and ignore the industrial action. NUT and NASUWT members promptly met to consider their response, and voted to request strike action from their national unions. Wherever managers throw down the gauntlet in this way the response should be to escalate and to do so with a substantial programme of

strike action announced in advance.

By far the most serious battle is taking place at Stratford Academy in Newham, East London. There the unions had not even decided on their action before the Head launched an aggressive union-busting attack. He demanded that all teachers sign a letter by Friday 19 October to confirm that they would not be taking part in any of the joint union action.

DEDUCTED

Those who did not return the letter signed would then have 15% deducted from their pay every day starting immediately.

The first deductions would be in their October pay slip. Last week members of both unions met in school with their officials and agreed to call six days of strike starting on Thursday 25 October, and increasing to two days in the first week after half-term (beginning 5 November) and three days the following week.

The response of teachers in these schools and their wider union organisation is absolutely right and it is

critical that they win. It is especially important that union-busters like the Head at Stratford Academy are not allowed to succeed. The most significant and impressive victories in this campaign are those in schools where the staff were previously too cowed to challenge the bosses.

School reps are saying that messages of support and solidarity are incredibly helpful in building morale and demonstrating to members as well as managers (they are posted on staffroom notice-boards) that we have the strength to win.

- Send messages of support to:
 - Steve Charles (NUT rep at Stratford Academy): stevec4151@aol.com
 - Karen Wheeler (Deptford Green School): karen_wheeler@hotmail.co.uk
 - Katherine O'Sullivan (NUT Rep at Mount Carmel): osullivan@mountcarmel.islington.sch.uk
 - Phil Davison (NASUWT Rep at Mount Carmel): davison@mountcarmel.islington.sch.uk

Contact Centre dispute: reject the deal!

By a PCS activist

Workers in Jobcentre Plus "Contact Centres" have been in dispute over working conditions since 2009.

There have been several strikes since the beginning of 2011. In each case Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) management have been adamant there will be no settlement after action, but in each case the strikes have been well supported and small gains have been won.

After the last strike, in August, again some small gains were made, but there is still much to fight for before Contact Centre working conditions are comparable with those of colleagues in other parts of Jobcentre Plus.

However, the Public and Commercial Services union

(PCS) DWP Group Executive Committee (GEC) are now recommending that members accept a new management offer, which in fact offers very few concrete gains, and the vast majority of which consists of platitudes about how bosses are "committed to a new start".

VICTORY?

This offer hardly spells a victory, especially when one considers the original demands of the campaign.

Rather, it seems to be an excuse for the negotiators to duck out of a troublesome and difficult dispute rather than keep fighting.

In the GEC meeting where the offer was discussed, the Socialist Party (SP) and Communist Party (of Britain / *Morning Star*) majority (including DWP Group President and SP

member Fran Heathcote) voted to recommend acceptance.

One GEC member, Alan Smith (also the editor of the DWP members' journal), resigned from his GEC position soon after this meeting where he had argued against the recommendation.

There was a call from activists for a national reps meeting to discuss the offer prior to any recommendation, which would have been in line with the union's response to previous offers in the campaign. Instead, the GEC met first and made their recommendation, and it seemed the reps' meeting was called merely to "inform" and to recommend acceptance of the deal.

The reps' meeting was clearly mixed, and reps present called for a vote. However, the DWP Presi-

dent refused to let a vote take place in the room.

It is understood that some of the GEC had doubts as to whether there was enough strength to continue to fight. But the answer to this is not to admit defeat, but to organise effectively on the ground.

DEFEATIST

This is a defeatist attitude, and it appears the leadership takes no responsibility for this supposed lack of organisation, when this dispute has been running for three years.

There is no doubt that there is still an appetite to fight in many places; this can be heard in offices up and down the country where workers angrily ask their local reps why they are being sold out.

The pattern of this dis-

pute clearly shows that we can keep on winning gains each time. So why settle now? It seems that PCS negotiators may have become jaded by the long-running dispute and were looking for a way out.

Nearly every member of the GEC would define themselves as socialists, and most as revolutionaries.

The fundamental lack of analysis of the strategy of this campaign and its failings is shameful, and suggests that the SP majority do not have the confidence that they can win more. But if this is the case then they have to look to themselves for the reasons why.

PCS activists should organise in Contact Centres and to keep on fighting until we win.

That means rejecting this shoddy deal.

British Museum cleaners vote to strike

By Ruben Lomas

Cleaning workers at the British Museum have voted to strike against a plan to outsource their work to a private company.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) and Unite voted by 90% and 100% respectively to strike after museum bosses announced a plan to outsource the work from 1 April 2013. The unions are now discussing dates for joint action.

Contracting out could lead to cuts in pay and attacks on terms and conditions for the workers. Cleaning contractors are notorious for their precarious working arrangements and high levels of exploitation.

PCS Regional Secretary Keith Johnston said:

"With food and energy costs going through the roof, the last thing low-paid workers need is the threat of privatisation hanging over their heads, and this vote for a strike shows the strength of feeling at the museum.

"These staff work hard to keep this prestigious cultural attraction clean, tidy and safe for millions of visitors to enjoy, yet they receive little reward or recognition. We are determined to oppose these plans that would mean shareholders profiting from cutting both the conditions of already poorly-paid cleaners and the quality of services to the public."

Unite regional officer Carolyn Simpson added: "It is unacceptable that our members are required to bear the cost of management failures at the British Museum. We believe this move to be driven by greed and totally unnecessary.

"We now have a situation where members, who have been working at the museum for over 30 years, are being sold off like cattle."

Reinstate Andrej Stopa!

By Ira Berkovic

Workers at the St Pancras Station outlet of chain sandwich shop Pret A Manger are facing intimidation and victimisation for organising a trade union in the store.

A group of workers began organising in August 2012, around a series of ongoing grievances including non-payment, late notification of shift changes, bullying by managers, and being rostered fewer hours than their stated contracts.

A petition around these demands was signed by nearly half of all staff

working in the store.

Almost straight away, key organisers found themselves victimised. One worker was given a disciplinary hearing for an "unauthorised absence", even though he had been off sick and phoned the store to inform them. The hearing was deliberately scheduled for after the Olympics so the worker could be kept on during the busy Olympic period. Eventually, the worker was given a final warning and transferred to another store.

The Pret A Manger Staff Union (PAMSU) was formally established on 1 September. Two weeks later, leading organiser Andrej Stopa found himself facing disciplinary charges for events which took place in January 2012. The date of the hearing was moved several times, and finally rearranged at 24-hours' no-

tice, meaning Andrej was unable to attend. As a result, he was fired.

Other members of the union also faced systematic intimidation, including one member who was given a full-time contract along with a "strong recommendation" that he leave the union, and who was told that his grievances would be better dealt with if he pursued them "informally".

Andrej says that because of this treatment, many workers are now too frightened to join the union or continue organising. His dismissal appeal hearing is at 1pm on Monday 29 October, at 1 Hudson's Place, London SW1V 1PZ (near Victoria Station).

Activists are planning a demonstration to support his reinstatement outside the hearing.

● Email pret.staff.union@gmail.com for more info.

Pickets of the Crossrail construction site in New Oxford Street, central London, have been continuing as part of a campaign to win reinstatement for 28 electricians sacked from Crossrail's Westbourne Park site because they raised safety concerns.

Workers and supporters have also been maintaining a daily presence at Westbourne Park, successfully turning some delivery lorries away.

The pickets have blocked traffic on Oxford Street for up to an hour, and are causing so much disruption and negative publicity for Crossrail that the company is desperate for talks at ACAS.

Warehouse workers strike

By Darren Bedford

DHL warehouse workers in Scotland struck for the second time on Monday 22 October, after a first walk out Friday 19th.

The strikes are part of a dispute over pay. Workers have rejected management's latest pay offer, which is for a 2% increase over the next two years. The firm's site in North Lanarkshire has already seen 100 redundancies in recent years, and workers faced a pay freeze

between 2008 and 2011.

Unite members working as delivery drivers for Tesco in Doncaster also rejected a deal from management. They are in dispute over the outsourcing of their contract to haulage firm Eddie Stobart, as their new employer is threatening to make job cuts.

Unite official Harriet Eisner said: "Stobart's would have to recruit new drivers on worse terms and conditions to run the operation, once they have sacked our members."

Uni workload strike

By Bob Sutton

Members of the University and Colleges Union (UCU) at the University of East London struck on Thursday 18 October over management's new proposed workload policy.

As things stand, UEL academics, in a survey conducted by the UCU, came out as working the longest hours of any university in Britain. UEL also has one of the worst staff-student

ratios of any British university.

One of the workers at the morning picket line told *Solidarity*: "I wouldn't be here if we were striking over pay, but this is an issue which directly affects our ability to do our job: provide a decent education for our students."

Further action on Tuesday 23 October was called off due to ongoing negotiations, but the dispute has not been resolved and further strikes are possible.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

14 November: European unions to strike together

By Ruben Lomas

Trade union federations in Greece, Spain, Portugal, Malta, and Cyprus have called general strikes on Wednesday 14 November.

Unions in France and Italy are also said to be considering calling mass strikes.

Spanish union federation CCOO said: "Unemployment, cuts, the impoverishment of the majority and the deterioration of public services justify a general strike."

UNIONS

CCOO and UGT, Spain's two main union federations, held a "social summit" with working-class community organisations, students' unions, and smaller trade unions to launch the strike call.

CCOO leader Ignacio Fernandez Toxo said he expected other countries to join in. Unemployment in Spain has reached 25%.

The FILT-CGIL, FIT-CISL UILtrasporti, UGLtrasporti and FAISA CISAL unions in Italy already have a transport strike scheduled for 16 November.

The European TUC has called for "a day of action and solidarity on 14 November, including strikes, demonstrations, rallies and other actions". 14 November will be the 21st day of general strike action in Greece since 2009. Most

Italian unions

general strikes have been for a single day, although some have lasted 48 hours.

The step is an important one. The European-wide nature of the crisis and the austerity agenda has always been clear, but until now the response from workers has tended to be national in character.

A day of coordinated strike action will help shift the struggle away from national movements trying to find solutions to "their" crises and towards a Euro-

pean working-class response to a European bosses' offensive.

14 November will not be a magic bullet. As the Greek experience shows, even a barrage of general strikes does not necessarily topple governments or force them to change course. But it can be a focal point and a platform for fighting for ongoing coordination.

In each country, socialists must organise for the maximum possible rank-and-file control over the strikes.

The direction of the strikes must be responsive to the struggles of workers at workplace level and develop and escalate as necessary. A European general strike as a one-day spectacular, an exercise in letting off steam, will not be good enough.

Revolutionaries in the British labour movement should fight for our unions to be involved. Where possible, live disputes should schedule action for 14 November.

DIRECT ACTION

If it's not logistically possible, or doesn't make industrial sense within a particular campaign, to strike on that day, other direct actions should be organised.

Stewards should organise workplace meetings to discuss any ongoing disputes, and, in the public sector, building a fightback against the pay freeze.

Lobbying the TUC to call a general strike on that day is unrealistic. Even if by some freak the TUC suddenly decreed a "general strike" on that day, it would not really happen.

Instead, 14 November should be a platform for developing independent rank-and-file organisation that can allow workers to take control of our own struggles.

Drop the charges against Bob Carnegie!

By Martin Thomas

The defence campaign for Bob Carnegie, community protest organiser at the August-October 2012 Queensland Children's Hospital construction site dispute in Brisbane, is getting underway.

In the dispute, the main contractor, Abigroup, eventually conceded the workers' demand for union-negotiated Enterprise Bargaining Agreement with a clause ensuring that workers get the rate for the job, whichever one of the many subcontractors they are employed by.

Abigroup also agreed not to pursue legal proceedings for damages against a number of workers on the site. But they are suing Bob Carnegie on 54 separate counts, with thousands of pages of legal documentation. The charges could lead to fines of up to \$400,000 and maybe a jail sentence.

Of course Abigroup suffered big financial

losses during the dispute: \$300,000 a day, they said. Those losses would best have been avoided by negotiating and agreeing to the workers' demand much earlier, rather than stonewalling for nine weeks as Abigroup did.

Obviously those losses cannot be recouped by legal proceedings against a person like Bob Carnegie who has no financial resources other than what an ordinary worker has.

The proceedings against Bob Carnegie can only be seen as a spiteful attempt to intimidate every community activist who may in future wish to assist workers in obtaining justice.

This is a cause which concerns every working-class organisation.

• See bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com for petition, model motion, letter, etc.

• Campaign secretary: Ian Curr — iancurr@bigpond.com +61407687016

Supersize My Pay

Film showing and discussion

How young workers in New Zealand took on McDonalds, Starbucks and KFC over pay... and won. Can we win at work in the UK?

Tuesday 6 November, 7pm, Room 3D, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY. ulu.co.uk/rightsatwork

"Antonio Gramsci: working-class revolutionary" — a Workers' Liberty day school

12pm-6pm, Saturday 24 November, Bloomsbury (central London, venue tbc)

More: workersliberty.org/24novgramsci