

Protests sweep the UK against £83 bn Tory axe to our services

JOIN THE FIGHT TO STOP THE CUTS



All over Britain, protests are mounting against the most vicious set of Tory cuts for 90 years.

Twenty thousand marched in Edinburgh, firefighters, tubeworkers and BBC staff launched strikes, and protests were held in every major city against the unprecedented £83 billion cut and the mass sackings, pay cuts and demolition of services that will follow.

The Coalition government has no mandate – most people voted against a fast track cuts package. But the Tory deal with the Lib Dem liars means Cameron and Osborne are going all out to make the poorest section of society pay the price for the banking crisis and recession.

Half a million job cuts in the public sector and another half a million in private companies as a knock on effect. Council budgets slashed by more than a third. Most schools' budgets to be sliced. Social housing spending to be halved. College fees to skyrocket.

Even worse, the Tories are targeting the very poorest – benefit claimants. A cap on housing benefit will drive up to 200,000 peo-

ple out of inner cities in a Tory programme of social cleansing. Even people with long term sickness and disabilities will suffer as the Tories limit Employment Support Allowance to 12 months.

This is class war – a war by the party of the rich and powerful against the working class. The Tories dare to claim the cuts are 'fair' because 'taxpayers should not fund people who are not working' – as if unemployment is rising because of a sudden outbreak of laziness rather than massive redundancies following the crisis!

The million people set to join the dole queues because of the cuts are not 'scroungers' – they've paid tax and want to work. Nor are the school leavers who can't get a job or a college place. Nor are sick people or those injured at work. Why should we let the Tories drive millions into poverty and smash up communities?

It's time to unite in action. Join your local anticuts committee. Get your union to send delegates to its meetings – and come to the Coalition of Resistance Conference in London on 27 November.

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SUPPORT FIREFIGHTERS STRIKE AGAINST MASS SACKINGS



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Where we stand

Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation formed in 1976 in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and applying their ideas to the fight against capitalism today.

We are the British Section of an international tendency formed in 1989, which in 2003 adopted the name League for the Fifth International to express our fight for a new world party of social revolution.

Capitalism is a crisis-ridden social system that repeatedly plunges the world into destructive phases of economic downturn, instability and war. Private ownership of the means of production obstructs the development of human potential and leaves billions in poverty while a handful of oligarchs monopolise wealth and resources.

The alternative to capitalism is generated by the class struggle of the modern working class which repeatedly organises resistance to the ruling capitalist class. Today, with global capitalism again entering an historic crisis, working class resistance is springing up everywhere against the capitalists' attempts to make the workers pay for a crisis we never caused.

By developing a new revolutionary leadership, the working class can unify its resistance to the capitalist offensive and convert it into a challenge to the rule of capital itself. This means overthrowing the capitalist class in an armed revolution, breaking up the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state and replacing it with the rule of councils of recallable delegates from workplaces and working class communities, guarded and defended by a workers' militia.

The principal obstacle to the victory of working class resistance is the leadership of the working class movement itself. From social-democrats and Labourites through to the mainstream Communist parties with their Stalinist ideology, the mass political parties of the working class movement have long since abandoned the road of revolution. Their reformist ideology not only obscures the road to working class power, but systematically disorganises resistance to the cuts and the capitalist offensive today.

The Fourth International was founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 to challenge the misleadership of social democracy and Stalinism, but since 1951 has abandoned this task and everywhere adapts to their leadership. For this reason, we everywhere raise the call for the formation of a new world party of social revolution, a Fifth International.



Outrage at Vodafone for its £6 billion tax-dodge exploded this week as protesters occupied stores all over the country demanding the phone giant pay its bill and that Tory Chancellor Osborne reverses his scandalous decision to let them off while carrying out massive cuts.

The action began with an occupation of its flagship store in Oxford Street, London, then spread like wildfire to Oxford, Brighton, Brixton and 20 other places across the country.

Check out the videos on YouTube and join the protests in your area!



The Coalition of Resistance is a national campaign that aims to unite the resistance to Con-Dem cuts and the attacks on the welfare state. Its supporters include Tony Benn, John McDonnell MP and trade union leaders Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka. Book your ticket now.

• Go to <http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk/> to register for the conference

JOIN US!

- I would like to join the Workers Power group
- Please send more details about Workers Power

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Email: _____

Tel no: _____

Anti-cuts protests sweep the country

In Edinburgh, 25,000 marched at an anti-cuts protest called by the Scottish TUC on 23 October, the biggest demonstration in Scotland since Make Poverty History in 2005.



In Leicester, about 400 anti-cuts protesters marched along Horsefair Street to a rally in city centre on 30 October.



In Belfast 15,000 marched against the cuts in a protest attacked by Finance Minister Sammy Wilson as a "waste of time".



Three thousand marched in Bristol, 2,000 marched in London led by strikers from the FBU firefighters union, and 1,000 marched in Manchester.



Oxford, Cambridge, Cardiff and Norwich have all seen protests too.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Sat 27 Nov
10am-5pm
Camden Centre,
London WC1H 9AU

workers power

Workers of all countries, unite!

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Lies, damn lies and the biggest cuts in history

As any hardened criminal will tell you, if you want to rob someone of all they have, by the far the easiest way is to first convince them you're doing them a favour.

And so it is with this cynical Tory government and its £83 billion programme of spending cuts – the biggest in British history.

There is no alternative, they tell us, because of the deficit. Smirking as they say it, Cameron and Clegg blame 'Labour's overspending' for the vast public debt the British government accumulated in the crisis.

It is a lie. There was no overspending, no surfeit of schools, hospitals and care services that we didn't need or suddenly 'can't afford'.

Deficit

The public debt was caused by three things: the £1.3 trillion bailout of the banks, a dramatic fall in tax revenues as a result of the recession, and the ballooning benefits bill because of mass unemployment as hundred of thousands lost their jobs in 2008 and 2009. All three of these factors had a single cause: the Great Credit Crunch and Capitalist Crisis.

Now the government has to borrow to cover its debts – and it borrows from the so-called 'bond markets' – in fact a tiny cabal of indescribably wealthy people who invest billions in state debt and demand vast interest payments in return.

To pay these parasites and keep this failing system intact, we are being asked to suffer a fall in living standards across the board that will drive millions into poverty and change the face of Britain.

Fairness

Over a million new job losses in the public and private sector. Funding for councils slashed by a third. Most school budgets sliced. £18 billion axed from benefits. Mass evictions as housing benefit is capped. College fees skyrocketing. The list goes on and on.

And now the Tories and their Lib Dem backers dare to talk of 'fairness'! It is not fair, their new housing minister Grant Shaps tells us, that working families should have to fund the benefits of their neighbours who 'will not work'. But was it fair when more than a million were thrown on the dole? Were the car workers,

builders and engineers who lost their jobs in the downturn to blame for the bank crisis? Why should people forced onto benefits be forced out of their homes as well? Perhaps to Orwell's famous slogans from 1984 – War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery and Ignorance is Strength – the Con-Dem Coalition should add a new one of its own: Fairness is Poverty.

Ideology

The new Labour leader Ed Miliband says he would deliver cuts but more slowly. The cuts are not driven by economics but by ideology, he says. The leaders of the biggest trade unions agree. Most socialists repeat this without a thought.

But what does this really mean? The Tory ideology of 'cutting down the state' means easing the tax burden on the rich by slashing services working class people rely on, privatising health and education so that the rich jump the queue and the rest of us get third rate. But their ideology is driven by economics and the crisis of the system.

By saying the cuts are not driven by the economy, the Labour and union leaders are letting the capitalist economic system off the hook. If only we didn't have these ideological cuts, they imply, the system would be ok. They'd make 'fairer' cuts – like the 20 percent cuts Darling was planning before the election – and all would be well.

In this way Miliband wants to limit resistance to voting Labour at the next election.

But if we wait five years we'll be staggering into the next election over the broken back of the welfare state, with hospitals taken out of the NHS, the inner cities 'cleansed' of working class people (and voters of course), the schools divided into posh ones for posh kids and crap ones for us, millions desperate on the dole. The Tories would have won a historic battle to dismantle the gains the working class won after the Second World War in 1945 – and the middle class, a weak class that admires strength, will rally to the Tories and vote them back in just like they did Thatcher in 1983 and 1987.

The Labour and trade union leaders want to... keep all protest to a minimum so as not to set off a revolt up and down the country. That's why...

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women's perspective from **JOSEPHINE CASSIDY**

Stop telling us what to wear!

The mayor of Italian town Castellammare di Stabia has banned women from wearing revealing clothing. Miniskirts and muffintops could cost you €300 according to the new legislation which supposedly attempts to "restore urban decorum".

These repressive measures have sparked outrage from many women in the city, who staged a sit-in at the town hall. Councillor Angela Cortese slammed the measures: "By equating women's clothing with urban decorum, this measure implies women are no more than benches or hedges."

Urban decorum? What a joke! With high unemployment and 22% of households living in relative poverty in the south of Italy, surely that is what is lowering the tone. This ban is about limiting women's freedom and enforcing moral order.

Women's clothing is more than just fashion. Across the world and throughout history, women's right to choose what they wear has been restricted, whether through laws or social norms. In Iran, women have to cover their hair by law and in the Kenyan city of Mombassa, mini skirts have been banned since 2004. Not to mention the laws recently passed in France and Belgium banning the burqa in public places.

Women's bodies are political and cultural battlegrounds and we need to fight to control them ourselves. The mini skirt itself is iconic. But is it a symbol of women's liberation? It is particularly associated with the 1960s, when women won abortion and divorce rights, as well as equal pay. While in some ways, it represents empowerment and sexual freedom, there is another side to the mini skirt. Often pushed by male designers and photographers to appeal to male desires, it encapsulates the contradictions facing women in this age of supposed sexual freedom.

Unfortunately, recently, women wearing skimpy clothing have been portrayed as vulnerable and at worst "asking for it". Women's clothes are often used as factors in cases of sexual assault and mini skirts and revealing clothing are seen as proof that sex was consensual.

This sentiment was echoed by an Italian priest, who claimed that the ban on revealing clothing in Castellammare di Stabia would help cut down sexual harassment. This is outrageous and is putting the blame for sexual assault onto the victims.

The law should never be used to prescribe to women what we can and can't wear – whether it be the mini skirt or the burqa. It is because of our place in society and the family, that our appearance is scrutinised while men's clothing is rarely questioned. We need to fight for the right to wear whatever we want, free from judgement and discrimination.

★ HOME FRONT

Coalition cuts are class war

Rebecca Anderson

This isn't just another cuts package – Cameron's cuts are a declaration of war on working class communities and the services we rely on. Unless they are stopped, millions will be thrown into poverty through job losses, evictions and the demolition of basics like care for the elderly, council services, college places...and the list goes on and on.

Particularly sickening is the attack on benefits, which will take money away from the poorest people in Britain, including the disabled, the jobless, and large low-income families in the cities.

And they dare to call these cuts "fair"!

The result of the spending review, if the Tories get their way, will include almost half a million public sector workers losing their jobs, a similar number in the private sector, the savaging of councils by over 35 per cent, take £7 billion out of welfare provision, and increase the retirement age and even rail fares.

It's estimated that 72 per cent of the cuts will fall on the shoulders of women, due to large numbers of women who work in public services,

and because women will be expected to pick up where healthcare and care of the elderly and disabled stops.

"All in this together"?

Cameron and his sidekick Nick Clegg say "we are all in this together", but their cuts clobber the poor and leave the rich well alone.

Company boardroom pay has increased by fifty-five percent in a year and many UK companies like Next and Vodafone pay hardly any tax. £25 billion of tax is evaded and £70 billion avoided by wealthy individuals and companies every year.

The Tories have even shut down the section of Revenue and Customs dedicated to collecting tax from millionaires!

They don't want to "sort out" the "mess left by Labour". They want to make the working class pay for an economic crisis caused by the rich and the capitalists – by blaming unemployment on the jobless, blaming destitution on the hungry and blaming poverty on the welfare state.

This is an ideological, political and economic attack on the very fabric of our society, driven by a system in crisis.

It must be stopped.

Build local anticuts committees

Communities, trade unions, trades councils, tenants organisations, youth, students and local Labour Party groups are organising to fight these vicious cuts together.

We need to continue to build anticuts committees in every single town and city across Britain.

And they must extend into every corner of our communities, opposing every single cut, and defending every single job, service and benefit.

Join your local anticuts group and help them get in touch with every organisation you can think of who will oppose these cuts.

Help build the local resistance: protests, rallies, strikes and occupations that can defend the welfare state and stop the cuts going through.

And anticuts committees, if they are strong enough, could go on to deliver action even if the Labour and union leaders won't.

Demolition of welfare that must be stopped

Housing: “social cleansing” as 200,000 forced out of inner cities

Bernie McAdam

Housing benefit will be capped to £400 for four-bedroom houses, forcing as many as 200,000 working class residents out of inner-city areas.

Councils neighbouring London, where rents are extremely high, are reported to have block-booked B&B accommodation fearing that their housing stock will not be able to cope.

To rub salt into the wound, at a time of mass unemployment, there will be a 10 per cent cut in housing benefit for those on Jobseekers Allowance for over 12 months. Single people under 35 will now have to share accommodation if they are claiming housing benefit.

Funding for social housing is to be cut

by more than 60 per cent and housing associations will be allowed to charge new tenants close to the full market rate. This will leave millions of families in limbo on housing waiting lists and push house prices further out of reach for most people. The right to a council house for life will be scrapped with new shorter tenancies, whilst subsidies paid for the building of affordable homes have also been slashed.

Evictions will soar

These proposals will have a devastating impact on some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the country, forcing thousands of working class families to move homes and leave jobs. Evictions will soar as unemployed and low income earners see their arrears rise to intolerable levels.

Council services slashed by a third

John Bowman

Services and welfare provided by councils will be smashed under Comprehensive Spending Review proposals that reduce local funding by over 30 per cent.

Councils were expecting to have to save a huge 7.1 annually for four years, but councillors have complained that they are “front-heavy” and that they will make the hardest cuts earliest.

The proposals will send hundreds of thousands of workers to the dole queues.

The full Spending Review document reports that councils and local authorities “will be able to cease reporting any of the 4,700 local area agreement targets”, keeping results of the cuts under wraps.

Many councils have not yet put forward their response to the spending review,

but Darlington council has – and it creates a grim picture of what could come if the cuts are implemented.

A whole range of services are to face the axe including a quarter of library services, bus subsidies, bowling greens, the subsidies to the civic theatre and art centre, 400 jobs will go, in a town with high unemployment.

But many communities are prepared for a fight, and anti-cuts groups have been set up in many towns and cities across Britain – drawing in trade unions, communities, youth, and constituency Labour Parties.

Where Labour councillors are carrying out the cuts, anti-cuts groups are demanding they breach spending review proposals and plan budgets based on the needs of the communities and launch a fight against central government.



Retirement age raised, young deprived of work




Public sector workers and job-seekers alike are furious at Osborne’s spending review plan to raise the retirement age, and slash workers’ pensions.

Workers will soon have to suffer an extra 3 per cent pay cut to fund their retirement – in addition to the public sector pay freeze announced by the Tories.

Come 2020, both men and women will have to be 66 if they are to receive a state pension.

“People are being asked to work until they drop – and young people will be thrown on the scrapheap”, said Rebecca Allen, young members’ convenor for civil service union PCS in West Yorkshire.

Cuts keep coming

-  Employment and Support Allowance cut to one year
-  Benefit cap of £500, bashing large low-income families
-  Legal Aid set to be slashed, with 25 per cent cut to Justice Department

industrial overview from **JEREMY DRINKALL**

Don't let the TUC delay the fightback

I'm sure I'm not the only trade unionist who's first thought when the TUC called a national demonstration against the cuts for March next year was "good – but why delay for more than five months"?

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber and Unite leader Derek Simpson told BBC Newsnight that these things take time because British workers "aren't like the French". But there is no doubt that if they called a national march against cuts this year the turnout would be huge.

How do I know? Well, more than 20,000 joined the Scottish TUC's recent march. As I write reports are coming in of huge numbers of coaches booked for the NUS student march on 10 November.

A national march this year would be joined by workers taking strike action too – and would put them in close contact with each other. Already Bob Crow of the RMT transport union called on London Underground workers to refuse to work when fire crews are on strike. Bringing our strikes together can only strengthen the resistance.

The answer has to be linking up at the base. Every union branch taking strike action, preparing to ballot or facing cuts should join and build local anticuts committees. That way we can start building really big local and regional rallies.

By sending delegates to the Coalition of Resistance national conference on 27 November we can try to get enough people together to call a national protest before March. And by bringing forward ballots, we can try to synchronise strikes as much as possible: and launch indefinite strikes alongside one another, tube workers, fire-fighters, civil servants (who are facing 70,000 job losses right now). That way we could build up to a national public sector strike.

What if the Tories then try to use the anti-union laws to break us like they did to the miners? Then from anticuts committees and unions across the UK the call should go up for an all-out indefinite general strike, to break the cuts and bring down the government...with or without the TUC.



50,000 marched on TUC demo in '09 – we need another!

★ INDUSTRIAL

Boris Johnson takes on RMT tube workers

Peter Main

London's Tory Mayor, Boris Johnson, is demanding even more job cuts on the Tube network, up to 800, on top of the 1300 announced in September. Johnson is not only looking for spending cuts, he is targeting the main union on the Tube, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, RMT.

The RMT is a major obstacle to Tory plans to dismantle the public sector. Under the leadership of Bob Crow, the union has mobilised its members to defend jobs, conditions and pay. Very often, relatively limited action, one or two day stoppages, or even the threat of them, has been enough to force managements to back down.

But times have changed. The RMT's current policy, one day strikes and an overtime ban, will not deter Johnson. Measured against the gains he expects, politically and

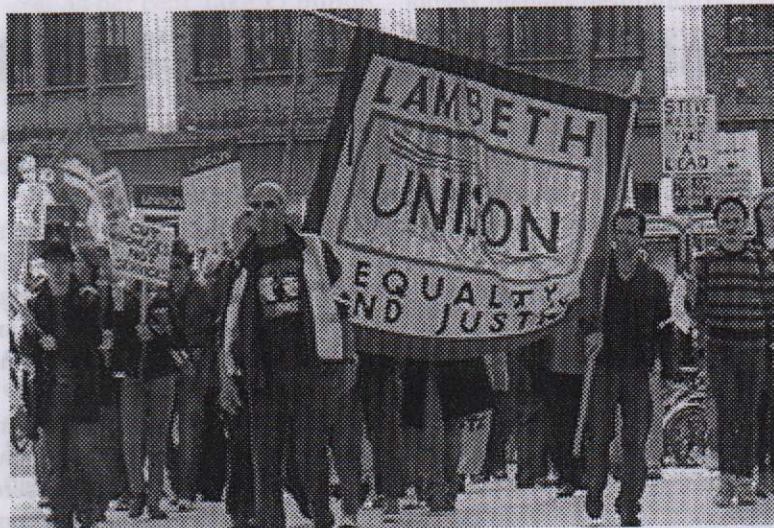
financially, from defeating one of the best organised unions in the country, even weekly closures are just an inconvenience.

The potential for more powerful, indefinite, strike action is clearly there. The first stoppage, on 5 October was widely supported and many RMT members also refused to work during the Firefighters' strike on safety grounds.

In the longer run, however, loss of wages, management introduction of new rosters, "voluntary severance" packages and the constant barrage of hostile media coverage could wear down morale.

Instead of relying on one day strikes and individual workers refusing to work on FBU strike days, the RMT leadership should propose coordinated strike action with the FBU and answer Johnson's increased demands with an indefinite strike until all cuts are withdrawn.

South London march against the cuts



Several hundred trade unionists marched in Brixton, South London, on Saturday 30 October against cuts.

The demonstration called by Lambeth Save Our Services and other organisations saw Unison, NUT, GMB, Unite, members along with pensioners and local activists march against Lambeth Council's cuts. The marchers heard from workers in children's services who have already successfully defended their One O Clock clubs.



Firefighters protest against the sackings

Unite elections: vote Jerry Hicks

Billy McKean

Ballot papers for electing the next general secretary have now been posted out to all 1.2 million members of Unite.

They have a chance to shape the future of Britain's largest trade union.

The key fight in this election is between victimised Rolls Royce convenor – Jerry Hicks – and Len McCluskey, who has been a full-time official for 25 years. Right-wingers Les Bayliss and Gail Cartmail have little chance of winning.

McCluskey drafted the Unite rulebook, making all officials appointed rather than elected. His supporters in the London Buses Division oversaw a nominations process where many drivers had no idea that branch meetings were taking place, if they indeed did.

Jerry mobilised a campaign team of drivers, cleaners and supporters, who have taken his message to workplaces in all weathers and at all hours.

Jerry pledged the election of all of Unite's officials and he promises to take, if elected, the pay of the average skilled worker – not the six-figure salary of Len McCluskey.

Jerry has pedigree as a fighter and offers policies based on strikes and workers' control. And he came second in last year's Amicus wing election.

But unless a strong rank and file movement can hold the next general secretary to their promises, they will be subject to the pressures of trade union bureaucracy and, through them, the bosses.

Unite members need a fighting leadership and full control of their union if they are to beat the Con-Dem cuts.

Vote Hicks – and take the fight to the bosses!

Firefighters must win

Dave Stockton

London's 5,557 firefighters face the sack from 26 November. This mass lockout by the bosses at the London Fire Service, headed by Tory Brian Coleman, is undoubtedly co-ordinated with London Mayor Boris Johnson and the government.

They aim to break the strongest public sector union – one with a left leadership – intimidate others and demoralise resistance to the cuts.

For just these reasons all trade unionists and the anticuts movement must act together in solidarity with the firefighters.

They face the sack for refusing changes to shift patterns that will seriously worsen conditions for them and their families and reducing the service for the general public.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary has argued that "similar changes elsewhere have led the way to reducing emergency cover at night. That means reducing the number of firefighters, fire stations and fire engines that are available for calls at night."

But London's firefighters will not be intimidated. They know

Solidarity with firefighters

• Picket lines:

All London fire stations, Friday 5 November (from 10am) to Sunday 7 November (9am)

• Fundraising: "Hardship Fund", Loyds TSB, sort code: 30-94-57, a/c no: 01764558

• Messages of support: email joe.macveigh@fbu.org.uk or post to Joe MacVeigh, FBU London Region Secretary, John Horner Mews, off Frome Street, London N1 8PB

• FBU leaflet for the public available at: www.london.fbu.org.uk/issues/shifts/FBU_London_take2.pdf

that they have public support and admiration for the job they do. They can give a lead to the whole labour movement – especially public service workers facing 500,000 job losses.

After the successful strike on 23 October, firefighters have upped the tempo of their actions with an eight hour walk-out on 1 November and two-day strike on 5-6th. Now they need to up the ante against the bosses' scabbing operation and go on indefinite strike to win.

But Labour leader Ed Miliband has refused to support the firefighters and his office confirmed that the FBU strikes were "irresponsible". Local Labour parties should not take this in silence. They should con-

demn Miliband's statement and get behind the strike:

- Set up support groups around every fire station.
- Join the picket lines and help stop the private scabs.
- Collect money for strikers
- Wherever possible, take solidarity action – copy the RMT and walk out at once wherever safety is compromised.

If the sackings go ahead, the entire London labour movement should take to the streets.

The Southern and Eastern Regional TUC – which backs the FBU – should organise mass demonstrations and call on all unions, students and youth to take solidarity action.

A victory for the firefighters would be a stunning first victory over the cuts and Tories.

NUJ votes to strike at BBC

NUJ member

Members of the National Union of Journalists at the BBC are to strike on 5-6 and 15-16 November.

The strikes come after NUJ members voted by 70 per cent to reject an offer that would have worsened any future pension and eroded what they have already paid in.

Activists

Officially, the NUJ and Bectu (the biggest union at the BBC, which organises non-editorial staff) made no recommendation on the offer. On the ground, Bectu's leadership said

it was the best deal that could be "negotiated" without recourse to industrial action while NUJ leaders were more critical of the deal and said they would support strike action by the membership if they threw out the deal.

It was left to reps and activists from both unions to put out a leaflet arguing for a "No" vote. It was emailed and handed out around the BBC. This helped deliver the NUJ rejection but Bectu voted by 65 per cent for the deal.

Shutdown

Editorial staff can still close the BBC and win. Pickets must ask

Bectu members not to cross. Bectu should bring forward their grievances, such as cuts in services, so they can fight alongside the NUJ. The action needs to be escalated to an all-out strike.

But why don't all the public service unions come together to defend pensions – just like they have in France. Individual unions can be picked off, but together we can defeat the Tories.

Rank and file "Open Channel" leaflet calling for rejection of BBC pensions offer



Welsh Labour council issues lock out threat to 10,000 staff



Rhondda Cynon Taff website shows its staff and services, which are being slashed and sacked

Chris Newcombe

Labour led Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) council has told its workers to sign new contracts or face redundancy. The GMB union has warned members not to sign them, but to "stand firm in the face of this threat".

The council's diktat took the form of a "collective redundancy notice" sacking all 10,000 workers. Gareth Morgan, South Wales GMB officer, summed up the workforce's disgust:

"GMB is aware that some Tory and Lib Dem councils are...using a legal device of pretending to make all their workforce redundant and offering some of them re-employment on worse pay and conditions. Now Rhondda Cynon Taff in the

Labour heartlands are resorting to this lockout tactic. It is totally unacceptable."

The union walked out of the talks, insisting that it would only return if the threat of a lockout was lifted.

But Labour council leader Russell Roberts washed his hands of the problem, saying it was a matter for council officers and the unions.

Having voted through the cuts, the council has cowardly ceded negotiating powers to the chief executive!

This shows the need for a local movement of trade unions, youth, community groups and Labour Party CLPs to challenge councillors, and get them to refuse to implement central government cuts locally.

Royal Mail sell off speeds up

Communications Workers Union rep

ConDem Business Secretary Vince Cable is rushing Royal Mail towards privatisation, with the legislation's second reading brought forward to October.

Postal managers in Unite union are balloting on more than 1,500 job losses – great, but remember how they scabbed last year.

So it's a scandal that CWU postworkers union tops have done nothing to fight the sell-off, job cuts or closures.

Its Keep the Post Public "campaign" website hasn't been updated since September. Members heard nothing for weeks until a single letter posted 20 October requesting us to "take direct action" – by writing to our MP!

We need to take direct action by striking against office closures that could see tens of thousands of jobs going.

Postal workers should support managers' right to strike and say to them: "We won't walk through your picket lines – will you walk through ours?"



Leak shows US and UK using Saddam-style torture in Iraq

Marcus Halaby

British and US troops tortured and murdered Iraqi civilians on a huge scale, revealed whistleblower website WikiLeaks – but security services are more worried about stopping WikiLeaks than bringing the killers to justice.

Only three months after its exposure of the murder of Afghan civilians by the US forces, WikiLeaks has now released 390,000 documents about Iraq.

An order to coalition troops, dubbed “Frago 242”, insisted that they should not investigate the murder or torture of prisoners, and other breaches of the Geneva Conventions, unless citizens of the occupying countries were involved.

Also, US forces lied that they do not record civilian deaths, but in fact their war logs count 109,000 people killed over five years, of whom at least 65,000 were civilians. This was 15,000 more than the figure estimated by the NGO Iraq Body Count, and 30,000 more than figures published by the US government.

US troops in Samarra and British troops in Basra routinely turned over prisoners that they had arrested to Iraqi security forces infiltrated by sectarian Shi’ite militias.

A special (and almost exclusively Shi’ite) interior ministry commando unit known as the “Wolf Brigade” was especially vicious, using threats to rape detainees’ female relatives to extract confessions, as well

drilling holes into the arms and legs of prisoners under interrogation. The leaked documents show that US interrogators were often present during torture.

Nick Clegg, in a bid to cling on to his party’s reputation as having been “opposed” to the invasion of Iraq, called the allegations “extraordinarily serious”.

The newspapers are focusing on the legal aspects of the revelations. But this is not just a question of US or British commanders turning a blind eye to the actions of their Iraqi counterparts or taking part in them. It is part and parcel of how the occupation forces have divided and ruled Iraq. This is the reason why the pro-war pundits have been so outraged by the leaks.

No wonder pro-war journalist Christian Whiton, a former US State Department adviser and occasional Fox News contributor, recommends that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange should be investigated and indicted as a spy, that WikiLeaks should be declared “enemy combatants”, that its assets should be frozen and that its website should be electronically assaulted.

The sight of the billionaire Rupert Murdoch’s mouthpiece being used to attack and criminalise an independent media outlet should disgust us.

But it should also harden our resolve to put an end to this war, through the immediate withdrawal of all the occupying troops.

imperialism in the dock MARCUS HALABY

Israel looks strong ...but it is doomed

I believe they call it *chutzpah*. Right in the middle of talks with Mahmoud Abbas’ powerless Palestinian Authority, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu restarted building illegal Jewish settlements on stolen Palestinian land.

To many, this merely emphasised the utter contempt of Israel’s rulers towards the Palestinian people. But to my mind it exposes the dilemma that will eventually tear the Jewish state apart.

How can Israel keep expanding its territory without turning its Jewish citizens into a minority who can be outvoted by Palestinian Arabs?

For decades, Tel Aviv’s preferred solution has been negotiations for “two states”, giving the Palestinians a shrunken ghetto run by collaborators, while grabbing all the best land and resources. But Israel’s own insatiable drive for expansion – and the resistance it has provoked – has repeatedly undermined talks.

The last serious attempt to implement a version of “two states” was Ariel Sharon’s so-called “unilateral disengagement” in 2005 from Gaza, a territory with plenty of Arabs on it, but not that much land. This allowed Israel to disclaim responsibility for more than 1.5 million Palestinians, while keeping them caged, blockaded and repeatedly bombarded.

Since then Netanyahu has rejected any further withdrawals, seeing the war in Gaza as proof that Sharon’s “disengagement plan” was a mistake.

But his current delaying tactics cannot avoid one simple fact: Palestinians will soon form a majority of the people under Israel’s rule. Will they let them vote?

No wonder Israel’s ultra-right foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman’s wants to make citizenship for Israel’s Arab minority dependent on their swearing “loyalty” to the Jewish character of the state. This policy – sign up to Zionism or get out – pushes not towards “two states” but apartheid or mass expulsions.

In the meantime maverick senior figures in the ruling Likud party, like Tzipi Hotovely and Moshe Arens, have suggested that granting a second-class form of Israeli citizenship to some West Bank Palestinians may be an acceptable price to pay for formally annexing their land. That means formal apartheid with a majority without full voting rights.

The only realistic alternatives are genocide or expulsion.

Sooner or later, Israel will be forced by its own expansion to stop pretending it is ‘the only democracy in the Middle East’ and embrace either open apartheid or open ethnic cleansing.

Either way, it is doomed.

Tories launch historic

John Bowman

“The final nail in the coffin”. That was the judgement of teaching union UCU on the vicious Browne Review into higher education funding. The ‘Independent Review’, chaired by the ex-boss of oil giant BP has set out the most drastic market-driven attack on university education ever seen in Britain.

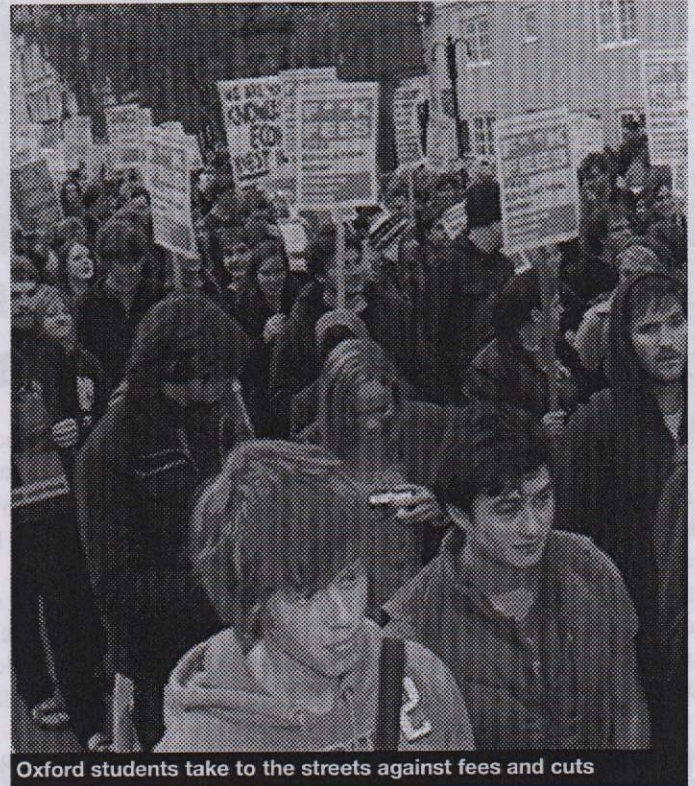
It proposed:

- The complete abolition of the cap on tuition fees, now to be raised from £3,290 to £9,000
- Using these variable fees to create competition between different universities and courses
- Diverting all sources of funding away from arts, humanities and social sciences towards “priority subjects” preferred by the jobs market and big business such as pharmaceutical and engineering related courses.
- Using the market to bolster

the position of a few “priority courses” at elite UK universities on the global education market, at the expense of other courses at other institutions.

Announced only a few days before chancellor George Osborne’s Comprehensive Spending Review made the decision to slash university teaching budgets from £7.1bn to £4.2bn a cut of 40 per cent by 2014, the Browne Review project is to let the market rip through higher education, letting new universities go to the wall.

In the words of the report, “there needs to be a closer fit between what is taught in higher education and the skills needed in the economy... There are clinical and priority courses such as medicine, science and engineering that are important to the well-being of our society and to our economy... In our proposals there will be scope for Government to withdraw public



Oxford students take to the streets against fees and cuts

investment through HEFCE from many courses to contribute to wider reductions in public spending” (Browne, 2010, p.23-25)

The proposals if implemented would turn university into nothing more than a recruitment ground for big business – to the detriment of knowledge, cul-

We need a strategy to

John Bowman

Angry protests broke out across Britain when Lord Browne’s report was published, and with a clear and militant strategy, students and workers can beat the Tory plan to demolish education.

Students from London, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield all to part in actions against the review.

In later weeks, over 1,000 students at Oxford University defied police instructions and marched through the city centre, and attempting to occupy a building on mass.

The National Union of Students, along with the University and Colleges Union had already planned a mass demonstration for 10 November aiming to bring tens of thousands of students and workers together onto the streets.

This could be the start to a mass militant wave of occupations, walkouts and strike action linking the student and workers movement together in a powerful force to paralyse the education system, coordinating with workers and trade unions in every sector to bring down the vicious Tories for good.

But a quick look at the recent past shows that this is the last thing NUS has in mind.

As the Labour government cut hundreds of millions of pounds from higher education before the general election, and thousands of university and college lecturers lost their jobs, NUS strategy was to avoid rocking the boat.

“Vote for Students”

They ignored calls and petitions for a national demonstration at the time, and instead launched a “Vote for Students” campaign, urging students to vote

for MPs, mostly Liberal Democrats, who had signed an NUS pledge against fee rises.

Rather than building a mass movement of protest and direct action to challenge MPs, to stop all education cuts, and make them think twice before raising fees, they de-mobilised students, and left them unprepared for when the pledge-signing MP’s reneged on their promises.

Whilst NUS knew the Browne Review was likely to propose fees of at least £7,000, its leaders argued to delay action until its release date, and lobby for a ‘graduate tax’

attack on education

ture and the betterment of society as a whole.

Debt as a weapon

The Review is clear and unrepentant on how this is to be achieved. A massive increase of tuition fees, through a system of loans and far higher costs, Browne aims to use debt as a weapon, making students take up courses that will allow them to pay off huge debts they will incur after graduation.

A study by the University of Leicester found that if arts and humanities fees rose to £7,000 per year, then there would be a 116 per cent rise in those deterred from taking up courses, compared to 31 per cent who would be deterred from medicine, a course that is perceived to lead to well paid jobs.

New universities

But the threat is not just to courses, it is to entire universities. Those which successfully gear themselves towards profit

driven courses and “deliver improved employability” will be able to charge far higher fees, whereas “those that make false promises will disappear.” (Browne 2010, p.31)

In practice, this puts new universities, looked upon less favourably by employers, at an enormous disadvantage. Their intake of less affluent students are more likely to be discouraged by higher fees. They rely more heavily on state funding as opposed to the property, donations and sponsorship benefiting more established Russell Group institutions.

The University of Greenwich estimates a loss of 80 per cent of its teaching grant income.

Million+, an organisation representing new universities say the bulk of their members would have to charge £8,000 per year just to maintain current levels of funding – fees so high that they would be simply unable to compete with Russell Group institutions.

Sally Hunt, General Secretary of the UCU said:

“As a result of this creation of a market for student places, we would see departments and universities close and a devastating effect on the curriculum as only so-called priority courses survive. It would become almost impossible to develop courses in new areas of knowledge without directly perceived economic benefit.”

Unemployment as a weapon

What is not mentioned in the Browne Review, is that it relies on the intense pressure on young people to find a decent job, or indeed any work when they finish education – at a time when there is a crisis of youth unemployment.

No wonder university applications are rising, despite the threat of debt in later life, with disappointment for more than 200,000 applicants, or three-in-ten who could not get a place this year. Next year it is likely to

be even worse, with universities cutting places to prepare for shrunken budgets, and students wanting to put themselves ahead in a jobs market with even fewer opportunities.

Students will do almost anything to get a higher education in this environment, but the scale of the fees suggested by Browne means many will be simply unable – depriving less affluent students of an education.

Attack on culture

With new universities looking set to close, unable to supplement enormous teaching grant reductions with fees, and with arts and humanities subjects looking set to become viable only for the rich, Browne’s review is an historic attack on the access of working class people to culture that must be fought with every means at our disposal – up to and including joint national strike action by both students and staff.

beat Browne's plans

instead.

Before Vince Cable ditched the policy, NUS President Aaron Porter said “Cable’s support for a graduate tax is to be welcomed”. In accepting this NUS leaders weakened the argument for free education – and that income tax should be raised for the rich to fund education for everyone. In short, they caved in to a key principle of Browne’s review.

But other than making angry statements, and building the 10 November “Demo-lition” march, NUS proposed no new action upon release of the

review.

It was left to Workers Power members in the grassroots National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts to propose a national day of action and walkouts, uniting school, college and university students to follow up the demonstration.

The day of action is picking up steam, gaining support from other campaigns such as Leeds University Against Cuts, Defend Sussex University and the Education Activist Network.

This shows what can be achieved when there is coordination between university

anti-cuts campaigns organised from the grassroots.

The strength of such bodies is that they draw in students and workers together, but are independent from the official structures of the NUS and UCU that can sometimes be slow and unwilling to act.

If they can be built into powerful committees at every campus, every college and every school, students and youth can become a radical mass force in a broader movement to kill the Browne Review and smash the entire Tory offensive aiming to destroy the welfare state.

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24 Nov

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France: turning point

Mass strike wave at a crossroads – will union leaders snatch defeat from the jaws of victory?

Dave Stockton

Millions of French workers have put up tremendous resistance to President Sarkozy's attack on their pension rights in a wave of intense strikes and marches – but now the battle has reached a turning point. With the strategy of successive one-day strikes having failed to force Sarkozy to back down, and with a key strike in the oil refineries beginning to crumble, the movement has only two alternatives: slowly wind down and hand the bosses a big victory, or go forward to an all out general strike that can bust the pension law, bring down Sarkozy and set the European resistance to cuts on fire.

Danger

The reason French workers are suddenly staring the possibility of defeat in the face is the fatally flawed strategy of the leaders of the trade unions – including the Socialist Party aligned CFDT and the more militant CGT led by the Communist Party.

The turnaround seems sudden. Protests on 28 October saw another two million people on the streets, for the seventh time since the movement began on 7 September. Yet the next day saw a return to work by port workers at France's main oil terminals, and workers also went back at the last five striking oil refineries including Grandpuits near Paris. In Paris demo numbers fell from 330,000 to 170,000.

This could be because of



High school students join dockers on strike in Marseille

school holidays but it is probably also two other things – the pension law has now been passed, and the less determined of the protesters are starting to tire of a process that seems to be bringing no results.

Successive one day protests are not working. The CGT strategy is based on strikes and blockades by the most militant of the unions plus weekly mass demonstrations and big one-day national strikes.

But this has not been enough to force Sarkozy to the negotiating table – because the government and the capitalists mean business and are determined to force this through, so that the even bigger cuts plan they have in store is not stalled at the first hurdle.

By contrast, the trade union leaders' real objective has been to force Sarkozy to negotiate, whereas most union members' aim has been to force him to drop the pension attack completely. The leaders' strategy relied using only the key strongholds of the CGT – the ports,

transport and power workers – to bring Sarkozy to his senses, rather than an all-out indefinite general strike to bring him to his knees.

When Sarkozy refused to back down the union leaders had no idea what to do. They treat the very idea of a full-scale indefinite general strike as unthinkable. The reason? They know that this would pose the question: who rules France – Sarkozy or the workers? And both the social democrats of the CFDT and the Stalinists of the CGT leadership are ideologically committed to one overriding idea: the working class must not make a social revolution and take power into its own hands.

So in the end they have nothing beyond their tried, tested and “successful” strategy for letting off steam and then winding down struggles via repeated “days of action.” Under mass pressure, in September, they increased the tempo to weekly mobilisations and the CGT kept the strikes going in the

refineries. But when the massive success of these mobilisations posed the need for all out action in October, they stubbornly refused to go forward. They decided to “snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.”

France's workers face a critical moment. The unions have called another day of action for 6 November. Militants must do all they can to make it a major success, because if the movement does not resume its forward march it will decline and eventually collapse. But there is still time – just. Victory can still be snatched from the jaws of defeat.

Public opinion remains solidly behind the movement and against Sarkozy – more than 70 per cent back the protests. But the demonstrators need to direct their demands on the union leaders and insist they call for an all out, indefinite general strike. Not just the most militant activists but the big battalions of the organised and unorganised workers must be brought onto the field of battle. This could checkmate Sarkozy.

Strategy

The present impasse highlights another problem with the union leaderships' false strategy: they oppose forming co-ordinations, or delegate-based committees to co-ordinate action at local level, for fear of giving the rank and file the initiative. Vital as the daily mass meetings (*assemblés générales*) of rail and power supply workers, teachers and school students have been, they



CGT lead march against pension reform in Marseilles

are not enough to take the struggle on to a decisive stage. To mobilise an all-out general strike of millions, co-ordinations are needed, councils of delegates elected at the mass meetings in every workplace.

Councils of delegates are needed to win over the great majority of workers not yet taking action and to prevent the coming sabotage by the union leaderships.

They have another urgent task too. Persistent police attacks on the blockades at the refineries, and on the youth from the working class and migrant suburbs, shows the need to set up *services d'ordres* – large numbers of stewards to protect protests against the police and prevent provocations.

The task of revolutionary socialists in France is to be the best supporters and builders of the movement, and also to argue within the movement for the tactics necessary to win, or as Leon Trotsky put it, to “say what is”. That means sharply criticising Bernard Thibault of the CGT and François Chérèque of the CFDT, without diplomatic niceties. And it means breaking the time hallowed French tradition that bars “political interference in the business of the unions”.

The biggest far left party in France – the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) – has been to the fore on the streets and the blockades. But it has not boldly said “what is” about the crisis of direction facing the movement. The NPA has mentioned the need for an unlimited general strike but in the most mild and unchallenging way, not as a vital slogan of the day, and not as a direct challenge to the failed strategy of Thibault and Chérèque.

When Sarkozy sent in the hated CRS riot police to smash picket lines at the power

stations, the NPA’s leading speaker Olivier Besancenot, issued the following statement:

“I propose to all the leaders of political parties, associations, trade unions: respond together against this unconscionable assault against the workers’ movement and its rights.”

New party

Of course he was right to call for the leaders to act. But he should have said what action he proposed – an immediate all out general strike, the formation of coordinations in every town and city, the formation of self-defence squads equipped to resist the CRS and in numbers sufficient to repulse them. He should have warned that Thibault, Chérèque and the other union leaders could not be trusted.

Besancenot did not. The hard truth is that the NPA is tailing the CGT, not giving a lead, revealing that it is not a revolutionary party but a centrist one, vacillating between reform and revolution.

Can this change? Yes – on one condition, that now, at this critical juncture, it breaks from its tailism and diplomacy towards the union leaders and warns that they are selling out the struggle. It should issue a clear action plan which its thousands of militants should fight for in the mass meetings, in factories, offices, schools and universities. They must take the initiative in forming co-ordinations and organising defence squads.

That way the NPA can live up to the revolutionary promises it made in its draft programme at its founding conference last year. Then – win or lose in this struggle – it will grow rapidly as a revolutionary party preparing workers for even more decisive struggles ahead.

Letter from **Sri Lanka**



**Mahinda Devege, National Secretary,
Socialist Plantation Workers’ Union**

More than 120 delegates from 20 public-sector unions have formed a campaign for better pay. It brings together unions associated with the JVP (People’s Liberation Front); independent unions such as the Independent Ceylon Teachers’ Union; and the Joint Health Workers’ Union and the Socialist Plantation Workers’ Union, which are affiliated to the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka (SPSL), part of the League for the Fifth International.

The campaign has two demands: an immediate increase of 8,000 rupees (£45) and standardisation of pay rates across the public sector. There will be public meetings on the campaign’s aims and strategy in four districts, along with rallies and pickets of government departments in the capital, Colombo.

Until recently, co-operation between these unions would have been impossible. The Maoist JVP which has adopted a virulent Sinhala chauvinism, supporting President Mahinda Rajapakse’s war against the Tamil Tigers, and opposed public-sector strikes as a threat to the “national interest”. The SPSL meanwhile maintained a principled opposition to the war and unconditional defence of the Tamils’ right to self-determination.

The campaign will require determined strike action to win. President Rajapakse will oppose any strikes, use the government-controlled media, and even deploy the “national interest” argument that the JVP itself used during the war.

The SPSL will argue for the broadest mobilisations possible, the building of local elected committees to run the strikes, and for all decisions to be taken democratically at mass meetings of the rank and file. In this way, the differences between the unions and political currents can be settled democratically. In this way the Sri Lankan working-class, Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim – can overcome its divisions and fight for its real common interests.

Pakistan – strikes and protests are rising fast

Revolutionary Socialist Movement, Pakistan

Teachers and students in Punjab have been on strike for the past three months, against provincial government plans to privatise 26 colleges, and to impose boards of governors on them. The Joint Action Committee (JAC), organising both teachers and students, called an academic boycott in government colleges across the province for 16 September.

Shahid Murad, a teacher, said that the Punjab government is threatening teachers who are

involved in the movement, but that it has been spreading nonetheless. Earlier attempts to give colleges “autonomy” had seen fees increase, preventing poor students from continuing their education.

Meanwhile, Electricity workers protested on 13 October against the privatisation of Pakistan Electric Power Company (Pepco). Organised by trade union WAPDA, workers held rallies in all Pakistan’s major cities.

In Lahore, a large procession from Bukhtiar Labour Hall marched through the city to Lahore Press Club. Workers



carried red flags and chanted “Down with World Bank, down with IMF”, “Down with privatisation” and “down with price hikes and unemployment”.

WAPDA general secretary

Khurshid Ahmad declared that if the government did not negotiate with union representatives, they would march to Islamabad. Others pointed out that recent privatisations of the Karachi Electricity Supply Company had seen increased power cuts and a poorer service.

One of the striking workers, Sajjid Hussain, expressed the high mood of the struggle telling Resistance (the Pakistani paper of the League for the Fifth International) that “we are living in very bad condition. We will fight for our demands and against privatisation.”

India threatens to silence critics of army brutality in Kashmir

Simon Hardy

Ahurandati Roy, award winning Indian author of the *God of Small Things* faces possible arrest after speaking at a public meeting in which she advocated the separation of Kashmir from India. She condemned the pro western policies of India and the endemic poverty of the nation, referring to “bhokhe-nange (beggar nation) Hindustan where more than 830 million people live on only Rs20 per day”.

Roy was speaking at a packed meeting of mainly students in Delhi when she called for Azadi, meaning separation, between Kashmir and India. India has occupied Kashmir since 1947, shortly after independence from Britain, and has maintained a permanent military presence there every since.

The meeting had been organised by the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners, a campaigning organisation fighting for the release of several human rights



Ahurandati Roy is a popular advocate against Indian militarism and oppression

advocates and activists who have been detained by Indian authorities.

Many pro-Kashmiri figures, like Mian Abdul Qayoom and Ghulam Nabi Shaheen, both prominent lawyers, have been detained under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act of 1978. This is a reactionary law which allows Indian police to detain some-

one for up to 2 years if they cause a ‘breach of the peace’.

This comes after a summer of resistance by Kashmiri people which has seen 112 killed, mainly young people, as they fought heavily armed police with sticks and stones.

Kashmir is rapidly becoming India’s own “Palestine”, an occupied country which is fighting for its independence in the face of an aggressive foreign power which is trying to absorb it into its own nation state.

As Roy put it: “I said what millions of people here say every day.... I spoke about justice for the people of Kashmir who live under one of the most brutal military occupations in the world.”

An increasing number of people in India are critical of their government’s brutality in Kashmir. Roy was right to make the comments that she did; India should leave Kashmir and allow the people there to determine the future of their own country.

**DEEP
RED**

1842

The First General Strike

Dave Stockton

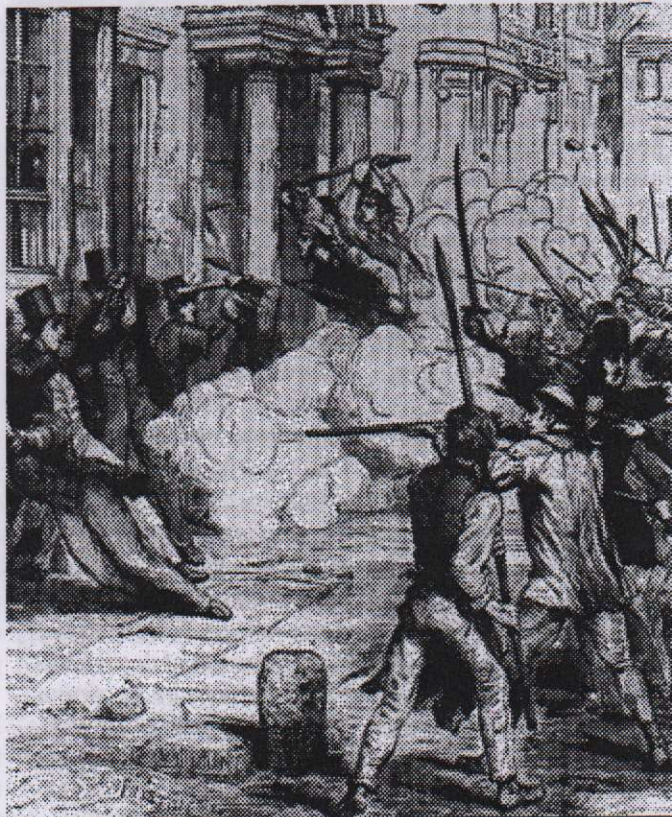
Today the idea of a general strike makes you think of the strike waves in France, Greece and South Africa. 'Moderate' union leaders like Derek Simpson of Unite say British workers don't have a tradition of mass strike waves.

But Britain was the country where the general strike was invented, both in theory and in practice. And – in an order that contradicts the prejudices of British empiricism – it was the theory which preceded and guided the practice.

In 1842, in the midst of a vast economic crisis and downturn, the British working class struck together in their hundreds of thousands, opening a new chapter in working class history.

Chartism

William Benbow (1784- 1841) was the first to raise the idea of a general strike. His pamphlet *A Grand National Holiday and Congress of the Productive Classes* was published in Manchester in 1832. Ten years later the first truly representative trade union congress and the Chartist national conference (the first really mass working class political party) met there to launch a general strike. They agreed two aims – resisting



The Newport Rising of 1839 paved the way for Britain's first ever General Strike which swept across the country three years later

the massive wage cuts and layoffs and winning the vote, or 'universal suffrage'.

Benbow was an enthusiastic advocate of the vote for all, of annually elected parliaments and the secret ballot. These demands found their way into the famous Charter of 1839 – the great national petition around which the British working class movement came into

being. The historian E. P. Thompson, in *The Making of the English Working Class*, describes Benbow as an irrepressible advocate of "physical force", a spokesman of the revolutionary wing of the nascent labour movement.

Benbow's pamphlet started out from an early form of the labour theory of value, arguing that the labour of the great

mass of the people was the source of all wealth, and that they had a right to recover it. He argued that it was "sheer lunacy" for workers to petition their oppressors and expect that a parliament dominated by their exploiters would emancipate them – they must do it themselves. In this way Benbow was pioneering ideas later developed by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*.

Holy day

To win equality, he proposed a month-long general strike, leading to an armed uprising. Benbow used the term "holiday" (holy day) because it would be "most sacred, for it is to be consecrated to promote the happiness and liberty." The term "General Strike" was coined by trade unionists in 1834.

Benbow said during this "sacred month" the workers should elect a "Congress of the Productive Classes," which should "legislate for all mankind; the constitution drawn up... that would place every human being on the same footing. Equal rights, equal enjoyments, equal toil, equal respect, equal share of production."

To run the general strike, he said each locality should elect a committee which would

DEEP RED

organise the seizure and redistribution of land, livestock and buildings. Again Benbow brilliantly anticipated the necessity of a general strike to have local delegate bodies and a national assembly to direct it – ideas put into practice by the French workers in the Paris Commune of 1871, and the Russian workers with their councils (soviets) of workers deputies in 1905 and the great revolution of 1917.

The six demands

In 1839 the growing British labour movement decided to launch a united fight to win the vote for the working class, believing that a full democracy would put political power in its hands so it could abolish hunger, unemployment, low wages and inequality. A Charter was drafted that was to be presented to parliament after a campaign of mass meetings and signings of the petition.

The six demands of the Charter were universal manhood suffrage, abolition of the property qualification for MPs, constituencies with equal electorates, annual elections, the payment of MPs and the secret ballot.

The Chartist movement was divided into two wings – the right consisted of supporters of “moral force” who believed peaceful petitioning and winning over of middle class public opinion was the road to radical reform. The left were the supporters of “physical force”, the general strike and armed uprising.

Benbow, a determined “physical forcer”, convinced prominent leader of the left wing Chartists George Julian Harney (1817-1897) of his plan. With the support of Harney, who a few years later became a friend of Engels and Marx, Benbow won the first Chartist



George Harney (1817-1897), the leader of the left wing Chartists

National Convention in 1839 to call for a Grand National Holiday on 12 August. Fergus O'Connor, the most popular Chartist leader, opposed it but he was voted down.

Harney and Benbow then toured the country agitating for workers to join the strike. But

On 4 November 1839 between 1,000 and 5,000 Chartists and miners besieged a garrison of soldiers in Newport

before they could have any effect both were arrested for sedition. When Harney appeared at the Birmingham Assizes, a Grand Jury refused to indict him. But Benbow was not so lucky. He suffered eight months in prison in 1839 and then charged again for sedition. He died in prison in 1841, not seeing the great strike he had argued for so passionately.

The seriousness of the intentions of the physical force wing were shown in 1839 with the Newport Rising. One cause of this armed insurrection was the rejection of the first Chartist

petition by the House of Commons on 12 July 1839. Some kind of rising had been in preparation for a few months with drilling on the moors outside the industrial towns. On 4 November between 1,000 and 5,000 Chartists and miners besieged a garrison of soldiers in Newport in South Wales.

A brief but bloody battle ensued but the soldiers had greatly superior firepower, training and discipline. Their repeated volleys broke the crowd, killing 22 and wounding over 50. It seems there was some sort of plan that the rising at Newport should act as the signal for a nation wide uprising. In the event there were only a few abortive risings, in Sheffield on 12 January, in the East End of London on 14 January, and in Bradford on 26 January.

The General Strike of 1842

In early May 1842 another petition, with over three million signatures, was submitted to parliament. The rich MPs contemptuously dismissed it. This, combined with the deep economic crisis of 1842, meant the time was now right for launching a general strike.

In 1841-2 there was a devastating collapse in trade ushering in a decade of depression, which came to be known as “the Hungry Forties”. In 1841, the Lancashire cotton industry entered a slump of unprecedented proportions. Mill owners laid off thousands of their “hands” and demanded huge wage cuts from those who remained. There were similar attacks by owners of the coalmines of Lancashire and the Midlands, and in the Manchester engineering factories too. In the villages huge numbers of former handloom weavers and farm labourers were destitute and forced into the workhouses.

Harney joined another famous Chartist leader, Thomas

Copper, in taking up Benbow's idea and calling for a wave of mass strikes to win the Charter.

During the summer of 1842, miners in Staffordshire struck against proposals to cut their wages, and for the first time demands for shorter hours and increased pay began to be linked. They pledged themselves to stay out “until the People's Charter becomes the Law of the Land.” The unrest spread like wildfire and in July reached South East Lancashire.

On 7 August two mass meetings were held on Mottram Moor made up of workers from Ashton and Staleybridge, and a resolution was passed for a “Grand National Turn-Out” to begin the next day. Support for the Charter was incorporated into its objective. On 8 August the strike began as workers left their factories and marched from workplace to workplace, “turning out” other workers.

At its height, the General Strike of 1842 involved up to half a million workers, from the Scottish coalfields to South Wales and Cornwall, with its main centres in Lancashire and the Midlands. It was the largest industrial action to take place anywhere in the nineteenth century and the first national general strike.

The traditional view of Labour historians used to be that trade unionism and Chartism were hardly connected. But over the last 20-30 years, research by Marxist historians has shown that the same individuals were often officials in their local union organisations and Chartist organisations. This is made clear in Mick Jenkins's book *The General Strike of 1842* (Lawrence & Wishart 1980). He shows that of the 15 men who made up the strike's main leadership, 13 were known Chartists.

As the strike progressed, elements of workers' control emerged. Factories were only

allowed to operate with the permission of "committees of public safety" that co-ordinated the action. These committees allowed work to be completed for humanitarian reasons or to keep water pumps operating so that coalmines would not be flooded.

At the same time a Trades Conference, the predecessor of the TUC by 26 years, and a delegate conference of the National Charter Association, assembled on 15 and 16 August.

The Trades Conference delegates were elected, often at meetings of thousands in Manchester, Oldham and elsewhere. At just such a meeting in Bacup the Riot Act was read, but the workers continued their meeting for an hour and a half more. Elsewhere, the strike was spreading, with turn-out activities reported from as far afield as Glasgow and Merthyr Tydfil.

The Trades Conference, with 143 accredited delegates, rejected a proposal to drop the Charter in favour solely of wage demands – with 120 votes in favour of a resolution that explicitly linked the two. It elected a 12-strong executive but within days the authorities, realising that they must react, arrested all the main strike leaders.

In the meantime, the Chartist conference had also taken place. Even though Feargus O'Connor, the main leader of



As in 1842, so it has been in every general strike – workers begin to take control. (Renault factory occupation in French general strike 1968)

the physical force wing, was strongly opposed to the use of industrial action to win the Charter, the conference still supported the strike. This decision spread the strike massively, with turn-outs from Dorset to Norwich, Scotland to Somerset.

Repression

Terrified, the government sent troops north by train from London and the South East. They mobilised the Grenadier Guards backed by artillery as well as the 34th and 73rd regiments. But even in London – largely strike free – they had to face angry supporters of the strike and marched with fixed bayonets.

Mass meetings took place

in London between 17 and 20 August, and both the police and military had to be sent to disperse them. But in the striking areas repression was much harsher. In Preston, troops fired on an unarmed crowd, killing four; soldiers also bayonet charged and fired on crowds at Newcastle-under-Lyme, Halifax and Skipton with several being killed in each town.

Many of the strike's leaders were arrested and without either the means to defend the pickets or a clear objective, the tide began to turn against the strikers. Some strikes continued into September, with the Manchester weavers heroically holding out till the end of the month.

Even the left Chartist leaders had little idea how a general strike could compel the government to pass the Charter through a parliament overwhelmingly dominated by the gentry and the upper middle classes. Only a mass insurrection, led by the Chartists and drawing in hundreds of thousands of industrial workers and the starving handloom weavers and agricultural labourers, could have swept away these obstacles.

But the revolutionary forces, though they talked and sometimes organised arming and drilling in preparation for an insurrection, had no overall strategy or clear tactics. Government spies and provocateurs easily penetrated their open mass organisations and wave after wave of leaders were arrested.

In short they lacked both a programme and a revolutionary party. But their achievements were massive. They created the first ever political party of the workers – they launched the first industrial workers' insurrections in British history, and they were the first to carry out a general strike, which is today one of the most powerful weapons of the international working class movement.

Lies and the biggest cuts (continued)

Continued from page 3

...the TUC has only now called a national march against the cuts – and has set the date for the end of March, some five months away!

The answer is to rely on our own strength and aim to stop the whole programme of the Con Dem Coalition. And action

has already begun. Twenty thousand marched in Edinburgh – the firefighters are on strike against mass sackings in London – students are flooding into London this month to protest against fees.

If we organise from below we can push our leaders to act, and we can take action without them if necessary.

The Coalition of Resistance Conference on 27 November could be a start to a nationally coordinated fightback – if the conference organisers allow the assembled delegates a really democratic working conference. In that way we can start to build a movement that can follow the lead shown by the French workers this autumn – and which can

set itself the goal of an all out public sector strike, occupations of threatened services.

And – if the Tories try to break our unions like Thatcher did – we'll need an unlimited general strike to bring down the government, bust the cuts, and open a fight to get rid of the capitalists, and put a working class government in power.

As Obama-mania turns sour – build a US workers' party

Simon Hardy

Obama's popularity has slumped in the polls and the Democrats are faced with electoral defeat in the midterm elections.

This isn't the fault of just one man, but part of a divide in US politics today.

The frantic excitement of 2008 when "Obama-mania" swept the US (and much of the world) was short lived. Within a year his opinion polls had slumped. Since then, Obama and the Democrats have found themselves caught between a rock and a hard place – both of their own making.

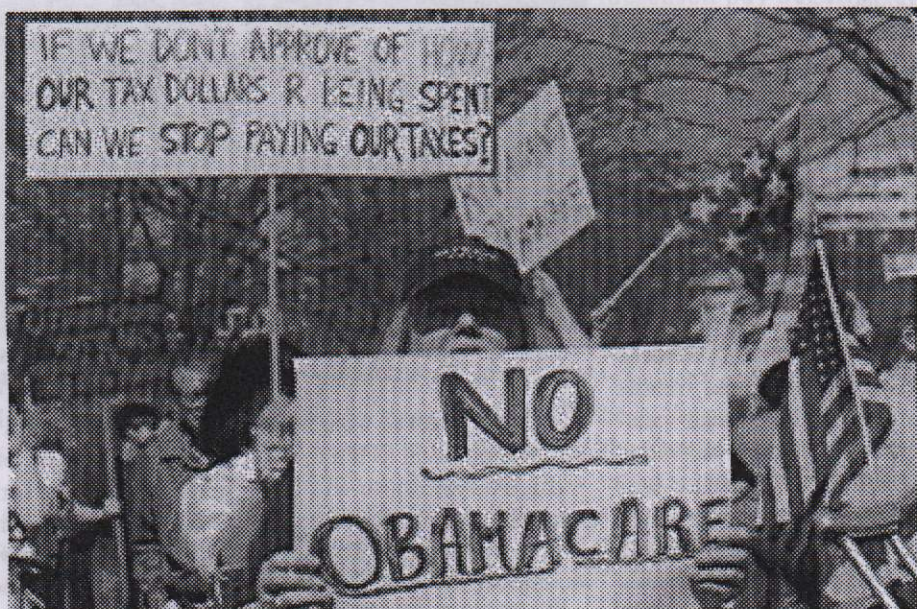
On the one hand, they have disappointed and even alienated, much of the base of support they mobilised in 2008. The war in Afghanistan is still ongoing, the health-care bill was mutilated in the Senate before limping onto the law books and the economy has flat-lined with nearly 10 per cent unemployment.

Tea-Party movement

On the other hand, there is the growing threat of the right. The first law of thermodynamics states that energy can be neither created nor destroyed, it can only change forms. It seems that as the energy leaked out of the Democratic base during the Obama presidency it found a new form in the Republican Tea-Party movement – a collection of pro-lifers, libertarians, climate change deniers, homophobes, and conspiracy theorists. Inspired by former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, it has taken US Politics by storm.

The Republican base has been activated by their hate politics, and now there are 129 Tea-Party members standing for the House of Representatives, nine for the Senate. While not all of them will win, the Republicans will no doubt re-capture the House of Representatives, certainly frustrating even the most feeble liberal reforms from Obama.

The fact that half-way through his presidency Obama is looking like another lame-duck president speaks volumes about the crisis of the Democrat Party. It is



Tea party supporters at a rally in Washington DC

squeezed between the interests and concerns of the super-rich and big business – much better expressed through the Republicans, and the concerns of the working class (who often vote Democrat simply because there is no alternative).

It is clear that in order to triangulate into the middle ground, one of the sacrifices that the Obama camp had to make was to demobilise their activist base.

Abandoned

Imagine how much more powerful Obama could have been with those hundreds of thousands of young people, people of color, and trade unionists still on the streets, campaigning, leafleting, and organising town-hall meetings. As it stands, the town-halls are occupied by the Tea Party, the leaflets on high street are not pro-healthcare or public services, but pro-war and anti-immigrant.

It would be wrong however, as some claim, that Obama has made so many compromises simply because he is isolated from his base of support. His base of support has largely abandoned him, or become passive, in the face of the reality of the Democrats-in-office.

Cut away all the hype about "change" and the "audacity of hope" and the US working class and African American community was facing a centre ground Democrat, middle of the road, pro market, pro (the right kind of) war and unwilling to make systematic inroads into social inequality and the power of the corporations in the US.

But why would he? Obama is a paid for by them, his election coffers bulging with donations from corporate America. Though hundreds of thousands of ordinary people donated to his campaign, this was paltry compared to the money that US big business can provide.

Out of steam

Obama comes across as a classical, elitist Democratic Party politician, and increasingly like a man who has run out of steam.

His once impressive public speeches are now increasingly flat.

The media now accuses Obama of being "soft". They say he is soft on China, Cuba, climate change, Iran, terrorism, U.N. reforms, anti-Christian violence, the Palestinians, and the list goes on. Forbes published an article criticising "Obama's Soft-



...Core Socialism." From the perspective of the working class Obama is soft too – soft on the rich, soft on the banks, soft on the corporations and soft on Israel. He looks like a loser.

There is an alternative

The progressive voice is being lost precisely because in the US too many people look to the Democrats as a vehicle, no matter how inadequate, for their needs.

The Democrats cannot make the changes that so many people expect, because they are tied from head to foot to the system that causes the problems: the

crisis of housing in the US, unemployment, the war, and the growth of social inequality.

The record of Obama in the White House exposes the lie of the Right that he is some kind of socialist; nothing could be further from the truth.

But the reason why the US Right are obsessed about a supposed "Bolshevik Barack," is that they fear a resurgence of socialist consciousness in the working class and urban poor. The kind of mass strikes which the working class launched in the early 1930s as a result of the economic slump were a strategic turning point in the

US class struggle. It saw the creation of new, militant trade unions and serious concessions wrung from the capitalist class. That is why the Tea-Party movement is so important now; it moves the entire political debate to the right, and it is designed to isolate and terrify the left and working class from taking action. When Tea-Party leaders, like Sharon Angles, argue for a possible Second Amendment "remedy" (the right to bear arms and overthrow the government by force), it becomes clear that this movement is willing to invoke a constitutional basis for their reactionary movement – but the left is nowhere near a similar "revolutionary" platform yet.

The time has come to build a working-class party in the US. Everything else is just wasting time. And time cannot be wasted – the decline of US empire and hegemony, the increasingly confident far-right, and the weakness of the economy all point to a superpower which is heading downhill head-first. If the working class does not raise itself up on its feet and fight for its own class interests – and real socialist politics – then it will find itself on its knees facing the "slump" politics of a right-wing government.

The time to organise is now – to forge a new path in the US, opening the road to working-class power.

Made in Dagenham review – continued from page 20

...in order to protect their salaries and extra perks. The slogan has to be: "With the trade union officials wherever possible, without them wherever necessary."

But the film has a number of flaws. Not least was casting Sally Hawkins as the fire-brand Rita O'Grady, the main organiser. During every speech Hawkins looked like she was going to cry, which was not the impression O'Grady gives in the film clip of the TUC speech seen at the end of the film.

A bigger problem is the feminist undercurrent that because all women face sexism, binding together in a sisterhood across classes will solve the problem. But although all women are subject to sexual oppression to an extent, upper class and wealthy women can offset it in many ways by pushing it onto other women such as maids and nannies. On the other hand, working class women bear the full double burden of working both outside and within the home.

This idea of cross-class commonality was illustrated twice in the film. First in the friendship with Lisa, the wife of Ford's UK director Peter Hopkins, who verbally supported the striking women but did nothing to help. There is a world of difference between her existence and O'Grady's, who was fighting for her livelihood.

Second was the scene with Barbara Castle, the Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity in Harold Wilson's Labour government, in which they have a small tittle together and she agrees to pursue their demands. Despite what Castle promised, the women were only regraded following a further six-week strike in 1984.

Let's be clear, Castle was no friend of the working class. In 1969 she developed a White Paper entitled 'In Place of Strife', which tried to reduce the trade unions' rights.

Among its numerous proposals were plans to force unions to call a ballot before

a strike was held, and establishment of an Industrial Board to enforce settlements in industrial disputes – a precursor to Thatcher's anti-trade union laws.

Lastly, and very shamefully, the final slide of the film states that Ford has since cleaned up its act and is a socially responsible employer. Tell that to the Visteon workers who were sacked in 2009 without warning, without redundancy pay, and without their pensions – some of whom had been Ford employees for more than 30 years.

The Visteon workers didn't go quietly – they didn't accept that just because Ford had spun off the parts supplier that it was absolved of responsibility. Instead they occupied their factories in Belfast, Enfield and Basildon until they forced Ford to cough up at least some of what they were owed.

That's another slogan for those of us that are facing the axe today: organise, occupy, for workers' control.

★ CINEMA

Made in Dagenham – an inspiring account of a strike for equal pay



Joy Macready

Made in Dagenham

Directed by Nigel Cole
2010

Set in 1968, this film tells the tale of 187 Ford sewing machinists who went on strike against sexual discrimination and for equal pay. Their walkout and indefinite strike forced through the Equal Pay Act of 1970.

It is important today as the Con-Dem cuts threaten over half a million public sector jobs, of which 300,000 are women. All workers today need to take up the tactics that we see in this fantastic film: all-out, indefinite strikes and flying pickets.

The women's story is one of strength, bravery and determination. The machinists walked out when, as part of a regrading exercise, they were informed that their jobs were downgraded to unskilled, and that they would be paid 15% less than the men. So they walked out and set up a picket line.

But they didn't stop there – they organised flying pickets to the other Ford factories around the country and pulled out the machinists at Ford's Halewood plant in Merseyside.

It was a political strike from the outset – it was not just about pay, but the principle of equality. It threw up a huge challenge to the

bosses, as Ford's American executive Robert Tooley said: "If this woman gets what she wants, we'll have to do this around the world."

And it was this strike that spurred other women trades unionists to found the National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women's Equal Rights, which held an 'equal pay demonstration' in Trafalgar Square in May 1969.

The film also shows the struggle within the struggle, for example the struggle against the sexism of male co-workers and husbands, who materially benefit from women's work in the home looking after the children and household. As the all-out strike began to bite and Ford ran out of seat covers, the company stopped car production and laid off the male workers as a way to pressure the women back to work. Tensions at home rose to fever pitch. But the women hit back: 'We women have stood by our men when you have taken strike action so you should stand by us.'

As well as the dirty tricks that the Ford head honchos threw at them, the striking women also had to fight against the union full-timers – or bureaucrats – from doing deals with management. The film rightly illustrated the role officials can play as negotiators, dampening down any real fightback...

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LAIKA'S VIEW FROM ORBIT

Workers Power is proud to introduce our newest correspondent Laika, heroine of the Soviet Union and first Earthling in space.



Tory dole minister Iain Duncan Smith says unemployed people in Merthyr should get on a bus to Cardiff to find a job. You what? There's 1,700 vacancies in the Welsh capital and already 15,000 out of work. And what does he know about buses anyway – bet he's never even been on one.



I see faith schools' real priorities have hit the headlines. They've been slammed by the Schools Adjudicator for skewing their intakes towards the rich. As the Bard put it, while 'words fly up, thoughts remain below'.



Another day, another set of figures rubbished by our heroic government. Now the commies of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development get called "non-sense" for saying the cuts will cost 1.6 million jobs. I guess it's only the Tories' own figures we're meant to trust?



Dog biscuit for journo Johann Hari for backing the occupations of Vodafone over its unpaid £6 billion tax bill. Johann suggests when cops attack the protesters we shout back 'Vodafone's tax could stop police job cuts'. Which would mean more police to, er... break up our protests?