

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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centre pages

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New Barclays boss Anthony Jenkins has promised to clean up the bank's act. His annual pay will be up to £8.6 million.

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GET MILLIONS
MILLIONS GET
FOOD BANKS**

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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EDL and BNP pushed back

By a London anti-fascist

The South London anti-fascist assembly on 1 June at the Imperial War Museum started off badly. People were late, it was mainly uni students, huddling around...

But then the Lambeth Unison banner led the demo off, the chants began, things looked up.

The South London people, and assorted supporters, took the initiative early on to move close to where the BNP were meeting. The BNP were not given an inch to move down Whitehall. This is very good.

We certainly outnumbered them — they had 90 at a high point.

We tried to get UAF to move. They initially refused, and stayed in their designated pen. Later they moved up the road, occupying a space some distance from the main site of action.

It is brilliant that we prevented the BNP from marching at all; they were humiliated, there were no speeches, Griffin was doing press for most of the time. We gave the BNP members that were allowed through a kicking, and taunted them in their pen.

The police made 58 ar-

rests, mainly of anti fascist activists, many students; they used "snatch" tactics and were clearly keen to take people away. I went to the police station later and I found people were all right.

There were hundreds of police by the end, and they'd brought in two big red buses to take people away once they'd been arrested.

UAF's claims to be responsible for the day's success were distortions. I loudly said to UAF types that "today's success is not down to UAF". I was promptly surrounded by five or more activists telling me I was "splitting the movement" and "with people like you how are we ever going to take on the Nazis"...

After 1 June there will be more activists looking for a way of organising different from UAF's.
● @SouthLondonAF

Leeds: a 10% answer

By Jude Hardy

Leeds City Council, which still controls 85% of the city's social housing, has reclassified rooms that were classed as spare bedrooms in over 800 homes affected by the Bedroom Tax.

However, 8,000 homes under council control are hit by the Bedroom Tax. The council decided to reclassify only box rooms or ground-floor spare rooms. Councillors have hinted that evictions are impractical, but tenants are still getting letters threatening eviction if they don't pay.

Leeds's Labour council has gone further than most councils. This is partly due to the efforts of the Hands Off Our Homes campaigns, which has held estate meetings all over Leeds, and or-

ganised a march of over 1,000 people. There has also been pressure from some councillors and rank-and-file Labour Party members to do something to oppose the tax and protect tenants.

However, the Labour Party regionally has suspended the District Labour Party, which was the mechanism for getting the motions to the Labour Group on the council. Councillors who supported the campaign need to stand up and demand the Labour group commits to stop implementing the Bedroom Tax for all its tenants.

It's also important that councils don't just quietly soften the effects of the Bedroom Tax.

They need to defy the Bedroom Tax as part of a campaign to kill off this detestable policy.

Sheffield

300 to 500 anti fascists managed to prevent about 50 EDL putting flowers on the war memorial in Barkers Pool.

There was some confusion about where EDL would march from or demonstrate.

Anti-fascists stopped EDL despite the attempt by first police officers then mounted police to force their way through to cut a path for EDL. Eventually, the EDL were ushered off as the police gave up.

Northampton

About 100 EDL marched through the town centre and laid a wreath (well, a couple of bunches of flowers) at a war memorial.

News of the EDL march came through mid-week and a hastily convened

meeting on Friday evening agreed to hold a anti-EDL protest, assembling at the market square beforehand. About 60 turned up.

I argued for moving across the road and blocking the entrance to the war memorial, but the general feeling was to stay put and "turn our backs" to the EDL as they went past, which is more or less what happened.

Most of the anti-EDL protesters were young, and mobilised through informal networks.

A couple of people said our AWL flyer was "anti-islamic" because of the reference to "Islamism", but they eventually seemed to accept that "Islamist" is word to describe the politics of those like the Woolwich Islamists.

Other people stopped by out of interest had no problem with our arguments.

Other

There were attempted EDL marches in other cities, none big.

Bizarrely, EDLers in Ipswich were joined on their march by members of the Islamic charity with its origins in Saudi Salafism.

● For more, see bit.ly/edljimas

Khomeini protest

By Omar Raii

On June 2, a celebration of the life of Ayatollah Khomeini, close to the anniversary of his death, was held at the Islamic Centre of England, in Kilburn, London. Invitees included Ayatollah Moezi, the personal representative of the Supreme Leader of Iran in London.

Iranian exiles organised a protest at this disgraceful glorification of a dictator. The action was mostly made up of socialists, but also included some royalists holding Pahlavi-era flags.

The Worker-Communist Party of Iran (Hekmatist) provided many of the banners (including those showing secularists and

trade-unionists that have been killed by the Islamic Republic).

Those facilitating the event at the mosque included members of the Islamic Human Rights Commission, an organisation known for its pro-Khomeinist stance, as well as a man in a t-shirt emblazoned with the logo of Hezbollah, the Iranian-funded organisation that is currently sending soldiers to Qusair, Syria in order to support the Assad dictatorship and crush the Syrian opposition.

Workers' Liberty stands in solidarity with the workers, trade-unionists, secularists, and women's rights activists in Iran who are fighting the regime.

How Jimmy Mubenga was killed

By Jonny West

Angolan journalist Jimmy Mubenga repeatedly called for help during the 35 minutes he was handcuffed from behind and bent forwards in his aeroplane seat during an attempted forced deportation in 2010, an inquest has revealed.

Despite the corroborating evidence of 21 other passengers and crew, the three G4S guards responsible for restraining him claim not to have heard him, and that the position he was in (with his head lower than the seat-back tray of the seat in front) was self-inflicted.

It has also emerged that

one of the guards forwarded racist jokes from his mobile phone before the incident.

The three G4S guards involved in forcing Jimmy onto the flight were arrested on suspicion of criminal offences but later released. They have told the inquest of the violent restraining techniques they are taught to use by G4S,

and the system they worked under whereby they had a particular quota of successful deportations to meet. G4S was operating the contract for the UK Border Agency.

Jimmy's death exposed the brutality at the heart of the British immigration system.

Any deportation is an act of violence; hiring trained thugs to perpetrate actual physical violence against deportees who fear for their lives if they are forced back to their countries of origins is only a grim logical extension of the entire system of immigration controls.

Ireland: stop the repossession!

By Micheál MacEoin

Fears of rising repossessions have been sparked as Irish politicians discuss a bill to clear up gaps in existing housing legislation.

The Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Bill 2013 seeks to remedy a legal problem which arose from a High Court judgment in 2011. The decision made it difficult for mortgage providers to obtain orders of possession on mortgages created before 1 December 2009 unless court proceedings had started before that date.

Ireland's repossession rates are relatively low, currently standing at 0.25 per cent compared to three per cent in Britain and up to five per cent in the US.

However, the brutal logic of capital spoke through the voice of Central Bank governor and head of the financial regulator, Patrick Honohan, last month: "[if] the banks were unable to make repossessions then

the incentive for the borrower to cooperate would be greatly weakened."

He warned that "the banks need to address the problem of non-performing mortgage debt more energetically. The time for passivity is long past". As Independent TD, Stephen Donnelly has said, it is an "ugly truth" that repossessions must rise.

Although drafting the original 2009 legislation, Fianna Fáil is now opposing the new bill. Its finance spokesperson, Michael McGrath, warned that the change could see repossessions in the tens of thousands, and predicted that

banks would repossess homes where the mortgage had been substantially paid off, rather than those deep in negative equity.

Repossessions strike a deep chord in a country where collective memory remains of mass evictions by absentee landlords in the 19th century.

In the case of Seamus Sherlock, a farmer on the Kerry-Limerick border, locals are maintaining 24-hour watch around the barricaded property to prevent any eviction.

One neighbour described the moral economy in which homes are for living in, as opposed to the capitalist idea that sees them only in terms of rent or debt: "He's in trouble because of the bankers... there's one law for the bankers and another for the ordinary people."

We need a mass movement to put pressure on banks and building societies and, if necessary, physically resist the bailiffs.

Back to 1947?

By Hugh Edwards

To be revolutionary today is to apply the Constitution, because only from here can start the social and political reconstruction of the country", proclaimed Maurizio Landini, secretary of the metalworkers' union federation FIOM from the platform in Bologna on Sunday 2 June.

It was the latest manifestation of the Italian left's attempt to cobble together an "alliance of resistance" to the

ruling coalition of Italy's two biggest parties, the supposedly-left PD and Berlusconi's really-right PDL.

Landini's line is now common currency for a motley collection of would-be saviours of the Italian working masses.

In the midst of a crisis of the capitalist order, the working masses are being invited to put their faith in a constitution drafted to maintain that order in 1947. The tragedy of Stalinism's betrayals in 1947-48 is now being replayed as farce.

To brandish Italy's charter of bourgeois legality as a banner around which to rally the desperate and suffering masses is eloquent proof of crisis, impotence and shamelessness.

Northern Ireland Health Minister Edwin Poots has eventually been forced to listen. He made a U-turn on plans which could have seen the closure of all residential care homes for the elderly in three out of five trusts.

A&E waits soar

By Todd Hamer

Between January and March this year the NHS had to cancel 220 operations a day because it had run out of hospital beds.

A&E waiting times are at their worst level for nine years.

A King's Fund report says in the first three months of this year, 310,000 patients waited more than four hours in A&E — 39% more than in 2012.

A report by regulator Monitor showed evidence of deteriorating standards for cancer care, infection control and non-emergency operations.

The government response to the A&E crisis has been to blame New Labour's "disastrous legacy". Jeremy Hunt claims — against all the evidence — that the problems we see now are the result of a change in the GP contract in 2004 when GPs were given the choice of losing £6,000 from their salaries in exchange for their out-of-hours responsibilities. 90% of GPs took this deal and set up co-ops that provided the out-of-hours clinics on a private basis. A lot of them did very well out of the deal.

But even NHS Confederation boss Mike Farrar admitted that A&E waiting times have decreased since 2004 and only increased under Tory rule.

GP consultations are up by one third since the 1990s. And on top of this the government are putting GPs in charge of the entire NHS budget.

The Department of Health has identified that

the main problem is that £20 billion cuts since 2010 has resulted in ward closures, bed shortages and staff shortages. Attempts to privatise the NHS have led to increased fragmentation and a untrained staff making inappropriate referrals (e.g. NHS 111). Sir Richard Thompson from the Royal College of Physicians says "This is no surprise — patients are presenting at emergency departments in increasing numbers because there is nowhere else they can go."

The Nicholson challenge — a plan to flatline NHS spending until 2015 — was intended to focus NHS bosses' minds on redesigning services.

Nicholson saw that the health needs of the British population were soon going to change radically. More and more people are presenting with complex long-term conditions. These people are best treated in the community and kept away from costly hospital treatment.

Unfortunately, slashing the NHS budget is not the way to focus the minds of the NHS bosses on the necessary redesigning of services. Such a task cannot be undertaken when services are being cut to the bone.

Socialists need to arm the labour movement with the arguments so it can better fight these cuts and "reforms".

Our strategy must be to build a mass campaign, building on local hospital campaigns and fighting in the Labour Party to enforce the decisions to fight cuts and PFI taken at the 2012 conference.

Eddie Barns

On Saturday 15 June there will be a memorial gathering for Eddie Barns, a socialist activist who died in March.

Workers' Liberty comrades will remember Eddie for his socialist activism in Hackney — he was a Labour councillor who voted against cuts in the 1980s — and for helping found Incapacity Action and run the Welfare State Network. For many years he used his legal skills to defend refugees, latterly at Kent Refugee Help.

A comrade active in the RMT union writes: "I'm shocked and very sad to hear about Eddie's death. He was a top guy. For the last few years had thrown himself into defending immigrants. The last time I met him was in my kitchen, discussing defending a cleaner who was threatened with deportation."

Kent Refugee Help has launched a fund for emergency welfare payments to refugees in Eddie's name.

Our condolences to all of Eddie's family and friends.

• Please send cheques to Kent Refugee Help, PO Box 192, Whitstable, CT5 1WA.

• Memorial: 1pm, 15 June, 6 Church Street, Wye, TN25 5BJ.

• www.kentrefugeehelp.org.uk

Reach out, don't just huddle

Letters



You are absolutely right to conclude that a whittled-down consensus will not inspire people to political activity ("How to make Left Unity", *Solidarity* 284). If any of the groups on the left had an inspiring and coherent strategy they would be doing very much better and we would not be despairing at the state of the left.

The left as a whole is weak and disorientated or in some cases stubbornly confident of success in the far-off future.

We need unity, but not for the sake of unity. There is no point simply huddling together with those politically close to us simply to feel there are a few more people listening. The process of coming together must be one which also clarifies our ideas into a set of practices and policies which engage with possible allies and can strengthen and grow our movement.

I also agree that it would be wrong to focus mainly on electoral politics. I would not argue that voting or even standing candidates is a bad thing, but many others would.

Many people are disengaged from electoral politics — we have to accept this and try and work with them in ways that seem more relevant to their lives.

Trade unions and workplace disputes are the most obvious way but again this is a difficult way to engage with people and there are many people to which it is not applicable.

There are many other paths to reach out to people already engaging in politics in its broadest sense: Tenants/Residents Associations; cooperative businesses; welfare charities; self-help groups; community and social centres; affinity groups; intentional communities and households; self-build projects; housing cooperatives; workplace committees; cultural groups (sport, music, art). I would suggest trying to federate all these diverse groups together into local community unions.

Economic policy is one major thing. I would suggest we need to drop the old socialist dogma of nationalisation and look at principles of localism, federalism, sustainability, co-operativism.

The other big debate which you have touched upon is of organisation/democracy. This is of course important to us in organising ourselves but also has implications for the type of society we are trying to achieve. Consensus and majority decision making can both work, but both have their problems.

I think the early history of the French Parti Socialiste is an instructive example of how to bring organisations together. The way they used a system of debate, voting, compromise and negotiation to arrive at their manifesto seemed to keep most people in the organisation happy — perhaps it is a model to be developed.

Phil Pope, comment on Workers' Liberty website

Bans likely to backfire

In my previous comment about the Stalinists on London May Day marches (*Solidarity* 286), I wrote that we should look to "do with the Stalinists what some AWL comrades did in 2009 with a contingent of the Sinhalese-chauvinist JVP on the London May Day march: challenge them, heckle them, demand answers. (The JVP quit the march)".

My difference with Eric Lee (*Solidarity* 287) is not that I "refuse to confront" the Stalinists on the streets.

I disagreed with Eric's proposal that we should lobby the London May Day organisers to make some rule or decree banning the Stalinists. Better to lobby them to call the demonstration for a time when it can get sizeable numbers from the labour movement.

Bans, other than on fascists, are a tricky business. We don't want everyone with a Che Guevara t-shirt or a Castro badge banned from the march. Where's the line?

Eric objects to me saying that the Stalinists are "left-wingers, of a sort", in the sense that they generally side with workers' struggles against bosses in Britain (and in Turkey, the homeland for many of the Stalinists prominent on the London May Day), even though they support the exploiters

against the workers in North Korea and (retrospectively) in the Stalinist USSR. I wrote nothing to suggest they are left-wing in "direct, real-world struggles", and right-wing only on "irrelevant theoretical issues".

I argue only that the range of Stalinist groups — from the CPGB M-L (whom, as it happens, I last came across in the fight against hospital cuts in my area) through to the CPB, the RCG, etc. — represent an infection going deep into the labour movement, including its militant sections, and attempts to deal with them by bans from above are likely to backfire.

Martin Thomas, Islington

Confused on "blowback"

Usually I enjoy reading Pat Murphy; he is generally on the ball and has a fine wit. However his article on the Woolwich atrocity ("The blowback theory", *Solidarity* 287), is confused and unfocused.

This attack was carried out by jihadists who have a particular interpretation of passages in the Koran relating to the waging of war against their perceived enemies of Islam and the Prophet.

The fact that we should have to go all the way back to religious history after a hundred years of Marx and Freud is a sad reflection on the current state of affairs. Up to now socialism has failed the Arab masses. In reaction to the appalling policies of the US and UK, and especially and most brutally by the war criminals Bush and Blair, the resort has been to an age-old religion, not to any enlightenment ideology. We have created this jihadist monster and it is going to be very difficult to deal with it. There will be more Bostons and Woolwichs before it's over.

So I cannot see what is wrong with Terry Eagleton's argument. Eagleton is usually given to post-modernist obscurantism, so it was refreshing to be able to understand what he was saying and strange of Pat Murphy to criticise him for "choosing his words carefully". Isn't this what writers are supposed to do?

Eagleton condemns the atrocity, says it emanates from an ancient revenge philosophy of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth in both the Bible and the Koran, then says it would not have happened without the brutality of Iraq

which has killed and maimed hundreds and thousands of innocent people, reduced that country to penury in which a smouldering civil war continues to cast its affliction, and caused British soldiers to come back from Iraq and Afghanistan with untreated traumas, demoralised, and knowing that all their sacrifices are worse than useless. Lions led by donkeys as per usual.

Of course, there is a "blowback", of course this "blowback" is led by the most reactionary religious zealotry especially in the while the left in this country are incapable of running a bath let alone a Left Unity conference.

Socialists will be aware of the phrase "socialism or barbarism" and both Marx's and Trotsky's warnings that reactions to imperialism are not inevitably progressive. I thought was how the AWL distinguished itself from other Marxist groups.

It might be thought that standing back and watching the EDL and the jihadists go for one another while we polish our fingernails is a viable option.

It is not. What we need are proper strategies for dealing with what looks like a worsening situation rather than articles that spend a very long time entirely missing the point. Or is Pat Murphy being a little too careful with his words?

Tim Thomas, Institute of Group Analysis (pc)

How to end food banks

The launch, on average, of three food banks each week across Britain is a sign of our times.

In spite of the success of the latest smart phones etc, capitalism is in decline. It can no longer afford the welfare state. So food banks have to pick up the pieces and fill the gaps.

There are now more than eight million people whose income from "self-employment" and part-time jobs is precarious.

We need a workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement, and serving the working class. The working week needs to be reduced to 30-hours with no loss of pay, and the minimum wage raised to £12-an-hour.

This would create secure, full-time jobs, both for the "precarious" and the one million young people "not in education, employment, or training."

It's the only way to avoid food banks becoming a permanent feature of Britain's social landscape.

John Smith, Cambridgeshire

A new SWP opposition

Left
By Gerry Bates



On 14 May, a new opposition voice emerged within the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP): a blog at the-faultlines.blogspot.co.uk, anonymously-edited since it is outside the pre-conference three months each year when dissent within SWP is licensed.

The blog represents a section of the "moderate" wing of the opposition at the SWP's 10 March special conference. The more strident oppositionists (between 200 and 400, according to different posts on Faultlines) quit soon after that conference. Some of them have formed a loose new grouping, the International Socialist Network, which has a public launch on 8 June (1pm at Birkbeck College, London).

Rumour has it the people behind Faultlines will split in their turn, some time in the coming months, but not join ISN. We don't know.

The tone of the blog is dispirited and pessimistic about redressing the SWP.

It promises "a space where comrades can explore and discuss the range of issues". As yet it has little elaboration of a

policy in the class struggle different from the SWP's.

One post refers (but without expanding) to "a one-sided hostile attitude to a revival of the Labour left; a failure to recognise the role revolutionaries could play within the People's Assembly (in drawing out its real contradictions); a persistence with Unite the Resistance despite its existence as a front group; a refusal to acknowledge that public sector strikes have not been a central site of struggle since the December [2011] sell out; turning necessities — such as the lack of speakers for [the SWP summer school] Marxism — into virtues; a willingness to smash our student work to destroy the [opposition] faction; a distortion of our politics on women's liberation..."

It also criticises "abstract calls for a general strike". Another post sees the SWP's big recent political mistakes as "calling for a vote for Labour against Respect's Lee Jasper [a call quickly dropped in favour of making no recommendation] and... [an] attack on Owen Jones for supporting a referendum on the EU".

In our view the SWP was right in that call for a Labour vote, and in the criticism on the EU referendum. Much else in the SWP's perspective and policy is wrong.

• AWL on SWP: bit.ly/flounders, workersliberty.org/swp.

Left: protest against multinational food company Cargill. Right: people eat lower quality food, or less food

Bankers get millions. Millions get food banks

The Sunday Times Rich List: the 1000 richest people in the UK got £35 billion richer in 2012-3, expanding their wealth to £450 billion.

The worse-off: the charities Oxfam and Church Action Poverty reckon that 500,000 in Britain today depend on food banks. They are building on figures from the Trussell Trust, one food-bank provider, which fed more than 350,000 people in 2012/13. As recently as 2009/10 it fed only 40,000.

Bankers' bonuses: they totalled £13 billion in 2011-2, about the same as in 2010-11.

The hungry: to use a food bank, you must get a letter from a doctor or social worker or similar. Besides the 500,000 food-bank users, there must be many people relying on the skips where supermarkets throw out-of-date food, borrowing from friends, eating only the cheapest and inadequate diets, or just going hungry.

Industrial and commercial bosses: chief executive's pay rose 16% in 2012. The average chief executive of a big (FTSE 100) company gets £3.2 million a year, a 266% rise since the year 2000.

Children in poverty: their numbers have been rising steadily since 2010. On optimistic predictions by the conservative Institute of Fiscal Studies, by 2020-1, 27% of children in Britain will be in "absolute poverty" as officially defined.

THE REST

A wider swathe of company directors: their takings rose 5.3% in 2012, while average pay rose just 1.2%. Most of those directors will own lots of shares. Shares in big companies (FTSE 100) have gone up 12.5% over the last year.

The rest of us: According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, between 2011-2 and 2015-6, the poorest 10% will become 4.5% worse off, on average; the middle 70% will be worse off, too; and the top 20%, better off. The top 1%? Probably much better off.

The huge multinational corporations which control the world's food trade: Louis Dreyfus had its best profits ever in 2012. Cargill scored its most profitable quarter ever in the first three months of 2013. The aggregate of companies controlling trade in metals and other basic commodities, as well as food, has pocketed nearly \$250 billion over the last decade.

They made more profit than Goldman Sachs, J P Morgan Chase, and Morgan Stanley combined.

One person in eight across the world goes to bed hungry each day, according to Oxfam. A lot of that has the same reason as the trading companies' huge profits: food prices have risen. Prices soared in 2007-8 and 2009-10 (with an intervening dip in 2008-9) and are still about 40% higher (in real terms) than they were in 2002-4.

Fruit and vegetable prices have risen more than others. In 2007-8, there were food riots in many countries. Since then, those countries have slid into slower, more insidious reactions. People eat lower-quality food, or less food altogether. Britain's food banks are, relatively speaking, the luxury end of that global spectrum of hunger.

The world is divided into classes. One class, which owns property, factories, offices, land, patents, is profiting. Another class, the people who sell or try to sell their labour-power for a wage, and whose labour produces all the goods and services, languishes or goes hungry.

The problem is insecurity as well as inequality. More than half the people who come to the food banks in Britain do so because their benefits have been paid late, cut or stopped. Others are people with precarious jobs, waged one month, destitute the next.

Many people condemn socialists as impractical strivers after remote ideals. There is nothing remote or impractical about what we need for everyone to have enough good food to eat.

Simplest would be to distribute food, or at least basic foods, free, in the same way that (as even Tories dare not dispute) health care and school education are provided free. Food sales in the UK are about £35 to £40 billion a year, so a modest super-tax of about 15% on the income of the top 1% in the UK could cover the cost of that.

If for now we didn't want to do that — for example, because in many countries it would undercut small farmers — a guaranteed living wage for everyone would get the same result.

There is nothing impractical or remote about that. It requires only that the working class organise ourselves to take control of wealth out of the hands of the top one per cent.

Help us raise £15,000

It's been a bumper week for literature sales, with over £70 in online orders.

Workers' Liberty's book range is expanding all the time, with a new book — *Marxist Ideas To Turn The Tide* — planned to coincide with Ideas for Freedom 2013. A drive to increase sales of our literature has been a key aspect of our fundraising appeal this year.

There's still a long way to go, though. With less than three weeks until Ideas for Freedom begins it seems unlikely that we'll hit our £15,000 target.

Above: the immense power of the written word

But it's not impossible; AWL branches are organising film showings and socials to contribute

to the appeal, and healthy advanced sales of IFF tickets mean attendance will be up and the fund appeal at the event itself has the best chance of taking us over the total.

Help us raise £15,000 by Ideas for Freedom 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:
£10,994**

We raised £90 this week in extra literature sales. Thanks to John.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

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Account name:

Account no:

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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

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Date

Signature

Wellington seafarers and the invasion of Finland

By Mike Kyriazopoulos

Readers with a knowledge of the history of Trotskyism will know that the USSR's invasion of Finland on 30 November 1939 marked a turning point for the movement.

It triggered a fierce debate, and eventually a split among the US Trotskyists. What is less well known is that a contemporary parallel development emerged among the Wellington [New Zealand] seafarers.

The *Evening Post* of 7 December 1939 reproduced the full text of a long resolution passed by a stop-work meeting of the Federated Seamen's Union which expressed its "profound sympathy with the people of Finland now suffering under a brutal aggression in pursuance of the policies of the Stalin-Hitler partnership."

The meeting conveyed its "admiration of their splendid fight against overwhelming odds in defence of their homes, of the conditions established in their country, and of their national culture. It notes that the Labour and trade union movements in Finland and all the surrounding Scandinavian countries have expressed their solidarity with the Finnish people and their detestation of the present unprovoked aggression.

"This meeting remembers the conditions under which the Soviet Government was first established in 1917 under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, and how it expressly repudiated the kind of aggression that Stalin and the present Russian dictatorship have launched. Marx and Engels, the founders of scientific socialism, vigorously opposed aggression against small nations.

"In 1917 the new Soviet Government appealed for, and secured, the support of workers throughout the world, largely because it stood for the freeing of small nations from their oppressors and for the determination of hostilities without annexations and without indemnities. The original Constitution of the Soviet Union expressly stated that it was 'a voluntary union of equal peoples' and that each constituent republic enjoyed 'the right of freely withdrawing.' Further, the Soviet Government at the time gave practical proof of its sincerity by surrendering the rights it enjoyed over China and Persia under the former Tsarist treaties and by freely granting its independence to the Finland that Stalin is now endeavouring to crush."

The president of the Seaman's Union, Fintan Patrick

Walsh, wrote to Trotsky in Mexico on 3 January 1940 enclosing a copy of the resolution. Walsh stated, "Although we down under are more or less outside the world affairs we nevertheless take a keen and live interest on matters affecting the international working class."

Trotsky replied on 19 February, "Thank you cordially for your warm letter of solidarity. I enjoyed it the more that, in this period of terrible chauvinistic pressure in almost all the countries of the world, sincere and consistent socialist voices are rather an exception." Five months later Trotsky was murdered by one of Stalin's agents. Walsh, who had cut his teeth as a militant in the IWW in the US during the early 20th-century, was rapidly moving rightwards. By 1951, he would sell out the wharfies in their epic battle against the government.

What makes the Wellington seafarers' resolution so significant is that, in my view, they had a clearer perspective than the great revolutionaries Trotsky and James P Cannon, who refused to condemn the invasion of Finland in their intra-Trotskyist polemics. (In his public writings, Trotsky was far more critical of the USSR's invasion.)

Walsh was already an irredeemable bureaucrat in 1939. He was never likely to play a progressive role in politics, and his correspondence with Trotsky is more of a historical curiosity than anything else. What is important, though, is that the resolution was moved, discussed and voted for at a meeting of rank and file workers at a crucial point in history.

As such, the record of the seafarers' position stands as a tantalising glimpse of the "Third Camp" politics that might have been in Aotearoa [New Zealand].

- Sources: *Evening Post* bit.ly/WyWr5z; Graeme Hunt, *Black Prince: the biography of Fintan Patrick Walsh*
- Mike Kyriazopoulos is an activist in Fightback (Aotearoa/New Zealand) and a sympathiser of the AWL.

Stalinist troops in the invasion of Finland

Big powers smaller oligarchy

Pandelis Pouliopoulos died 70 years ago, on 6 June 1943, shot by Italian occupation forces in Greece during World War Two. In his final moments he delivered an internationalist speech to his executioners, so that the firing squad rebelled and the officers had to shoot instead.

In this extract from his pamphlet *What the Veterans and Army Victims Demand* (1924), Pouliopoulos indicted the economic and diplomatic subjugation of Greece to the big powers; and explained clearly that a nationalist response was inadequate for the working class. The plutocrats of second-rank capitalist powers like Greece also had "aspirations to conquest", and only independent working class struggle against Greece's own oligarchy could bring liberation.

Pouliopoulos (1900-43) was the first general secretary of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and a founder of the Trotskyist movement in Greece.

In March 1927, Pouliopoulos was removed from the KKE Central Committee. He soon formed an oppositional journal *Neo Xekinima* (*New Beginning*).

In 1938 Pouliopoulos took the initiative to unite the Greek Trotskyists to form the Unified Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece (EOKDE), which was present at the founding of the Fourth International in Paris in September 1938.

That same year, after going into hiding, Pouliopoulos was arrested by the Greek government and imprisoned. He refused to kneel before the dictatorship or sign a declaration of repentance allowing him to flee abroad, declaring that "they can only take me abroad in chains, and even then I will find a way to return".

Our country is so tightly bound to the chains of economic dependence from the Western imperialist Powers, that every government is forced to follow a policy of blind obedience towards the daily interests of the imperialists in the East and the Balkans.

And we have seen that the interests of the various imperialists do not agree with each other, but they antagonise each other, they are in constant conflict.

Thus, every time that this conflict reaches a war outbreak, the policy of the Greek governments, tied to the chariot of one of the warring imperialist Powers, leads inevitably the people to bloody adventures, and takes now this, and then another self-righteous pretext. If this depth of the war policy of the Greek governments is not leaping to everyone's eyes, this is happening because these charlatans and jingoists take all possible measures to hide it, to cover it up. The diplomatic backstage and antechambers of the bank offices are the workshops where the executioners, local and foreign, sharpen their murderous knives.

But the economic chains and the attachment of the state to the chariot of European imperialism wouldn't be enough to completely justify the wars if there wasn't yet another factor, another power in our country, allowing and facilitating foreigners to carry out their plans of conquest with our blood. And we must find this power, we must examine it carefully and persistently from all sides. Because it is the most important, the most basic point of our whole program.

There is an oligarchy in our country too, which holds in its hands the most important means of the national wealth and whose interests oppose and counter those of the great majority of the people. Many want to deny this, either out of self-interest or narrow-mindedness. They say that there is no such

s and garchies

class here in Greece, such capitalism as in the other big countries, who have a more advanced economy and their big industry concentrated to a few hands. They say that our country is petit-bourgeois, where all wealth is shared, where every one has his own and no-one is complaining and that there is no inequality in our society.

But those who suggest such things do not want to look around them. They don't see from one side the infinite misery that torments the poor people, and all the small ones who "own" something (small landlords — small manufacturers, poor peasants etc.) they don't see that themselves, in order to live, are forced to work and work more excruciatingly than those who own nothing, but their labour is stolen by the merchant with his speculation, the shylock with his loan sharking, the predatory State with its taxes, the landlord with his rents.

They don't see that this "something" whether it is a small house, or a small shop, or a small amount of money, the poor in order to keep it "theirs" are forced to work for it day and night with all his family, to painstakingly earn his bread!

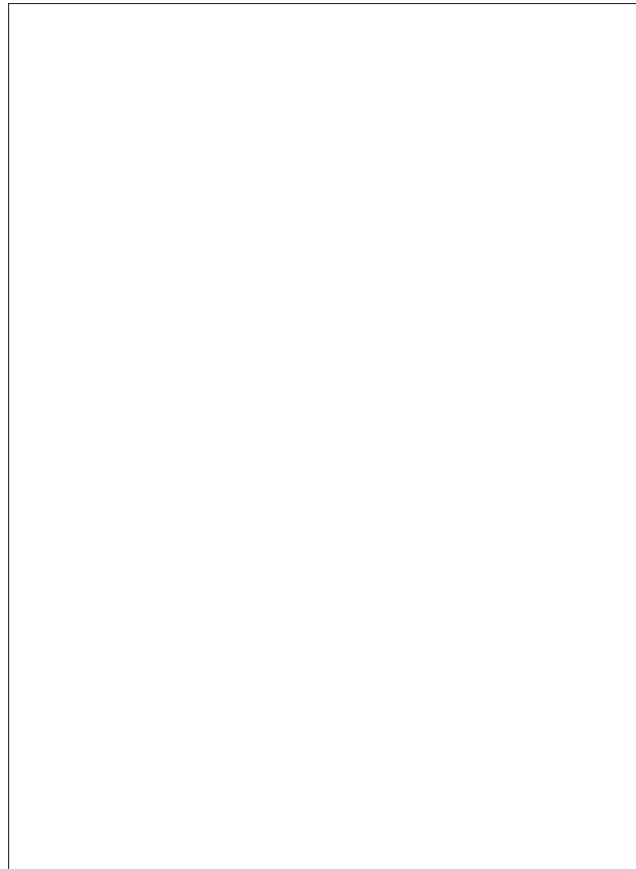
And they don't want to see, from the other side, these parasites, bankers, big merchants, financiers, ship owners and industrialists, all those idle squires who accumulate capital from the sweat of all the working people.

BALKANS

And what is happening in our own country, is happening also in the other small Balkan states. There too such a privileged oligarchy holds the most important parts of the national wealth in their hands and exploits the labour of the people, accumulating huge capital.

As the gangs of big plutocrats of the big Powers demand today to conquer the whole world becoming imperialistic, thus the privileged oligarchies of our Balkan countries of today show similar aspirations of conquest: Each one them seeks to extend the kingdom of their economic sovereignty, to make it bigger and to exploit even more working hands, more extensive lands and sources of natural wealth. The bankers seek new countries to place their capital with bigger profits in new enterprises. The big merchants seek to they grow their circle of speculative action. The ship owners seek to acquire new harbours under State protection. The industrialists seek to sell in more speculative prices their merchandise under the protection of the State, that is, by paying fewer customs duties. Finally the predatory State with its sinecures, in order to have more poor people to milk and thus avoiding the taxation of its protected ones, the rich.

And generally every plutocrat, of any sector, always sees



Pandelis Pouliopoulos

something good for his interests and supports always war. For this reason, when war is imminent, while the workers and peasants and the poor people in general tire and ask for peace, the rich are ready to gouge their eyes out in order to convince us that the war must go ahead, that the homeland blah-blah, etc.

Now it's easier for all of us to realise that the imperialists find in these tendencies, in this greed and profit mania of the local oligarchy, their best ally for their interests and purposes. Of course, the aspirations of conquest of each one of the Balkan plutocracies come to conflict, since their lands are not immense.

For example, Macedonia is claimed by the Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek plutocracies and even by the Turkish lords. The States arm themselves and confront each other like roosters ready to fight. The slightest pretext is enough for war to break out. Thus, every now and then the unfortunate peoples are called to resolve these trade differences with their own blood. Pretexts are found in abundance. Today, national unity, tomorrow a diplomatic incident, the day after in defence of the first one to be attacked and the like...

Only through their own organisation and their own struggle will the working people, slaughtered and sacrificed, be able to gain hold of their lives and a means to free and save themselves. As there are various kinds of tyranny and exploitation against them, their organisations must also be varied; there must be various ways for their struggle. And so it happens. The very needs for life itself push them to join in various organisations. It is obvious that all these organisations have common traits and final goal: the abolition of the plutocratic oligarchy and the liberation of the people.

Workers and peasants' economic organisations take up the struggle against economic exploitation. They seek to improve the position of wage earners and all workers in general! To impose to the exploiters and the State their demands.

Political organisations wage the political struggle of the exploited.

They fight against the political parties of the exploiters, they pull the masses out of their influence, they awaken and educate them, and want to give the people true political domination, to raise them to state power, to turn the state into an instrument of their own interests, instead of the instrument of plutocratic interests that is today.

The True Prison

Songs of Liberty & Rebellion



Ken Saro-Wiwa was a writer and activist. He was one of the leaders of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, a community-rights and environmental movement which challenged the power of oil companies and the Nigerian government.

In 1994, the Nigerian government launched a concerted offensive against the Ogoni people to make the region safe for oil multinationals. 3,000 people were killed. In 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed by the Nigerian government.

His poem *The True Prison* bases itself on a recurring and striking anti-capitalist trope —that actual prisons are merely reflections and extensions of the shackles imposed on humanity by capitalism. The poem, written two years before he died, damns the state.

The Ruby Kid

It is not the leaking roof
Nor the singing mosquitoes
In the damp, wretched cell
It is not the clank of the key
As the warden locks you in
It is not the measly rations
Unfit for beast or man
Nor yet the emptiness of day
Dipping into the blankness of night
It is not
It is not
It is not

It is the lies that have been drummed
Into your ears for a generation
It is the security agent running amok
Executing callous calamitous orders
In exchange for a wretched meal a day
The magistrate writing into her book
A punishment she knows is undeserved
The moral decrepitude
The mental ineptitude
The meat of dictators
Cowardice masking as obedience
Lurking in our denigrated souls
It is fear damping trousers
That we dare not wash
It is this
It is this
It is this
Dear friend, turns our free world
Into a dreary prison

Ken Saro-Wiwa

Politics, sexism, and Facebook culture

Kate Harris



It's fair to say that Facebook and Twitter have changed the face and shape of left-wing organising in Britain, particularly organising young people and students.

As well as posting about the music you like, what you're eating, and what colour you've dyed your hair, you can post about your views: either on your profile, or in numerous groups.

Sometimes political discussion on social networking is fruitful and enlightening. Sometimes it descends into personal, sectarian, and boring fights that are had over and over again and are of little use to socialists except those who think they will build up some sort of profile and use that to silence people. Which isn't very socialist.

It can also be a means for people to act in less than honest or comradely ways — setting up fake accounts to slander others or discrediting organisations for no good reason.

But at the same token Facebook has made it easier to find people, talk to people, advertise events and organise group discussion and it's hard to think about what we would now do without it.

Rather than seeing Facebook and Twitter as "good" or "bad" for organising, the sensible thing for socialists to do is to use them as another form of media in the same way that we publish papers, phone people, and use email.

Last week we saw a spate of male university students cre-

ating "Rate Your Shag" Facebook pages and posting quotes about sexual performance and body type alongside people's real names.

Socialist-feminists are not prudes; we are not against sex, casual or otherwise. We are not in general for censoring sexually explicit material.

These pages, though, were an invasion of the privacy of students of all genders; they reduced the sum of someone's "worth" to what someone else felt they experienced in a casual encounter; they were judging and shaming people based on sexist, ableist body norms and were generally slut-shaming.

BIGOTRY

A few years ago it could've been me being mentioned on those pages, as a sexually-active university student. A horrible thought, and my sympathies go to anyone who was negatively affected.

This isn't an "internet problem" though, but a problem of pathetic, heteronormative, sexist, and otherwise heavily gendered attitudes towards sex and sexuality. With or without the internet, we would still have bigotry and oppressive attitudes — the only way we will get rid of them is through liberation and socialism.

It is not that uncommon to hear boys and men in the street talking about women being "pigs", scoring women out of ten, and berating or praising each other based on who they've pulled.

And it's also not uncommon to hear girls and women talking about whether or not they will be judged for sleeping

Puerile, stupid, sexist

with someone on the first date, whether or not they will be labelled a "slag" for sleeping with someone casually, or what is an "acceptable" number of sexual partners to have had.

Society at large, including a lot of people in our class, still views women's sexuality negatively and women as sex objects.

We should be using new media and social media in order to put forward our ideas to anyone who uses them (not just young people) and to challenge capitalism as well as sexism and other bigoted opinions in society.

Ideas for Freedom 2013

Marxist ideas to turn the tide

Thursday 20 June–Sunday 23 June, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 8HY

This year's Ideas for Freedom will include five introductory sessions on key episodes from revolutionary history. No prior knowledge is required, as the sessions will relate the "story" of each event, but some prior reading (see below) may be helpful. The sessions will use a variety of formats, including film showings, slideshows, small-group discussion, and discussion of contemporary material (newspaper clippings, etc.)

Saturday 22 June, 2.50pm–4.10pm

The Paris Commune 1871: the first workers' government (Rosie Huzzard)

The Paris Commune was a short window of time in 1871 when workers took control over Paris, and made radical demands for a programme of socialist government. The Commune's successes, and ultimate defeat, has informed much of revolutionary understanding of the state ever since.

• Prior reading: bit.ly/paris-shact (the story of the Commune told by US socialist Max Shachtman)
bit.ly/marx-pc (from Karl Marx's "The Civil War In France")

Saturday 22 June, 6.20pm–7.45pm

How South African workers beat apartheid (Mark Osborn)
Struggle by independently self-organised black workers, in key industries like mining, was key to the defeat of the white supremacist apartheid state in South Africa. How did those workers organise, and challenges did they face? And why did the post-apartheid government take a neo-liberal course?

• Prior reading: bit.ly/sa-wkrs
bit.ly/wl3-btc (a special issue of *Workers' Liberty* magazine from 1985 about black workers' struggles)

Sunday 23 June, 10am–12pm

Solidarnosc 1980–81: workers versus "communist" bureaucrats (Tony Byrne)

Solidarnosc, the mass union movement at the head of a social upheaval against Stalinist totalitarianism in Poland, was a model of independent working-class self-organisation. How did it grow, and why was its left wing eventually defeated?

• Prior reading: bit.ly/pol-solid

Sunday 23 June, 1pm–2.25pm

The Dublin lock-out 1913 (Patrick Murphy)

The labour war in Ireland's capital in 1913 saw pioneering use of the solidarity strike (sometimes euphemistically referred to as "secondary action" by modern-day trade union officials). Can the efforts of Irish workers to build mass industrial unions inform our organising today?

• Prior reading: bit.ly/dub-1913

Sunday 23 June, 2.35pm–4pm

The real Chinese revolution 1925–7 (Heather Shaw and Stephen Wood)

The uprisings of the nascent Chinese working class in the mid-1920s can teach us much about how working-class forces should relate to social movements led by non working-class groups. The misdirection of the Chinese workers' struggles by Stalin and his supporters was a grim foreshadowing of the Stalinist misleadership, betrayal, and sabotage of workers' movements that would characterise much 20th-century class struggle.

• Prior reading: bit.ly/china-25

Other discussions include:

Class struggle in Turkey • The cleaners' revolt (with speakers from IWGB and RMT) • Art, theatre, and socialism • Challenging sexism in the labour movement • Black soldiers in the Second American Revolution • What is Hugo Chavez's legacy? • The Warsaw Ghetto uprising • Clay Cross: how a Labour council defied a Tory government and won • Lenin or "Leninism"? • Radical East End walking tour • Screening of *The Spirit of '45* and discussion

Tickets are £33/£22/£8 (waged/low-waged/unwaged) if bought in advance of the event. Ticket price includes food. Free creche and crash accommodation available. For more, or to book tickets online: workersliberty.org/ideas

The next five months

This is an abridged version of a report on plans for the next five months adopted by the AWL National Committee on 1 June.

The working class is on the back foot. Working-class struggle is low. There is no big, exuberant rush to the left.

But the work done by a revolutionary socialist organisation, and only by a revolutionary organisation, has a greater relative importance in such quiet times than in many times of high struggle.

In a revolutionary onrush, no special organising methods are necessary to sustain socialists in consistent activity. Activity surges beyond all plans. If socialists are not drawn into high activity by the general movement, no-one will do anything but shrug and write them off.

What the revolutionary organisation contributes then is clarity of ideas. Its activists' contributions to debates in the maelstrom will be sufficiently brisk and clear only on the basis of the political and theoretical education which the revolutionary organisation's activists have gained in previous, quieter epochs.

In periods of lull and retreat, the specific organising work of the revolutionary organisation is essential to stop activism dissipating into drab, erratic fragments, and to stop the socialists' educational work of developing class consciousness being overwhelmed by the tasks of sustaining minimal trade-union and campaigning organisation.

By conserving and honing purposefulness and consistency of activity, the revolutionary organisation trains its activists, integrates new activists, strengthens its political influence in workplaces and union branches, and thus creates the means which enable it to contribute well in the subsequent upsurges.

BRISK

There will be important strikes and other struggles in the next five months. We must be ready to be energetic and quick-moving in support of them.

That energy and speed of movement cannot be got by sluggishness in activity between the strikes and the big struggles, but rather by briskness and reliability in those quieter times.

To stabilise, and make reliable and well-followed-through, our basic routines of AWL paper sales, stalls, meetings, and educationals, is not merely marking time, but doing the best we can to enable us to contribute positively in whatever battles come soon, and in the bigger struggles later.

Parts of the existing left are in flux. We intervene consistently and vigorously for a proper political assessment of the Stalinoid past of the SWP and others, for democracy in debate, and for the continuing importance of revolutionary organisation.

Paper sales are both an important substantive part of, and a "thermometer" for, our activity of circulating ideas.

They are an important part because big ideas require codification in writing to get across.

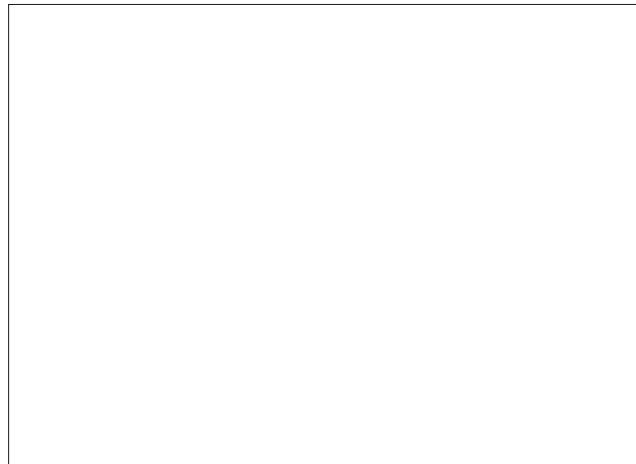
They are a "thermometer" because the paper is the main visible sign by which our activists identify themselves as AWL on campuses, in workplaces, in union forums, on the streets, on the doorsteps, etc. In almost all cases where we can make real new contacts and initiate new streams of conversation, we will also convince the person involved to take the paper.

And paper sales can be quantified. Monitoring our activities by tracking the number of papers we sell gives an objective measure.

To take that measure as the only criterion would be wrong. To proceed without monitoring it would be as wrong as a mass revolutionary party proceeding only by vague estimates of things which can't be quantified, like "the mood", and neglecting hard facts of party membership, votes, strikes, etc.

Paper sales are not as high as they were in the period of the immediate shock of the global financial crisis, in late 2008; or in the 1984-5 miners' strike; or in some periods of high class struggle in the 1970s. But generally street sales and door-to-door sales, if done competently, produce somewhat better sales than in, for example, most of the 1970s.

This is paradoxical. A probable reason is as follows. In the 1970s, someone interested in left-wing politics could readily



Focus on the NHS

see many accessible openings for activity which seemed thriving, on the up and up, etc. They could express their interest that way. Unless they were highly motivated, they would feel no special impulse to express their interest additionally by buying a left-wing paper encountered in the workplace, on the street, or on the doorstep.

These days left-minded people are more likely to see available activity as hard going. However, if they see a left-wing paper offered for sale on the street, or on the doorstep, buying and reading it can seem to them a good and undemanding way to express their interest.

It follows that the conversion rate, from those who will buy papers on the streets on the doorstep to those who will e.g. come to meetings, is lower now than at other times. But we already knew that.

Routines of stalls, paper sales, and meetings are an essential underpinning for more elaborate "broad" enterprises. They do not undermine or contradict those "broad" enterprises any more than regular breathing contradicts complicated athletic feats. On the contrary: making the regular activity of political "breathing" so reliable and steady that it requires no fuss or worry is a springboard for everything more athletic.

STRUGGLES

Union membership numbers rose fractionally in 2012, by 59,000 to 6.5 million according to the count by the Department of Business.

The rise was all in the private sector, where however union membership numbers had previously fallen since 2008 by almost 500,000. The small rise, and the steadying of union membership in the public sector, are welcome achievements in current conditions.

The squeeze on real wages in Britain, much longer and bigger than in living memory, combined as it is with relatively brisk inflation and new prosperity for the wealthy, sets the scene for a potential "wage explosion" later on. But there are no grounds to rely on that explosion happening in the next five months. It is not happening now. Strikes have been at historic-low levels since 30 November 2011. The local government cuts in the April 2013 budgets were harsher than in 2011 and 2012, but aroused less trade-union and campaigning response.

As we noted in October 2012: "We cannot at will change the level of militancy and confidence of the broad labour movement. In principle, a shrinkage of 'broad' activity should for us, as revolutionary Marxists, simply mean that time and energy... is shifted to the 'narrower' activity of our own education, training, paper-selling, contact work, etc.

"In practice the shift is not automatic. It requires conscious and deliberate effort. Without that conscious and deliberate effort, a lull in the 'broad' movement will tend to lead to a slackening rather than a stepping-up of our 'narrower' education, training, paper-selling, and contact work".

The bedroom tax has produced the first real surge of campaigning against benefit cuts since the initial burst of campaigning, mainly by disability activists.

Bedroom tax campaigning is patchy, and in many areas more a matter of leftists making publicity against the tax than communities organising themselves against them. But left-

ists making publicity is good, and may be an essential first step towards helping communities organise themselves. AWL branches should be active in bedroom tax campaigns.

The NHS is an epochal issue, still identified in the minds of the British working class (including young working-class people) as the centrepiece of the welfare state, and now under grave threat from the Tories.

In the foreseeable future campaigning on the NHS will take three forms: a. Big local campaigns against the closure of local hospitals or departments (Lewisham, Stafford, etc.) b. Regular publicity work (stalls, etc.) by smaller local committees. c. Activity in the Labour Party to reinforce and enforce the decision on the NHS made at the 2012 conference. We should work on and assist all three.

STUDENTS AND YOUTH

The revolutionary socialist movement always depends for new vigour on recruitment from youth. These days, by far the largest accessible concentrations of young people are on university, and secondarily college, campuses.

However, they are not "accessible" unless we make ourselves visible. On many campuses there is really no visible left activity. A new student arriving at one of those campuses with a tentative interest in left-wing politics is likely to have that interest wither unless we develop some visible activity through which she or he can explore that tentative interest.

A reliable, well-done routine of stalls, sales, meetings, film-showings, etc. on every campus where we have AWL members, or where non-student AWL members can get ready access, is therefore central.

As our October 2012 conference document noted, we need an ideological offensive which "should not take place only at the level of 'high politics' but also at the level of raising big political issues, such as the NHS or immigration, which are 'live' but fall outside of the immediate remit of the student union or the anti-cuts group. The AWL should be the natural point of reference for left-minded students looking for answers on such issues".

We should not let our political profile on campuses be swamped by concerns for the engineering of anti-cuts campaigning. There will be battles against cuts. We should be in them. But cuts are not the main thing, and the inevitably fading cadre of activists "against cuts and fees" from 2010-1 should not be the main focus.

As we reported (*Solidarity*, 20 Feb 2013): "While less well-off universities are losing thousands of applications, overall university finances are set to increase by billions... Overall, business is booming. The ability to charge £9,000 fees is allowing universities to increase their incomes.

"Much of this new loot is being poured into projects to make the sector more competitive". And student political activity is higher on the bigger, more up-market campuses, which in 2013-4 will be further boosted financially by their new licence to enrol 115,000 ABB+ students outside quotas.

On each campus we must find ways to organise discussion events, usually weekly during term time, with a range of left-wing debates and speakers. These will include AWL speakers, often debating with other leftists. We will also invite local campaigners, left-wing academics and research students from the university, and right-wing academics open to debate.

The meetings should be include film showings, debates, panel discussions, etc., as well as straight lecture-plus-questions sessions. Within each society we should pursue individual discussions with the students who become interested in specifically AWL ideas, and seek to recruit them to AWL.

- 22-23 June: Ideas for Freedom 2013
- 20 July: AWL National Committee sets the agenda for AWL conference
- 8-11 August: AWL summer camp at Heightgate Farm, near Hebden Bridge
- September: AWL branches will plan a drive on stalls and sales from the start of September, re-raising activity after the inevitable impact of holidays in July and August, and organise activities for students' return to the campuses around 23 September.
- 26-27 October: AWL conference.

Syria and the embargo

By Martin Thomas

On 28 May the European Union ended its arms embargo on Syria. The move was driven by the UK and France. They say that they don't intend to send arms, but instead to use the threat of sending arms to apply pressure for a deal at the Geneva conference convened by the US and Russia, which is pencilled in for 15-16 June, but may be postponed.

The US welcomed the EU decision, while still saying that the US itself would not send arms. Geneva probably won't yield a deal. The main external opposition front, the Syrian National Council, says it won't attend, in protest against the siege of the Syrian town of Qusair by the Lebanese Shia militia Hezbollah, which is supported by Iran and allied with Assad. The SNC's stance may be a way of jockeying for position and trying to extract concessions in advance, but it does not promise well.

What then? Socialists had no reason to endorse the European Union arms embargo. Sectarian Sunni-Islamist militias within the Syrian opposition have a lot of arms and funds

from Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Assad is supported by Iran and Russia.

On 28 May Russia said it would supply advanced anti-aircraft missiles to Assad. Israel issued a thinly veiled warning that it would bomb the Russian missiles if they arrived in Syria. The *Financial Times* reports "private doubts among Russian officials and analysts that the deliveries will take place".

General Idris

It does not, however, follow that we can support or applaud the lifting of the embargo. British and French arms shipments will probably, directly or indirectly, boost some sectarian Islamist group.

The UK and France reportedly plan to send arms, if they send any, to Selim Idris, the senior military defector from the Assad regime and nominal head of the "Free Syrian Army".

Idris recently asked the US and EU for arms for use against

both Assad and elements of the opposition, saying that "wants to create a more moderate and stronger alternative to Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda-linked militant group that has emerged as one of the most powerful rebel factions" (*FT*, 22 April). But Idris in no way represents a reliable force, politically or even militarily.

"General Idris acknowledges that he does not command the forces on the ground" (*FT*, 22 April).

A major question mark on all assessments is the plans of Turkey, which is the major military force in the region and has the major border area in which Syrian opposition militias operate.

Turkish government announcements are cautious, with prime minister Erdogan saying that he "purely and simply stands by humanity and conscience" in Syria. One element looks like being a Kurdish gambit. Turkey has recently done an oil deal with Iraqi Kurdistan. Syrian Kurdistan is de facto autonomous. Turkey is negotiating with the Turkish-Kurdish PKK.

Turkey may hope to expand influence in the region in the guise of guarantor and ally for the Kurds.

Sectarian surge in Iraq

By Chris Reynolds

Sectarian attacks have reached a new high in Iraq. Most are bombings by Sunni-sectarian militias aimed at Shias.

The link with the civil war in Syria is not tight. The driving force seems to be frustration among the Sunni Arab minority (15 to 20% of the population, but politically dominant for centuries before 2003, including under the Ottoman Empire) against the Shia-Islamist-dominated regime of Nouri al-Maliki.

Maliki's support for Assad (he lived in

Syria, then Iran, when in exile from the Saddam Hussein regime), is a subordinate element. Iraqi oil production has increased 50% above its 2005-8 levels, and the price of oil, despite a dip in 2008-9, has tripled since 2005. The resulting revenues have helped Maliki rule with little regard for Sunni allies or Sunni sensibilities.

A survey has ranked Iraq's government as one of the most corrupt in the world (169th out of 174). In provincial elections in April this year, Maliki's "State of Law" party, having absorbed Fadhila, consolidated its hold despite a drop in votes. Iyad Allawi's more secular party, once favoured by the US and capable of winning more votes than Maliki in the March 2010 parliamentary elections, did poorly. Many Sunnis abstained. No polls were held in the three regions within Kurdistan or in Kirkuk or in the two Sunni-majority provinces of Anbar and Nineveh.

As well as Sunni-Shia, Arab-Kurdish conflict is also a destabilising factor. Maliki has declared "illegal" an oil deal signed in mid-May between the Turkish government and the regional government of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The city of Kirkuk is still disputed. The city and its oil-rich environs were "Arabised" by Saddam, and have since been re-"Kurdified". A referendum to decide its status was due in November 2007, but still hasn't happened.

Late in 2012, Maliki moved Iraqi troops to the south of the

city, and the Kurdish regional government moved Kurdish troops to the north. Questions of the status of the large Turkmen minority in Kirkuk are also moot.

The Iraqi labour movement is still a force against sectarianism, but still weak, harassed, and in need for international support.

Iraq: the timeline

- **March 2003: US and allies invade Iraq, quickly overthrow regime. Looting and collapse of regular social administration follow. US sets up a Coalition Provisional Authority, which exacerbates chaos by disbanding the Iraqi army and much of the state administration. Sectarian conflict, intertwined with attacks on US forces mainly by Sunni-Islamist militias, grows.**
- **April to August 2004: Warfare between US forces and Shia-Islamist faction led by Muqtada al-Sadr**
- **June 2004: US hands over to an Iraqi "interim government" of its choice, led by Allawi, which serves to May 2005**
- **January 2005 and December 2005: parliamentary elections**
- **2006-7: Sectarian conflict rises to simmering civil-war pitch**
- **May 2006: Maliki becomes prime minister**
- **Late 2007 and 2008: Sectarian conflict eases. A significant section of Sunni militias have accepted US sponsorship and funding ("Sahwa")**
- **November 2008: US signs agreement to withdraw troops**
- **May 2009: Last UK troops withdrawn**
- **March 2010: Elections in Iraq. Allawi's party gets highest vote, but Maliki eventually (November 2010) forms the new coalition government**
- **December 2011: US troop withdrawal complete.**

Spaces for working-class politics

Val Graham, a trade-union and Labour activist in Chesterfield, spoke to *Solidarity* about the "alternatives to austerity" discussions she has been organising in the town to bring forward ideas on what the labour movement should demand of a Labour government if elected in 2015.

The first few meetings had about 30 people at them. Reflecting a general issue on the left, most of the people attending are older. There have been some young people, but not as many as I would wish.

Most of those who come are active trade unionists and involved in other campaigns.

The first meeting we had was on welfare — including what kind of welfare system we wanted.

The second meeting discussed the issue of councillors opposing cuts. I invited Graham Skinner, who was one of the Clay Cross rent rebels [when the Labour council in Clay Cross in Derbyshire defied the Tory government and refused to raise council rates in the 1970s] to discuss his experiences.

We also had a meeting on the Bedroom Tax. The most recent meeting was on the Fire Brigades Union's pamphlet *It's Time To Take Over The Banks*.

The next one is a showing of *The Spirit of '45*, and the one after that will most likely be on feminism.

Part of the point of the meetings is to encourage people to think beyond the defensive campaigns they're involved in. We need to work out what we're for, not just what we're against.

We need our own alternative policies, and a fight for them inside the Labour Party. I hope there'll be a Labour government after 2015, but without a strong voice to fight for anti-austerity policies we can't expect them to do anything except carry on much like the Tories.

The forums have had the effect of making councillors think seriously about adopting a "no cuts" position and discuss it in the Labour group.

There's also been activity around the Bedroom Tax. Involving the FBU encouraged them to work more closely with the wider labour movement in Chesterfield and affiliate to Chesterfield TUC.

Nothing like these meetings has happened in Chesterfield in a long time. One of my aims has been to be open, to welcome anyone who wanted to come.

I've got speakers who are clearly socialist but from a range of backgrounds and organisations.

Cleaners' fightback continues

By Ollie Moore

Tube cleaners working for ISS suspended a planned strike after management backed down on use of the "Bradford Factor" sickness management system (which allows bosses to sack workers for missing as few as three days) to discipline staff.

Cleaners are also demanding an end to biometric fingerprinting, and want ISS to pay the arrears of a pay rise from November 2012 to bring wages in line with the London Living Wage. ISS cleaners on new contracts have also seen their working day increase with no extra pay.

As in the past, ISS bosses

have used immigration controls as a weapon of class warfare and responded to the ballot by colluding with the Border Agency to conduct immigration raids on workplaces that have seen over 20 cleaners snatched. Workers say biometric fingerprinting could be used to deport cleaners with precarious immigration status if they stand up for themselves.

One cleaning worker told Workers' Liberty's *Tube-worker* bulletin: "We have a message for ISS: we will not be silenced by your intimidation. We are not slaves. We have the right to take action against your brutal management."

The Rail, Maritime, and

Transport workers' union (RMT) is preparing to ballot its London Underground and London Overground members for strikes to demand these two companies stop using agencies and give the agency staff permanent jobs.

LOCKED-OUT

On London Overground, agency STM "locked out" workers when they started lawful action short of strikes. RMT responded by escalating its protests, and STM backed down.

On London Underground, the "Justice for the 33" campaign in support of sacked former Trainpeople agency staff has main-

tained a near-constant presence outside the head offices of LU and its parent company TfL in St. James's Park, as well as visiting workplaces across the network to build support amongst other Tube workers.

Some of the workers had been working on the Tube for five years at the point they were sacked, and had even been asked to train newly-recruited, directly-employed staff, despite not being offered direct contracts themselves.

The proposed strike aims to stop the process of casualisation, demanding that all agency staff are brought into direct employment.

Brighton Greens plan strike busting

By Ira Berkovic

The result of a strike ballot by CityClean refuse workers at Brighton Council is due on Friday 7 June.

The workers already launched an unofficial sit-down strike, and have been operating a work-to-rule, against a cuts plan from the Green Party council which could see workers lose up to £4,000 a year from their pay.

The council is dis-

cussing "contingency plans" to deal with any strike. It has begun moving a number of vehicles away from CityClean sites for use by agency workers during any potential strike. A statement from the GMB union said it had written to council leader Jason Kitcat to "warn him that the use of agency labour to replace striking workers is unlawful."

"[...] It appears that the Green Party administration on Brighton Council is now gearing up for a full blown strike-busting operation."

"These plans place them amongst the worst employers in the country, with even the Conservative party in Brighton never having attempted such draconian measures."

Above: locals' messages of support attached to bins

Culture workers strike

By a gallery worker

Culture workers in the museum and galleries sector staged effective full and half-day strikes on May 30 and 31, as part of their Group action strategy linked to the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) national campaign on pay, pensions, and job cuts.

There were lively, well-attended picket lines at Tate Liverpool, Modern, and Britain, and actions at National Museums Liver-

pool, the National Gallery, and National Portrait Gallery resulted in disruptive room and gallery closures.

Support from comrades in other PCS sections (London DEFRA and Liverpool HMRC) and the Lost Arts campaigning group was warmly welcomed, as were the messages of solidarity from the gallery-going public, as well as the wider union movement.

The culture sector, like many other departments, expects another cut to its operating budget of be-

tween 8-10% in the Comprehensive Spending Review due on the 26 June.

Arts and heritage administrations will be looking to pass these cuts down the line to workers. This could take the form of redundancies, further outsourcing and possible enforced closures.

Workers in these revenue-generating sectors are steeling themselves for a further national strike at the end of June, whilst preparing for the inevitable, looming, local disputes.

Balls to keep Tory plans

By Darren Bedford

George Osborne is due to announce his latest spending review on 26 June, the day before the first regional strike in teachers' industrial action over pay, pensions, and workload.

Osborne says he hopes to make £11.5 billion cuts in the new review, which would cover the 2015-2016 financial year. A general election is due to take place in May 2015, just after the financial year begins, which Labour is expected to win. Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls said on 4 June that, if elected, Labour would maintain the basic framework of Osborne's spending plans. Leading figures in the GMB union accused him of "out Osborne-ing Osborne".

With the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) rolling strike campaign on pay, pensions, and jobs ongoing and action on 26 June a possibility, and the NUT/NASUWT strike due the day after, 26 June should become a national labour movement day of action.

It should include local demonstrations and rallies against the cuts and to demand that Labour break with Tory policy.

Outsourced workers' summer of action begins

By Ira Berkovic

The University of London Union (ULU) mobilised student activists to set up an impromptu "holiday camp" outside the office of Vice Chancellor Adrian Smith in the university's iconic Senate House building.

The action aimed to highlight the inequality between the holiday entitlement of outsourced workers (cleaners, catering staff, and security guards) and directly-employed staff, and was part of a summer of direct action called by ULU and the University of London branch of the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), the union which organises many outsourced workers.

The "3 Cosas" campaign, demanding sick pay, holiday entitlement, and pension equality, has been active since 2012, and follows the workers' victory in winning the London Living Wage in June of that year.

- [facebook.com/3coca](https://www.facebook.com/3coca) — 3 Cosas website
- bit.ly/l5-3c — LabourStart online appeal for the campaign

Mid Yorks NHS strikes escalate

By Stew Ward

Health workers at the Mid Yorks NHS Trust have escalated their six-month dispute against down-banding and pay cuts by voting for Trust-wide strike action.

Unison members voted by 75% to strike again in an attempt to stop a cuts plan which could see workers lose up to £2,700.

Workers at Dewsbury, Pontefract and Wakefield Pinderfields hospitals have already struck for nine days during the dispute. The escalation of the action, from around 250 affected administrative and clerical work-

ers at the three hospitals to all Unison members across the Trust, is a bold step by the union. The overwhelming vote in favour of strikes demonstrates the depth of solidarity throughout the Trust. A date for a strike is expected to be announced soon.

Messages of support can be sent to the branch at midyorksunison@aol.co.uk.

Send donations for the strike fund to Mid Yorks Unison c/o Trade Union Office, Pinderfields Hospital, Aberford Road, Wakefield WF1 4DG. Make cheques payable to Mid Yorks Unison 20671.

Job cuts threat at Lambeth College

See bit.ly/lamcoll

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Turkey in revolt

Striking workers who are supporters of the rank-and-file UID DER network marching to Taksim Square to show support.

From the Turkish revolutionary socialist group Marksist Tutum

Resistance against the planned destruction of Gezi Park — whose trees are to be felled to make way for a shopping centre — has become a mass movement.

Park workers, labourers, students, artists and intellectuals have been opposing the construction machines and resisting the police. On 1 May, workers and socialists were also victims of furious police attacks when they demonstrated in Taksim Square.

Construction machines stood ready to cut down the park's trees, but demonstrators, joined by

[pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party] deputy Sirri Sureyya Onder, assembled to oppose them. Overnight, the protesters set up tents in the park, under police attack. But on the order of the Governor they were doused with tear gas, blasted with water cannons and their tents were destroyed.

This struggle carried on for 24 hours after the taking of Gezi Park, and the protest camp was re-established. Members of the community of all ages and from different social backgrounds came to oppose the plundering of the camp. The AKP government ordered the police to go on the offensive from 5am on 31 May: an order which the police obeyed with great enthusiasm, showing no regard for human life.

In this attack, three people suffered broken bones and 100 were hospitalised by gas. From this point on, every street gathering was met with brutality from the police. Gezi Park was forcibly cleared and a planned press conference was postponed.

Health workers organised in the left-wing union federation DISK came to make a great display of solidarity for the Gezi Park protestors. They were welcomed with applause, and the general secretary of DISK addressed the crowd.

BOASTS

Despite the AKP's boasts about their "respect for democracy", the police continued to attack, with teargas-laced water and shooting gas canisters directly into the crowd.

An activist, Suresh, was hit on the shoulder and hospitalised as a result. An Egyptian protester, Lavna Allani, was shot in the head with a teargas canister and was taken to hospital in a critical condition with a broken skull.

Many people took shelter from the gas attacks in places like the metro. Their eyes red with tears, children fled the fighting into the underground system. Gas canisters were fired down after them, to punish protesters and commuters alike for their rebellion against the AKP.

Mass demonstrations took place at lunchtimes, as people went to Gezi Park in

defiance of the police. Meanwhile, Istanbul Sixth Administrative Court declared a temporary suspension of the construction of the proposed shopping centre. However, the government has not given up on the redevelopment project — and the police have not given up on repression.

After 19 hours of actions on the streets, thousands of people came together to take the demonstration to Taksim Square, where they were met by the police. In spite of continuing repression, the demonstrations continued to grow by the minute.

While tens of thousands converged on Taksim, thousands more demonstrated in other towns around the country: Antep, Izmir, Adana, Ankara, Hopa, Zonguldak and elsewhere, marching against the despoliation of the park.

The bourgeoisie, under the political leadership of the AKP government and the various municipal administrations, wants to lay waste to Istanbul with shopping centre and skyscraper redevelopments, destroying woodlands, parks and green spaces. Many cities have seen remorseless pillage going under the euphemistic name of "urban renewal".

The philistine greed of capital values neither culture nor nature. But there is something that the capitalists and their AKP servants have forgotten: the power of the working masses!

Sooner or later, the AKP will have to reckon with the workers' movement, and capitalism will come up against the gravediggers it has created for itself. There is no escape!

- The KESK and DISK union federations have called general strikes in solidarity with the protests.
- LabourStart is running a solidarity appeal in coordination with DISK. To support it, visit bit.ly/lis-disk
- Marksist Tutum — en.marksist.net

Prolonged strikes in America's revolt of the low-paid

By Ira Berkovic

Walmart workers in Miami, Massachusetts, and California struck on 28 May.

The strike is the latest walkout in an ongoing campaign for workplace justice at the retail giant, coordinated by OUR Walmart, a labour-movement coalition mainly animated by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW).

The strike is due to last for over 10 days, until Walmart's shareholder convention on 7 June. Although the strike involves only a minority of Walmart employees, the tenacity and dynamism of the campaign (which also coordinated strikes in October and November 2012) has seen it punch significantly above its weight. The escalation from one-day or half-day stoppages to a prolonged strike is a significant step for the campaign. Speaking in *The Nation*, Walmart worker Dominic Ware said: "We've seen that Walmart is trying to hold out the best that they can. So I'm planning on going on strike as long as it takes."

The strike is the first prolonged walkout in Walmart's history, and according to UFCW official Dan Schlademan, are "another example of the

depth of leadership and commitment that this organisation is building."

OUR Walmart's headline demand is simply for Walmart to stop intimidating workers out of speaking up about grievances in the workplace. The grievances themselves are manifold, relating to low-pay, health and safety violations, and abuse of contracts.

The Walmart workers' struggle is paralleled by the growing strike movement amongst fast food workers across America, which is similarly coordinated through union-backed coalitions rather than through unions themselves. The fast food industry, where jobs are characterised by low pay, long hours, and precarious contractual arrangements, is growing twice as fast as the rest of the economy.

Workers employed by McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy's, and others are fighting for a \$15/hour minimum wage (most are currently paid less than \$8/hour). Fast food workers in New York struck in November 2012 and April 13, with strikes spreading to Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, and Milwaukee.

The organising drives in the fast food industry are backed by the SEIU, one of America's biggest unions.

"The idea that the NHS is somehow lucky because its budget has been ringfenced is to misunderstand the pressures the NHS is under. We are having to make efficiency savings on the scale of other government departments just to stand still" — Jeremy Hunt (FT, 3 June)

Join the hunt for Hunt!

On Saturday 15 June, trade unionists and community campaigners will be taking the fight for public healthcare to Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt's constituency.
savelewishamhospital.com