



Solidarity

For a
workers'
government

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 313 12 February 2014 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org



**Floods show profit system
will wreck our future**

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RENEWABLE

ENERGY NOW!

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:

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French law hurts sex workers

By Rosalind Robson

In December 2013 French MPs voted for new laws to make the buying of sexual services a criminal offence and subject to a minimum fine of 1,500€.

The new law, which is still to be passed by the French Senate, is based on the so-called "Nordic model" (i.e. originating in Sweden), where clients rather than sex workers are heavily penalised and where sex work remains, in theory, legal. The policy is aimed at abolishing sex work altogether.

In France migrant sex workers who "give up" sex work are given exceptional "leave to remain" in France. They will also get 336€ a month.

The architects of the French law (including the Women's Rights Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem) say they want to disrupt foreign "pimping networks". They claim 80-90% of France's sex workers are migrants; they strongly imply all migrant sex workers are "victims of trafficking rings".

ELITE

They argue any sex worker who opposes the laws (and there have been many protests) are an "elite" who do not suffer the terrible slave-like conditions of migrant sex workers.

The abolitionists in France, as indeed everywhere, say they are human rights activists, as well as feminists.

The counter-argument (including from sex-worker



French sex workers protest

organisations) is that this law is patronising, based on shoddy data, reproduces a false picture of the sex industry, ignores the needs and opinions of sex worker migrants and will make life more dangerous and precarious for all sex workers.

According to Laura Augustin (author of *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*) the law is the result of years of politicking inside the EU. The framework is that of the campaign "A Europe Free from Prostitution", set up by the European Women's Lobby. As a transposition of the Nordic model to "mainland Europe" (where prostitution is in many places legal and regulated) it is a "game changing shift".

At the heart of the debate is the idea of consent. One may accept (though the abolitionists don't) that ordinarily sex workers consent to sell sexual services and, as long as nobody gets hurt it is not the state's business to obstruct and ban it; sex workers need legal protection like any other

worker, and perhaps more specific protections, but that is all. But can one accept that trafficked migrant sex workers consent to the work?

The problem is that the reality and meaning of "trafficking" is highly contentious. One conscientious 2008 academic study concludes, "Accurate data on the extent of trafficking in human beings does not exist." The figure bandied about by French politicians of 80% is based on UN estimates which are unverified and unverifiable. There are many reasons why it is difficult to find an accurate picture of numbers of "illegal" migrant workers, including sex workers.

Migrants in sex work who come into contact with authority may "under-report" their situation (for fear of reprisal) or "over-report" their situation (to gain some leverage in the system).

It is also difficult to separate out people who have been "smuggled" (by individuals or "gangs") into another country because they want to, or at least knowing that they will, be engaged in sex work and people who have been "trafficked", that is, forced into sex work.

Forced sex work should indeed be outlawed, but that should be done using appropriate laws, not ones aimed at all migrant sex workers.

There are many grey areas. Migrants rely on "criminals" to get from one country to another — that is the reality of modern migration. Conditions for migrant sex work can be appalling, that is the reality of a lot of sex work. But nei-

ther of these realities cancel out, or should be used to deny the consent of sex workers.

The realities demand legal protections — from all coercion, including state coercion of threat of deportation and the right to work in a safe environment.

The French government's answer of simultaneously cracking down on migration and "stamping out" all prostitution is both utopian and dangerous.

Utopian, because as long as we live in a fundamentally unequal world that pushes people to migrate. Whilst we fight for economic justice everywhere, we cannot, and we should not deny people the right to move to find a "better life". We may be appalled at their lack of choice — that this means working four cleaning jobs, standing on a street corner selling pirate DVDs, and selling sexual services on the internet — but all of these crap choices are essentially the same from the point of view of the migrant.

Dangerous because "stigmatising" migrants in general and sex workers in particular as these laws do (despite the charitable concern of the legislators) will lead to bad conditions, a green light for exploiters and malign individuals to beat up sex workers, or worse.

The policy itself will lead to sex workers and clients going to less accessible and more dangerous places.

- Syndicat du Travail Sexuel strass-syndicat.org;
www.lauraagustin.com;
www.xtalkproject.net

Tsipras to Europe? Italian left to... where?

By Hugh Edwards

On Friday 7 February, Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras spoke in Rome.

In the little Teatro Valle, Rome's oldest theatre, under occupation for the last two and a half years, he addressed a packed crowd in response to the invitation from a section of the Italian left to nominate him as presidential candidate in the forthcoming European elections. He has already accepted simi-

lar nominations from other sections of the left in Europe.

On the basis of an article written in support by Toni Negri, an Italian intellectual once imprisoned for "political crimes", right-wing Greek prime minister Antonis Samaras has claimed that anyone who stands for office with such support osmotically absorbs the previous "guilt" of Negri. He has called for Tsipras to be prosecuted.

But, apart from those oc-

cupying, the audience in Rome was mostly people in their 50s, for the most part veterans and longsuffering footsoldiers of one retreat after another. And for many in the audience, and certainly all their leaders, the struggles in Greece have little relevance. For them the "spontaneous" revolt of the Greeks reflects the unique conditions imposed by Europe's leaders, especially Germany (the demonisation of Germany is another

trope much in vogue), not the general need for battle against capital.

Alexis Tsipras's stirring call from the platform for the masses of Europe to unite as one against their oppressors received huge applause.

But the masses in Italy are now weak, divided and disillusioned, prey to the populist, racist blandishments of Grillo and worse, because of the squalid compromises of the left leaders.

Collins: oppose the 2019 plan!

By Colin Foster

It is, sadly, a traditional approach of trade union leaders: to accept bad proposals without a fight because they are pleased with the adroit negotiation which made the proposals not as bad as they might have been, and they think that further “boxing clever” can curtail the remaining evils.

It looks as if most union leaders will do that with the Collins proposals on Labour Party structure, which go to a two-hour Labour Party special conference at the Excel Centre in London on 1 March.

The Unite union Executive meets on 13 February to decide its attitude. Unite general secretary Len McCluskey has made his attitude clear by ensuring that the two Unite full-time officials on Labour’s Executive voted for the proposals on 4 February. The Unite lay rep on the Labour Executive, Martin Mayer, abstained but has made it clear he does not like the proposals.

Other union leaders have let reports that they back the proposals go uncontradicted.

Local Labour Party delegates, and as many unions as possible, should still vote against the proposals on 1 March, if only to lay down a marker for the battles between now and 2019 and to register a principle.

The principle is that no-one should vote for a far-reaching package like Collins’s unless they are positively convinced that it is good, and that they have had adequate space to consider, debate, and amend the package.

In fact the Labour leaders have planned 1 March as a



Len McCluskey: backing Labour’s proposals

“coronation” for the package. Moves are afoot to seek a vote in parts on the package, but that will take a struggle. Scope for amendments? None.

The evil in Collins is not so much in what it proposes immediately (though that includes bad things) as in its projection for 2019:

“After a transitional period of five years, affiliation fees shall only be accepted on behalf of levy payers who have consented to the payment of such fees. At that point, the scale of a trade union’s collective affiliation shall be governed by the number of levy payers who have consented to the payment of affiliation fees”.

That reads bland and technical, but it is not. The gist is the very opposite of the blather about building Labour as a mass working-class party.

Individual not-very-politically-active trade unionists currently have a political say through their unions’ collective representation in the Labour Party and through the right to vote on Labour leader and deputy leader.

Under the Collins plan, from 2019 all those individuals who fail or forget to tick a box on a form will be compulsorily “opted out” from their unions’ democratically-decided, collective, political action in the Labour Party, and from their individual voting rights in the Labour Party.

It is not spelled out in Collins’s text, but the aim here is to engineer smaller affiliation numbers so as to gain leverage for reducing the unions’ representation at Labour conference and in Labour committees.

Such reduction will increase the overweighting in the Labour Party of professional politicians, advisers, researchers, think-tankers, and their business-people friends.

It will firm up the characteristics of the Labour Party that shape the leaders’ current policies for continued pay freezes and cuts after 2015, and a feeble fight against the Tories.

Rumour has it that Unite will reduce its formal Labour-affiliation numbers soon, and the GMB will reduce its numbers too, though not as much as it said it would a few months

ago.

The “clever” idea here seems to be that if unions’ formal affiliation numbers have already been reduced before 2019, at a time when unions still have their 50% vote at Labour Party conference, then the reduction to box-ticking numbers in 2019 will not be steep and will give less fuel to the Labour right-wingers who want to reduce union representation.

But the 2019 plan should be contested head-on.

The Defend The Link campaign is preparing material to tease out the detail of the Collins report, and will be active at the conference on 1 March.

And after that the battle must continue. Only two rule changes are to be voted on 1 March. Properly, the proposed shift in 2019 should require a further rule change.

Some Labour Party insiders warn that the leadership may try to make the shift without a rule change, but that can and should be contested.

• defendthelink.wordpress.com.
Collins text: bit.ly/14collins



Celebrate? Protest!

By Clare Richards

The third National Libraries Day took place on Saturday 8 February.

Local libraries held celebrations which included author readings, poetry sessions, business advice classes and children’s storytelling.

As a library worker and avid borrower who got my first library card as a toddler, I love to see libraries being celebrated, but I was not in the party mood for a “celebration”.

Cuts to local government funding have hit local libraries hard. A total of 439 libraries closed in the first three years of the Coalition government. In the same period nearly 4000 full-time equivalent jobs have been lost from the sector. In 2014-15 budgets, 10% of libraries are currently under threat.

Using libraries improves children’s literacy and life chances; story and rhyme times provide vital support for new parents, improving their mental health.

Libraries provide free internet access to the 23% of the population who do not have the internet at home; libraries provide access to benefits and housing advice; libraries help people find work; libraries give homeless people a place to keep warm.

Libraries give people isolated because of mental and physical health problems a chance for interaction and advice. For some people they are the only chance in a day to have a conversation. As universal spaces, libraries bring communities together and improve community cohesion; libraries save money in reducing pressure on other services and increasing employment chances for people who use them.

We need to fight for our libraries because they give us access to reading and whether you can afford them or not everybody peo-

ple should have a right to books. Reading is exciting. You learn things you didn’t know before, you go places and feel things outside of your life experiences. Through stories children learn empathy and practise bravery, wisdom and friendship through their favourite characters.

Through fiction and non-fiction books we learn that things can be different, the world has not always been as it is now and we can change it.

National Libraries Day came out of Save Libraries Day; a day of protest against cuts and closures in services nationally.

OCCUPIED

Save Libraries Day saw read-ins and demonstrations, it was a day of action and fighting back.

We have seen people fighting for their libraries; the proposed closures in the Wirral sparked a huge and successful community campaign, Friern Barnet Library was occupied against closure and strike ballots were held in Greenwich and Lambeth against.

National Libraries Day is no longer a day to demonstrate, to stand up and fight for our libraries; it has morphed to a day to celebrate, to stand up and cheerlead for a dying service.

If we want to save our libraries, we need to be bold. We must demonstrate, occupy and strike. We must build big, militant campaigns in our union branches, anti-cuts groups and communities. We must link up anti-cuts struggles and take a political fight against cuts across the private sector.

Unison, the union which organises the most library workers has produced a number of studies on the savage cuts to library services but is not taking the lead in the fight back against them.

NEW UNIONISM 2014

**An activist conference 29 March 11am-5pm
University of London Union, Malet Street,
London WC1 7HY**



This conference will seek to learn from experiences of organising the unorganised in history and today. It will hear from working-class activists on the frontline of today’s class battles, and of struggles to reshape trade unions. It will discuss issues including the changing shape of capitalism and the working class, the struggles of young, migrant and women workers, organising in the private sector, outsourcing, fighting in bureaucratised trade unions vs “revolutionary unionism”, approaches to working-class politics and much more.

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www.workersliberty.org/newunions

Privatise the pension?

Leaked Whitehall documents have revealed that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is considering saving money by privatising the delivery of the state pension.

The government currently runs 10 pension centres in England, Wales and Scotland, including in Newcastle, Swansea and Dundee. 7,000 are employed to administer nearly £90bn of pensions, pension credits and other pensioner benefits.

But the review even considers whether the DWP’s bereavement service for those reporting deaths and terminating benefit payments would be run more efficiently if outsourced.

Both G4S and Serco, two of the main firms who do such contracted-out work, have been investigated by the Serious Fraud Office (SFO), after an audit found that they were overcharging taxpayers for tagging criminals who were in fact dead, in jail, or abroad.

The SWP's five three-quarter truths

The Left
By Martin Thomas



Five three-quarter truths, piled one on top of another to reach a conclusion, make a conclusion which is only three-quarters times three-quarters times... true. Or 24% true. Or three-quarters false.

Example: the SWP's current argument on "work, class, and resistance", as developed in a day school sponsored by the SWP's *International Socialism* Journal in London on 8 February.

The SWP enounces five three-quarter truths:

1. The working class is a whole. It is not two separate segments with a wall between. There is no separate "precariat" class.

2. Public service workers are part of the working class.

3. Only strong industrial action like strikes can win.

4. One-day strikes by public service workers' unions on issues like pay and pensions rally workers and make them more confident to take on other issues.

5. At present few workers are confident to wage big strikes unless the union officials back them. The union officials make a difference. Not all union officials are the same. Pushing left-wing union officials is important.

Conclusion (three-quarters false): the "strategy" of building "Unite the Resistance" is correct.

UTR is the latest SWP trade union enterprise, the successor to the once ballyhooed, now forgotten Right to Work and Organise for Fighting Unions. Essentially it consists of a series of conferences and meetings where SWP speakers share platforms with left union officials who are on relatively good terms with the SWP, and they join in calling for "more action" (which comes down to: more one-day strikes without planned sequel).

At the day school, SWPer Paul McGarr finessed the problem of "action" meaning one-day strikes by invoking the "all out, stay out" slogan which flickered on and off in SWP speeches in the run-up to 30 November 2011: aha, the SWP presses left union officials to call a one-day strike, and then notionally converts it into an indefinite general strike by speculating about workers staying out on following days.

SWP speakers rebuked disputants from RS21 (the latest SWP split-off) who argued that the SWP ends up over-valuing alliances with and nudging of left union officials. (*)

Paul McGarr argued that even when you are against left officials on industrial issues, you must be "with" them on others such as racism. I decode this as saying that if left union officials will support SWP initiatives such as the rally for UN anti-racism day on 22 March, then the SWP strives to keep "in" with them whatever they do on industrial issues. The SWP has a bad record of such attitudes.

The trade union strategy here may have some link with the SWP's bureaucratic botching of its response to complaints by women members of sexual abuse by its former national secretary Martin Smith, a botching which triggered the conflicts leading to the recent split-offs from the SWP (ISN in spring 2013, RS21 in December 2013). The SWP leadership was so defensive about Smith, so it is said, because they valued his supposedly exceptional ability to schmooze left union officials.

Implausibly (and oddly: I'd never heard the claim before), SWP speakers claimed the 30 November 2011 one-day strike on public sector pensions as (at least in large part) their own achievement, the product of a "convergence between the party and some left officials" possible only because of the canniness of SWP policy.

SWP speakers defended their perspective as a sort of golden mean. On the one hand, there are Counterfire and the People's Assembly, "cheerleaders for the left bureaucracy". On the other, there are the more recent SWP split-offs, which SWP speakers presented as arguing that neo-liberalism has rotted the soul of the working class (Richard Seymour), offering vague enthusiasm about the "precariat" as a magic bypass for the difficulties in the labour movement (other ISNers), or seeing breakaway unions as a cure all.

In the middle, the SWP, with the golden mean.

Again, SWP speakers Alex Callinicos and Paul McGarr presented the alternatives in assessing the condition of the working class as either "everything has changed" (allegedly the recent SWP split-offs' view) or "nothing has changed",



Tube cleaners protest. The gap between better and worse off workers has increased

or a sage SWP middle way: some things have changed, but not others.

True enough, but what has changed, and what hasn't?

Neo-liberalism means sharpened global capitalist competition, and the redefinition by capitalist states of their role as one of making their national terrains attractive sites for global capital to nest in. Consequently it means accelerated and continual restructuring of labour processes, cascading internationally.

Further, and essentially because of the weakening of union organisation caused by defeats and unions' inability or unwillingness to keep up with the pace of restructuring, it means (as one non-SWP speaker at the day school, Phil Taylor, put it) continually revised internal differentiation of the working class.

Over the neo-liberal decades since 1980, inequality between the rich and the worse-off has risen, and so also has inequality between the better-off and the worse-off sections of the working class.

When I argued this point at the day school, SWP speaker Alex Callinicos said I was wrong, and in fact the spread of techniques like performance management to university lecturers showed a "homogenisation" of the working class.

It is true that the divisions between better-off and worse-off in the working class are not static, that there is constant pressure for levelling down, and that management techniques pioneered against the worse-off are then applied to the better-off. But "homogenisation" and "differentiation" can happen simultaneously. They do happen simultaneously. University lecturers (the SWP's main "industrial base" these days, I think) may be hit by performance management, and yet the gap (in pay, security, conditions, pensions) between them and the cleaners in their universities may grow.

Unions have generally retreated to selective damage limitation for the better-off and more easily organised sections of the working class, leaving the worse-off, and many issues affecting the better-off, in the "too difficult" basket.

NO BYPASS

To think that socialists can solve the problem by bypassing the existing unions and going out to organise the "precariat" directly is fantasy.

To organise the worst-off sections of unorganised workers, you first have to have, available and ready for the task, a large body of organised workers, and that is not to be found by bypassing the existing unions. (The justly famous IWW of the pre-1914 USA owed much of its initial impetus to the Western Federation of Miners, based on large, stable workplaces).

SWP speakers cited some valid and important statistics showing that, contrary to much talk, the proportions in the British workforce of temporary and part-time workers have not increased much. Though the bosses want to make us think otherwise, in fact in most jobs they want stable, long-term workers.

As in all previous periods of working-class history, socialist and trade union organisation in the coming years will depend on bodies of activists won among the better-organised, better-placed, better-off sections of the working class.

But it must also address the issues across the whole working class; it must reach out, as far as it can, as fast as it can, to the worse-off sections of the working class.

This mandates an orientation centred not round getting joint conferences and rallies with left officials (though such things may be useful as an ancillary), but around socialist workplace bulletins which take up all the workplace issues,

not just those which the left officials have selected as suitable for one-day strikes; around a battle to democratise the trade unions and remake trade union organisation from the rank and file upwards.

At the dayschool Phil Taylor gave a barnstorming presentation on performance management. He concluded with a valuable list of ideas on how to fight it in detail. SWPers in the floor discussion that followed mostly (not all) contented themselves with bluster ("just say no") or with the thought that good one-day strikes over pay (or, as happens with the PCS and the NUT, catch-all demands for the government to negotiate about all issues) would make workers more confident when facing performance management.

Lucia Pradella said that precariousness and poverty are structural to capitalism, and affect the whole working class. Socialists should work for a collective, unifying response.

However, we need "a realistic consideration of the factors which divide the working class". In Italy, she said, the "precariat" debate is an old one. Ten years ago, or so, there were many activists who said that they were organising the precariat and did not want to work with the unions. Now "everyone is precarious", and that debate has faded.

But the fact still remains: "the unions did nothing to organise the precarious workers", nor even much to combat the pressures and tactics imposing precariousness on the bulk of the working class.

* One of the SWP's defences was that they had backed Jerry Hicks for Unite general secretary against Len McCluskey.

Though Hicks's personal sincerity and personal record are estimable, we do not think that Hicks, and the motley crew around him, represented any better programme for Unite than McCluskey. On the whole, I doubt that the SWP would have voted Hicks if McCluskey were willing to speak at SWP-sponsored events, instead of giving favour unilaterally to the People's Assembly initiated by Counterfire, another SWP split-off.

Elsewhere, for example in the NUT, the SWP is not really more distant from the left officials than Counterfire is.

New book rediscovered US socialist cartoons

A few bold strokes by an artist can convey an idea more vividly and fix it more firmly in the viewer's mind than an editorial or an article would.

The cartoons collected in a new book depict US politics, workers' struggles, America's "Jim Crow" racism, Roosevelt's "New Deal" and Harry Truman's "Fair Deal", and Stalinism in its era of greatest prestige and triumph, as revolutionary socialists saw them at the time.

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<http://www.workersliberty.org/socialistcartoons>
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Renewable energy now!

Behind the issues about flood defences and dredging, the current floods point to a bigger and global question.

Unless we plan a big shift away from fossil fuels, global warming will make events like these floods, and on a much bigger scale, more and more common.

They are likely to escalate to levels which will make human life on earth difficult or even impossible in its present mode — and which, before they do that, will create great pressures for wars, crises, and mass population movements.

Many islands and coastal regions will disappear under the sea. Water supplies and agriculture will be disrupted.

Yet the big shift in energy production now is towards increasing extraction of fossil fuels through carbon-spewing techniques like fracking.

Wind, solar, and tidal power, and “carbon capture and storage”, are getting relatively little research and development. Even less is being done to reorganise buildings, cities, transport, and work patterns so as to reduce carbon emissions.

Corporations can make more profit, quicker, by expanding fracking, by selling more gas-guzzler cars, and by promoting carbon-spewing industries.

Since 2009, when the Copenhagen summit failed, governments have retreated on “green” policies. Each government says that global capitalist competition makes it uneconomic to be more “green”.

The profit priority blocks the development of nuclear power too. Despite the real problems with nuclear power, we in Workers’ Liberty have concluded that the urgency of reducing carbon emissions makes it wrong to rule out nuclear power as a technology for “base load” power (power when the wind isn’t blowing, the sun isn’t shining, etc).

Nuclear power requires large investments and long-term planning. Those are necessary, but being blocked by capitalist preferences for techniques which bring bigger profits quicker.

A system driven by competitive struggle between capitalist owners for who can make most profit, quickest, cannot sustain a plan to save the planet.

A plan which enables humanity to live in balance with

Plan for people and environment

The recent extensive flooding, with worse still predicted, has brought into question the policies of the Environment Agency and dragged questions such as those around climate change and agricultural land management into the public eye.

Flooding has caused extensive damage and personal loss in large sections of the south of England. However, despite this being the main coverage on the news, this is not just restricted to the Somerset Levels. Unusual weather patterns have caused extensive damage to coastal areas all along the south coast, and over the past few years flooding has become an increasing problem in areas of Wales, Hebden Bridge (2012 and 2013), and along the river Severn in Herefordshire and Worcestershire to name but a few.

Ironic then that the minister whose department holds the remit for preparing the UK for the effects of climate change, such as increased flooding, is a known climate change skeptic.

Owen Paterson has come under fire in the media for his lack of action on dredging, and his lack of visits to areas affected by flooding, but very little seems to be aimed his way to criticise him for his skepticism over climate change. The government has also rightly come under attack for the cuts to funding in the environment agency, with a 12% cut to budgets for flood defences in the coming year it is difficult to see how increased flood defences could be put in place.

Conscious government policy over the past 30 years on agriculture and land use has drastically changed the British countryside and affected its ability to cope with heavy rain. The trend has been to large scale, industrial, farming where trees and shrub land are cleared for larger and larger farming fields. With large subsidies from the government for this land clearance and to large farming businesses, this process has been driven forward quickly. This reduces the ability of land to soak up excess water, causing water to run through the



We need a massive shift away from fossil fuels, not a shift towards fracking!

the globe and other species, and with proper regard for the future, can be achieved only by democratic control of economic life — only by the working class organising to take production out of the hands of the profiteers.

landscape to where it causes problems. Large subsidies have also been available for clearing hillside land for farming, which allows water to run straight off hillsides into valleys, causing increased flooding. That is not to say that a return to multiple, small scale, farms is necessarily a desirable thing. Neither is it to say that human intervention to shape the landscape around us is necessarily a bad thing. It largely depends whose interests are driving it.

Added to the change of agricultural land use, is the increasing trend for building on flood plains. Figures obtained by *The Independent on Sunday*¹ show that last year local councils allowed at least 87 planning developments involving 560 homes to proceed in England and Wales in areas with a high risk of flooding. Over the past decade many building regulations have been relaxed or simply not been stringent enough in the first place, allowing the construction industry to make more profit by building on flood plains.

Flood prevention and defence is going to be an increasing issue not only with changing weather patterns but with predicted sea level rises. This requires integrated and collective thinking. Currently many flood barriers protect economically important areas or simply areas where richer people live, to the detriment of poorer areas downstream.

It requires planned programs to plant trees and convert certain areas of land into natural flood barriers, therefore investing money to the benefit of the majority, despite and against the priorities of capitalism.

1. www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/the-more-the-experts-warn-against-the-more-we-build-on-flood-plains-9101710.html

Solidarity will skip a week on 19 February, in order to produce a booklet on the 1984-5 miners’ strike. Solidarity 314 will be out on 26 February.

Help us raise £12,000 by October

One of the roles of a revolutionary organisation is to retain the memory of past political struggles, and to study the debates and ideas from the history of our movement.

Workers’ Liberty maintains an extensive archive of articles and documents, pamphlets and polemics.

Recently, we have been OCRing and uploading to our website a series of May Day specials from *Labor Action*, the newspaper of the US Workers’ Party/ISL tendency that pioneered the development of a distinctive “Third Camp” socialism.

In order to carry on doing this important work and more, we need money!



We want to raise £12,000 by our AGM in October 2014

- You can set up a regular payment from your bank to: AWL, sort code: 08-60-01, account: 20047674, Unity Trust Bank, Nine Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2HB).
- Or send a cheque to us at the address below (cheques payable to “AWL”).
- Or donate online at workersliberty.org/payment.
- Take copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college, or campaign group, or organise a fundraising event. And get in touch to discuss joining the AWL!

More information: 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

This week we have raised just £50 in donations (Thanks to Matt and Christine).

Grand total: £1490.



Metronet failed in so many ways

The PPP fiasco

In 2003, the Labour government imposed its “Public-Private Partnership” policy on London Underground, in the face of huge public opposition, trade union resistance, and mountains of rational criticism of the policy.

After four years of derailments, cock-ups, late starts to the train service as engineering works overran, the PPP began to fall apart, as Metronet — one of the private infrastructure companies (Infracos) — went into administration. The other, Tube Lines, would follow it back into public ownership three years later, spelling the end of the PPP.

This extract from Janine Booth’s book, *Plundering London Underground: new Labour, private finance and public service 1997-2010*, gives shocking figures as to the cost of this disastrous policy to the public.

At first, no-one seemed able to figure the cost of Metronet’s collapse. None of the many witnesses to the Transport Select Committee would name the price, and London Underground Ltd’s Tim O’Toole warned that, ‘I cannot sit here looking at a catastrophe of this dimension and say, “Don’t worry, it is not going to cost anyone anything.”’

Six months after Metronet went into administration, Transport Secretary Ruth Kelly was still “uncertain” as to the cost of failure and how much of the tab would be picked up by tax-payers and fare-payers.¹

Eventually figures came out. The direct loss to the public purse of Metronet’s failure was between £170 million and £410 million.² But there was much more. Transport for London was liable for 95% of Metronet’s debts, so the government gave £1.7 billion to the Infracos’ lenders as part of TfL’s funding settlement in 2008.³

Metronet’s collapse meant that LUL’s legal bill for 2008 was £20.3 million, many times greater than a more typical year, for example £4.3 million for 2005.⁴ The cost to LUL and TfL of running Metronet’s business during administration was £13 million per week, with TfL advancing £900 million to Ernst and Young LLP. As well as money lost, there was money wasted: TfL paid £1.2 billion for station renovations that Metronet had not carried out. The National Audit Office reckoned that the cost of the debt repayment and loss to tax-payers amounted to up to 10% of the work actually delivered.⁵

Who should foot the bill? London TravelWatch — the independent, statutory watchdog for passengers — argued that Metronet’s shareholder companies should pay for the losses and the government should fund the extra Arbitrator costs. GLA Transport Committee Chair Roger Evans argued that, “because this was imposed on London then the Government that imposed it should be the people who pick the bill up”. Mayor Ken Livingstone agreed, and briefed his publicity machine accordingly, telling staff that “no-one was to say ‘we told you so’. Journalists pressed me to denounce [Gordon] Brown but I just droned on about ‘working together to solve the problem’.”⁶

Metronet’s shareholder companies lost only their stake of £70 million each, a sum that MPs called “relatively mod-

est”. The companies seemed comfortable: Balfour Beatty plc’s pre-tax profits were up £76 million in the six months to 30 June 2007; EDF Energy made £402 million in the year before Metronet’s failure; Thames Water plc made £256 million⁷; and Atkins plc recorded an “exceptional accounting gain” of £17.2 million directly from the discontinuation of its Metronet activities.⁸

Ruth Kelly seemed convinced, however, that “Metronet’s failure has cost its shareholders significant sums”. She argued that it had “damaged the reputation of those companies involved”, and pledged that the “terrible failure” would be taken into consideration should the shareholders bid for government jobs⁹. Any reputational setback seems to have been minimal though, as Metronet’s former owners between them now hold many government contracts, with Atkins plc, Bombardier Ltd, EDF and Balfour Beatty plc holding several lucrative deals with TfL and London Underground Ltd.¹⁰

Dubious Metronet practices now came to light. Metronet manager Ed Maloney — seconded from Balfour Beatty plc — used his position as project director to give work at Oxford Circus station to contractors who many thought were poorly-suited to the work — he had a financial interest with them. When he was convicted of fraud in 2011, his sentence — for cheating and potentially endangering the public — was community service and a suspended jail term.¹¹

Other Metronet managers exploited the public purse without being accused of breaking the law. The Bond Street modernisation project team held routine managers’ meetings during working hours on a hired Thames pleasure boat, with a free bar paid for by the PPP contract. Metronet and its contractors held “golf days” for senior managers, where the player who got his or her ball closest to each hole got a prize such as a DVD player. Hundreds of managers were taken to Premiership football matches, including hospitality suites and private boxes for some. Tim O’Toole had even sent an email asking, “How do we prevent the contractors plundering our stations, by the way?”

He was concerned that Metronet and its contractors were taking heritage features such as roundels, signs and furniture.¹²

Notes

1. BBC News website, 31 January 2008.
2. Comptroller and Auditor General, *The failure of Metronet*, HC512, National Audit Office, 2009.
3. BBC News website, 6 February 2008.
4. *Evening Standard*, 22 November 2010.
5. Comptroller and Auditor General, (2009).
6. Ken Livingstone, (2011), pp.578-9.
7. *RMT News*, October 2007.
8. WS Atkins, Annual Report, 2008.
9. *New Civil Engineer*, 20 November 2007.
10. TfL list of contracts, 28 June 2012; LUL awarded the contract for the SSL signalling upgrade to Bombardier Ltd.
11. Mail Online, 13 March 2008; *Evening Standard*, 22 November 2011.
12. *Evening Standard*, 18 March 2008.

Tube strike

By Ira Berkovic

Tube unions RMT and TSSA suspended a strike planned for 11-13 February, after London Underground bosses agreed some concessions in talks.

The *Daily Mail* reported the suspension of the action as London Underground “caving in to militants” and retreating from their plan to close all ticket offices. That the right-wing, anti-union press sees the deal as a win for the unions is certainly a positive sign!

London Underground management have committed to put the implementation of their cuts plan on hold, and to a station-by-station review of ticket office closures, with the explicit proviso that this may result in some of them remaining open.

A two-month discussion period, ending on 4 April, has been announced, and the terms of the deal specify that the proposals could be subject to change during that time.

That is significant: before the strike, Tube bosses and Boris Johnson were talking about the “Fit for the Future” cuts plans as a fait accompli that couldn’t possibly, under any circumstances, be changed — and, unfortunately but understandably, many London Underground workers believed that too. Johnson and LU bosses have been forced to back down from that intransigence by the rock-solid strike on 4-6 February, and the confidence of the workforce has received a big boost.

The Mayor repeatedly called the strike “pointless”; and the company’s mantra was “striking achieves nothing”. That has been dramatically disproved.

Bosses have also committed to withdrawing the HR1 and Section 188 notices, which carried the threat of redundancies. Those concessions are real and positive. However, there are no definite, specific commitments to back down on the proposals — so what the unions do next is crucial.

TSSA was more eager to settle than the RMT, and some activists in the RMT felt that members would not have been prepared to take further, sustained action once a deal representing any kind of progress had been offered. Keeping the strikes on with this deal on the table would certainly have been a risk.

However, suspending the action is risky too. The danger now is that over the two-month period, the pressure comes off management, the issue falls out of the headlines, management have time to recover the ground they lost through the 4-6 February strike. Unions may stop communicating with their members, and officers and activists may retreat into “business as usual” mode.

To make the most of the concessions forced from manage-

Tubeworker

Workers’ Liberty members who work on London Underground produce the rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker*, along with other militant Tube workers.

Tubeworker’s latest issue calls for a broader and more democratic strike committee to take control of the direction of the dispute from below, strike pay to fund sustained action, and appeals to members of the drivers-only union, ASLEF (some members of which have respected picket lines, but which as a union has not joined the dispute) to stand up and be counted.

Tubeworker’s blog features daily updates, as well as news, views, and pictures from the strike.

As it’s sometimes risky for London Underground workers to be seen distributing the bulletin, *Tubeworker* relies on help from non-Tube workers to distribute it at stations, depots, and other London Underground workplaces. Can you help?

Email tubeworker@workersliberty.org.

More: workersliberty.org/twblog,

@Tube Worker on Twitter,

“Tubeworker Bulletin” on Facebook

... stalls cuts plans

ment, unions must take some immediate concrete steps. They should declare, now, a strike in early April of three (or more) days. Talks only bring progress when the threat of strikes looms, and announcing April strikes would signal to both members and management that if the talks do not yield meaningful progress, action will continue. It will give activists a focus and keep them in mobilisation mode. If the talks do yield further concessions, that action can be reviewed.

In the talks, the unions must declare some bottom lines, such as no reduction in staffing levels, no introduction of a two-tier workforce through re-grading, and keeping a trained supervisor on every station (rather than management's plans for "mobile station supervision").

The talks themselves must be open, not conducted behind closed doors by union officials. That must mean daily reports to members and members having access to all documentation.

Unions, and campaigns like Hands off London Transport,

Solid, effective and popular

London Underground workers' 4-6 February strike to stop job losses and ticket office closures was solid, highly effective, and popular amongst working-class Londoners.

London Underground bosses' promises to run a guaranteed service on certain lines were left in tatters, as the strike proved far stronger than management, and perhaps some in the RMT and TSSA unions, were expecting.

Management strikebreaking threatened safety throughout the strike. With the strike less than an hour old, a strikebreaking manager routed two trains to near collision at the Northumberland Park depot. Elsewhere, Stratford station had to be evacuated as the skeleton crew of a handful of scabbing station staff, partially-trained casual workers, and managers dragged out from behind their desks to work frontline jobs for the first time in years simply could not deal with the crowds.

Strikers reported bigger, livelier, and better-supported picket lines than have been seen for years, with workers from well beyond the ranks of the "usual suspects" supporting the strikes and turning up to picket.

Despite the anti-strike narrative of the right-wing media, public support for the strike was strong. Passengers understood that the strike was about the future of the Tube, not just workers' economic conditions. The University of London Union, University College London Union, and the Students Union of the University of Arts London all organised solidarity actions, and disabled activists held a central London protest in support of the strike.

Tube unions RMT and TSSA followed up the strike with a "revenue action", where workers refused to carry out "rev-

enue duties" (selling and checking tickets) and, where safe, opened the gates to allow passengers to travel free for certain times during the day.

In response to the strike, the Tories have renewed their push for new anti-union laws. They say they will consider putting commitments to further clampdowns on unions' rights in their manifesto for the 2015 general election. Options under consideration include imposing a "minimum service" agreement on London Underground, as well as changing balloting law to require strike ballots to return an absolute majority, rather than simply a majority of those voting, to be considered legal mandates for strikes. The right-wing clamour for new state repression of unions' already straitjacketed rights to take action is testimony to the immense power that well-organised workers still have. It also received little support from the London public, a majority of whom told pollsters that they supported the right to strike as well as the strike itself.

Every workplace must be visited and every member of staff talked to, systematically, and union branches to carry on meeting as often as they have been over the last six weeks. Branches should build hardship funds to sustain serious action in April, and the national unions should make their dispute funds available.

The RMT should also bring other TfL companies into dispute, particularly Tube Lines, where management have revealed their intention to pay for equal pensions and passes with job cuts.

The suspension of the action is not a sell out, but whether it has bought unions time to push for greater concessions from management depends very much on what unions do now.

The stakes remain high, and victory remains possible.



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The Tube strike has rocked the Tories. Already concessions have been won. Further action can force LU bosses and their Tory backers into an embarrassing climb-down, which will show workers right across Britain that, even in this climate of austerity, workers can assert ourselves and win.

Defend Mark Harding!

Mark Harding, secretary of the Hammersmith & City branch of the RMT, is being victimised for his union activities.

He was outrageously arrested on a picket line by Hammersmith police after a strikebreaking staff member got upset at being asked not to cross a picket line.

Mark's bail conditions prevent him from "being involved in RMT or any other union associated with LUL/TfL or to be in attendance at any organised industrial action". The arrest and the bail conditions are part of an ongoing attack on basic democratic rights.

Defend Mark Harding, drop the charges!

- facebook.com/defendmarkharding

Picket Lines

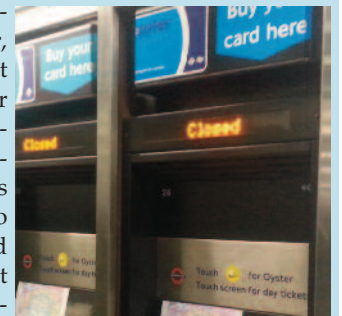
King's Cross

At King's Cross on 5 February, Workers' Liberty members visited the picket lines to show solidarity with striking RMT and TSSA members. We distributed Tubeworker, which was well-received by the workers, and gave away a couple of papers.

The workers were confident about the action so far, and were clear that the first 48 hours had to be solid for the strike to maintain momentum. They were receptive to *Tubeworker's* proposals for branches to establish strike funds, and interested to hear about how strike funds were operated by the 3 Cosas Campaign during the recent strikes at the University of London.

One worker told *Solidarity*: "I've only seen one member of staff go into King's Cross, so it's a good turnout and we're happy with that. All our members have stood strong and united, and hopefully if our train drivers do the same we should get our message across today."

Micheál MacEoin



Brixton and Elephant & Castle

I visited Brixton and Elephant & Castle picket lines. They were both pretty big and lively.

Brixton had six people from my union branch there, as well as TSSA and RMT strikers. Management had pulled out all the stops to get the station open earlier, but they had obviously been a bit taken aback by how strong the strike was. Strikers were angry that management eventually got the station open, and obviously at the ASLEF scabs.

Elephant and Castle was a jolly picket, as ever. They'd turned back a few people back, and were upbeat about the strength of the strike, particularly in signalling. I spoke to union activists about doing some community direct action around the next strikes.

Lucy Monette

A striker at north west London picket spoke to *Solidarity*:

"The first day of the strike was incredibly solid on our line. Essentially it didn't run at all, despite management's promise of a skeleton service. On the second day, a few more drivers and service control staff came in which meant management could run some level of service, but only seven stations were open.

"There's been some flak from passers-by, but on the whole the public are supportive. People know that this is a strike for the future of the service.

"Reports from all over are that the picket lines for this strike have mobilised people well beyond the 'usual suspects'. Those new people and their energy need to find expression in the direction of the dispute. The strike committee needs to be broadened out to be more democratic and representative, so it can actually get in the driving seat for this dispute and take control of where it's heading.

"There is some nervousness about the possibility of sustained action. Some people are saying 'well, there's the next two days coming up... then what? How many more days' pay will I need to lose before we win something?' Obviously you want to fight that kind of thinking, but in this economic climate it's not hard to understand why people think that way.

"There's always been a bit of coolness in the RMT towards the idea of strike pay, but if we're going to enable people, particularly part-time and lower-paid workers, to take the kind of sustained action that might be needed to win this fight, it's something that's going to be absolutely essential."

End sweatshops! Support Bangladeshi workers!

Vicki Morris reviews 'Exposure: Fashion Factories Uncovered' (ITV, 6 February 2014)

When Rana Plaza, a multistorey building housing garment factories, collapsed in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka in April 2013 the focus of the world media was on the conditions of Bangladeshi workers. It seemed that a turning point might be reached in their fight for rights. But a new investigation by ITV journalists, featuring the campaigning NGO Labour Behind the Label, has shown that little has changed for the better.

In this programme two young women workers wearing hidden cameras went to work in two fairly typical garment factories, making clothes for Western companies. The women filmed very young women and girls — some as young as 13 — working longer than the legal working day, with no days off, in hot conditions, being slapped, kicked and insulted by supervisors when they could not keep up with the workload.

In Bangladesh, under-18s should work no more than five hours a day, and 14 is the minimum age for legal work, but in the film all of the workers are forced to work for 11 hours. The worker's basic pay is just £30 a month.

The investigation also found fire doors padlocked shut: hundreds of Bangladeshi workers have burned to death in factory fires. A fire at the Tazreen Fashion factory in November 2012 killed at least 117 people. After Tazreen, health and safety regulations were tightened up, but the film showed that in this area too, so far, little has changed for the better.

There is some hope for improvement in the future: in the



Rana Plaza victims and relatives have still not been compensated

aftermath of Rana Plaza a number of brands signed up to a legally binding agreement called the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, which gives a role to workers' representatives and will set out a programme of inspecting and improving safety standards in more than 1,000 Bangladeshi factories.

Walmart and a number of other US brands have not joined it, however, and have put forward a weaker alternative scheme that does not include workers' representatives.

The programme showed the factory managers coaching workers in what to say in anticipation of a visit by a potential Western buyer. Workers were told to say that they worked no more than the legal maximum number of hours, and that they had received the required health and safety training. They also have to lie about their age and to say that they are old enough to work long hours in the factory — when it is clear that they are not. But scrutiny of the industry is so rare that such coaching is scarcely ever necessary.

This film graphically illustrates that all of the codes of conduct in the world — and most clothes brands now have them — are worth nothing unless the workers on the ground are in a position to fight for their own welfare — unless they are organised!

RANA PLAZA

The Rana Plaza collapse killed 1,130 people and injured thousands, most of them workers who had been forced back into the block to work on the upper floors despite the fact that there were severe worries about the building's structural condition, and after shops and a bank on the ground floor had already closed.

Some of those companies whose labels were found in the dust — the 29 brands identified included Benetton, Bonmarché, Mango, Matalan, Primark and Walmart — were momentarily embarrassed by the unwelcome focus on the conditions under which many of our clothes and their profits are made. Although not all.

To date, the majority of those brands are still refusing to pay compensation to workers injured or to the families of those killed at Rana Plaza. Even those companies that will pay out — companies that have made billions of pounds from the sweated labour of the Bangladeshi garment workers — and the Bangladeshi government itself make people jump through hoops to get compensation: they must prove that their dead relatives worked at Rana Plaza and have even been required to provide DNA evidence that a certain body is that of their loved one.

This is both grotesque and totally impossible in the case of the around 300 bodies buried without identification.

The Government offers proven victims the equivalent of £13,000 compensation; the brands collectively are offering in addition at most a few hundred pounds per victim.

Companies such as Walmart still contest whether the clothes found at Rana Plaza with their labels on were actually being manufactured there at the time of the disaster. This evasive behaviour is typical of the big brands.

In the ITV programme, some of the jeans being made at the

factory had Lee Cooper labels on them. When the programme makers presented Lee Cooper with the evidence, they claimed:

"We employ a strict set of rules to ensure our licensees source responsibly and can confirm that this production is either counterfeit or unauthorised.

"We will take all steps to eliminate the unlawful production of Lee Cooper branded products."

Perhaps the jeans were pirates — but big brands are often quick to try and wash their hands of responsibility for conditions in their supply chain. A lot of sub-contracting of work does go on, but the brands know this happens and they are complicit in it: they are completely implicated in the crimes of the industry, from top to bottom.

And, again, so what if the jeans were pirates? It is unlikely that the factories making genuine Lee Cooper jeans will be much better than those exposed in the film.

The whole industry, worth £13 billion annually, and accounting for 80% of the exports of Bangladesh, is unsafe, unhealthy and grossly exploitative. It will remain that way until the workers in the industry themselves have more power.

SOLIDARITY, NOT BOYCOTTS

Perhaps Lee Cooper is a little more ethical than the pirate manufacturers (it's doubtful) but if we want to see the end of sweatshops we will not change much by swapping or boycotting certain brands.

Our concern should not be for brand reputation! It is for the workers in the industry, whoever they are producing for. All the companies, whether premium or shoddy, will get away with whatever they can get away with. The industry as a whole turns a blind eye to sub-contractors who will themselves sub-contract to less regulated factories when a big order comes in.

How we can help is by supporting the workers in the industry to organise to fight for better wages and working conditions. It will not be easy: unions such as the National Garment Workers Federation do important work, but, according to IndustriALL, a global union federation for textile and garment workers, less than one percent of garment workers in Bangladesh are represented by a union.

But workers can make gains. At the end of 2013 Bangladeshi workers won a 77% increase in the minimum wage (one of the lowest in the world) which will rise to 5,300 takas (£43) per month, after a 10-day wave of protests demanding an even higher increase (8,114 takas, a 170% increase).

It is this type of workers' action that we must support if we want to help end sweatshops. Ultimately, workers should control the industry, take it out of the hands of the exploiting minority that own and run it at the moment. In the future, the factory and brand owners will have to do without their fat profits earned from the blood, sweat and tears of men, women — and children — slaving in deathtrap factories.

End sweatshops — support Bangladeshi workers!

Cheap clothes and higher wages

Many people think that Bangladeshi workers toil in terrible conditions because Western shoppers want cheap clothes. The arithmetic is false.

Research by the TUC published in May 2013, after Rana Plaza, showed that doubling the wages paid to Bangladeshi workers would result in the price of a t-shirt going up by just 2p. Commenting, the TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady said:

"It isn't UK consumers — trying to make their wages stretch further as their living standards are hit — who are to blame for life and labour being cheap in Bangladesh.

"Wages paid out to the thousands of women who work in the clothing factories are just a tiny fraction of the end price we pay at the till.

"It's the multinational companies — the brands, retailers and manufacturers who are all well-known names on our high streets — who bear the responsibility. They are the ones who must change their behaviour and encourage their overseas suppliers to pay higher wages and improve working conditions, not UK consumers."

Labour councils and bedroom tax

By Tom Harris

On 10 February, Channel 4 screened a 'Dispatches' documentary on "bedroom tax".

Many Labour councillors appeared on the programme denouncing the Government's measures. Some of them even detailed how they were doing the bare minimum required of them by law to implement them. Our main priority is to protect our tenants, they said.

The Labour Party has pledged to scrap the tax on coming to power.

The pledge has encouraged councils not to evict tenants in arrears because of the bedroom tax. Quite a few councils have said they will try to avoid evicting. Though the pledges have loopholes, in fact there have been few evictions directly linked to the bedroom tax.

If Labour councils are serious about opposing the bedroom tax they should disrupt it more aggressively by re-classifying and opening declaring that they will not evict.

The "tax" cuts housing benefit for a tenant who has a "spare bedroom" by 14% (or 25% for two "spare" rooms).

The documentary was rather pained in its attempts to appear even-handed. Whenever we learnt of some injustice inflicted by the bedroom tax, we were solemnly reminded that, nevertheless, public spending on benefits had to be brought down somehow another.

But the programme effectively demonstrated the cruelty, as well as the futility, of the bedroom tax.

Cruelty in the way that a disabled couple had to leave the house that had been specially adjusted to meet their mobility needs, because they needed a second spare room to keep their wheel-chairs in.

Cruelty in the way that families from different areas were forced to scramble around trying to swap houses with one another so as to avoid a cut in their benefit.

But also the futility of a situation where, at a time of acute housing shortage, houses now stand empty because their occupants have been forced out by the changes.

And in a grim irony, the documentary pointed out that the bedroom tax barely even saves money — the money saved in reduced benefit is wiped out by the money spent by councils trying to re-home people forced to up sticks.

China: new realities and old dogmas

Harry Glass revives *China's Rise – Strength and Fragility* (2012) by Au Loong Yu, published by Socialist Resistance.

This book contains many good things – an assessment of the nature of capitalism that has developed in China over the last two decades; analysis of the burgeoning Chinese working class; and avid descriptions of recent workers' struggles. However these fine efforts are spoiled by its treatment of the Maoist period, which is falsely characterised as some kind of workers' state.

Au Loong Yu's political economy of the current Chinese social formation is broadly correct. He defines China as "bureaucratic capitalism", a term first used ironically by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the 1940s to depict the kind of capitalism that the nationalist Guomindang had created.

Au Loong Yu argues that bureaucratic capitalism is most appropriate for China because "it captures the most important feature of China's capitalism: the central role of the bureaucracy". Chinese bureaucrats are "simultaneously entitled to a salary (plus benefits) and a share of the surplus value... Bureaucratic capitalists monopolise the most profitable sectors of the national economy and become the core group of the new bourgeoisie". However he also accepts bureaucratic capitalism is "still a type of state capitalism".

China's rulers and their state began to turn towards capitalism in 1978. Au Loong Yu argues that the class character of the state began to change in 1988, when the CCP amended the constitution, legalising private enterprises and the sale of land-use rights. Capitalism was decisively restored from 1992 onward. In 1992 by Deng Xiaoping marked the "great leap forward to capitalism" in the social and economic arena.

China started waves of privatisation in 1996 when the CCP announced the "seize the big and let go of the small" policy, under which it would simply sell off the small state-owned enterprises (SOEs). In fact many medium-sized enterprises were also privatised. The waves of privatisation resulted in a great shrinkage of the state sector, from 80% in 1979 to one third of industrial output. By 2001, 86% of state industrial enterprises had been restructured, and 70% had either been partially or fully privatised.

BEST

One of best elements of the book is its emphasis on the weaknesses and limits of China's economic development, which is often forgotten by many on the left eager to welcome a rival to US hegemony.

Bruno Jetin refers to IMF data using current exchange rates, which estimates that China's GDP in five years' time will still be 35% below the US, although twice the size of the Japanese economy and three times the size of the German economy. US GDP per capita in purchasing power terms (PPP) in 2011 was almost 6 to 1 compared with China, although the difference could narrow to 4 to 1 over the next decade.

Although China is the recipient of huge amounts of foreign direct investment (FDI), its own outflowing FDI is much smaller – while expanding fast. It is currently behind a dozen developed countries but is top amongst developing countries. The export drive has enabled China to accumulate a huge amount of foreign reserves. It is estimated that two thirds of the reserves are US bonds and securities. China has now become a major player in the global financial market.

Au Loong Yu points out that although some Chinese transnational corporations (TNCs) are now big enough to be listed in the Fortune 500, they are "chiefly monopolistic companies or primary productive companies like the power industry, oil, banks, telecommunication and foreign trade". Their present position "owes more to strong government support than effective management or innovations". Most of them are government owned.

The book emphasises the interdependence between China and the USA. Today, the USA accounts for almost two-fifths of China's exports, while the Chinese state holds most of its foreign exchange reserves in dollars. Au Loong Yu argues that "China and the USA have common interests in maintaining the global production chain, but Chinese bureaucratic capital is determined to fight for a greater share, while US monopoly capital is trying to keep its portion". China's economic interests "are now so fully integrated with the USA and the EU that war is excluded in the medium term".



Workers at Foxconn (which makes iPhones) in China walk out

Another merit of the book is its outline of the growth and recomposition of the Chinese working class over the past quarter century.

Au Loong Yu points out that today, "the working class comprises more than two-fifths of the Chinese working population. Industrial workers account for one quarter of the world's total. Service workers account for one fifth". Under rapid industrialisation, wage-earning workers have risen quickly at the expense of farmers "to the extent that it will soon constitute half or even more than half of the population". The working class is a growing class while the peasants are a declining class.

This growth masks incredible restructuring. Over the last two decades, the state sector has nearly halved its workforce, from 100 million to 61 million workers, meaning that "the majority of the present day working class is composed of rural migrant workers who have no collective memory as a class prior to coming to the cities".

Meanwhile, since the mid-1990s, a new working class composed of 250 million rural migrants was formed. While the number of SOE workers in China fell substantially, the overall body of wage labourers ballooned to nearly 400 million. China's working class population "has never been this enormous. If this reversion to capitalism has anything positive about it, this is it".

Au Loong Yu argues that the working class is increasingly the main class in democratic struggles in the future because it has a stake in winning democracy and the potential to win it. Either the working class "eventually achieves democracy by taking the lead in the struggles, or it will continue to suffer in a barbaric capitalism indefinitely".

The book has a good summary of the last 25 years of workers' struggles in China. It contains a lengthy discussion of the working class involvement in the mobilisations of 1989, which ended with the Tiananmen Square massacre. The account of the Beijing Autonomous Workers' Federation is based heavily on the Hong Kong Trade Union Education Centre book, *A Moment of Truth: Workers' Participation in China's 1989 Democracy Movement and the Emergence of Independent Unions* (1990). It explains how workers' demands and independent forms of organisation grew during this opening triggered by students, only to be smashed by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

A chapter by Bai Ruixue quotes official figures that be-

tween 1993 and 2003, the number of "collective incidents" grew from around 10,000 to 60,000, with the number of participants involved growing from 730,000 to over 3 million. In 2005, when the Public Security Ministry stopped publishing figures, the number of collective incidents had grown to 87,000. With the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, the number of labour disputes has grown even further as factories closed and large numbers of workers were laid off.

The book also describes recent workers' struggles, such as the Zhengzhou Paper Mill workers' struggle in 2000, the Liaoyang metal workers dispute in 2000-02, the Daqing Oil workers' struggle in 2002 and the Chongqing 3403 factory dispute in 2004.

In 2004, there were more than 30 strikes reported in the Pearl River Delta alone that involved more than one thousand workers (there are no official statistics on the number of strikes).

In 2006, workers established the Ole Wolff Yantai Trade Union, the first local enterprise union in China to actively seek international solidarity and receive assistance from unions overseas.

The Tonghua steel workers anti-privatisation struggle of July 2009 led to the death of a factory boss and victory for the workers, when plans to privatise the steel mill were dropped. Around the same time, workers at the Linzhou Steel Company also won their fight against privatisation.

FORCE

These struggles "show that SOE and collective enterprises workers can still be a formidable force".

In May 2010, probably the most high profile strike in China's recent history began when Honda workers in Guangdong took action, calling for higher wages and, perhaps even more significantly, the reorganisation of their workplace trade union. This triggered a wave of strike action by workers in foreign-owned car plants that summer. More than 50% of those who took part in the first strike were high school students. Au Loong Yu and Bai Ruixue argue that the strike represents "the actions of a new generation of Chinese workers, who have no memory of their own of the defeat of the 1989 democracy movement – in fact most of them probably do not know of the event at all because of censorship – and who are prepared to fight to improve conditions at their own workplace".

The book is rightly highly critical of the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), China's union body – in reality a labour front tied to the state. Bai Ruixue describes how, following the 1949 revolution, the ACFTU was re-established and became China's sole trade union organisation (it was temporarily dissolved during the Cultural Revolution).

By the end of 2009, total ACFTU membership had reached 226 million, which included 80 million rural migrant workers. The ACFTU's "strong ties to the Chinese Communist Party and the pursuit of its agenda is a key factor in explaining why the ACFTU has not and will not act in the interests of workers". Indeed, "the ACFTU has been an organ of the Communist Party ever since its establishment". Under Chinese employment law, workers have no freedom of association and cannot simply join a trade union of their choice. To be a legally recognised union, all trade unions must be affiliated to the ACFTU; all independent trade unions and other such organisation by workers is prohibited.

The book navigates the debate about international union relations with the ACFTU. The ITUC has an approach of "engaging in critical dialogue" with the ACFTU, with some unions developing links, while others have virtually "no contacts".

In some recent struggles, workers have used local elements of the ACFTU or works councils (Staff and Workers Representative Councils) to advance their initial organisation. Au Loong Yu is critical of Han Dongfang and the China Labour Bulletin, who he says now call for the "depoliticisation" of the labour movement (and for work within the ACFTU), instead of their previous position of fighting for an independent trade union movement. This is an important strategic and tactical debate.

Continued on page 10

England's Catholic left

Matthew Thompson reviews *Catholic Progressives in England after Vatican II* by Jay P Corrin (2013).

This examination of the Catholic left in England in the 1960s begins by outlining the history of the Church in the nineteenth and twentieth century when Catholics in Britain belonged to one of two culturally divergent groups: a massive majority of working-class Irish immigrants and their descendants and a much smaller minority of aristocratic recusant families who had held on to their faith following the English Reformation of the 1500s.

Not only were there very few middle-class Catholics — in contrast to the Church in the rest of Europe and to the Anglican and Nonconformist churches here — but also that the English Church produced very few intellectuals committed to exploring new economic, social, political and theological ideas. That was because working-class Irish Catholics were denied access to education beyond elementary level and the aristocratic English Catholics had no interest in doing so. This changed as a result of two factors.

The first was the conversion to Catholicism in the mid-nineteenth century of two of the Church of England's leading thinkers, John Henry Newman and Henry Manning, both of whom became Cardinals. Manning, unusually for an English Catholic prelate, became involved in the 1889 London dockers' strike.

In the 1920s and 1930s, another convert, GK Chesterton, championed Distributism, which saw itself as an alternative to both capitalism and socialism and advocated returning to a pre-industrial society of small farmers and craft workers organised into guilds. (After Chesterton's death in 1936, many of his followers gravitated towards fascism, notably his cousin AK Chesterton who edited the BUF publications *Action* and *Blackshirt* and in the late 60s helped to found the National Front).

The other factor was the 1944 Education Act which enabled young working-class Catholics to win scholarships to grammar school and from there go on to university. These young men and women formed the Catholic left of the 1960s.

Corrin outlines the influences that shaped them: CND, the Catholic pacifist organisation PAX, the intellectuals who had quit the Communist Party after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and set up *New Left Review*. Also, crucially, the Second Vatican Council held between 1962 and 1965 in which the Catholic Church "opened its windows" to the modern world by reshaping its liturgy — most noticeably by allowing Mass to be celebrated in languages other than Latin — and by initiating a dialogue with other Christians, as well as with other faiths, especially in improving Catholic-Jewish relations.

Corrin looks at this Catholic left in England largely through the focus of the journal *Slant* which was published between 1964 and 1970 and whose best known editorial board member, the literary theorist Terry Eagleton, had been influenced as an undergraduate at Cambridge University by the radical Dominican priests Laurence Bright and Herbert McCabe.

Slant was notable for its freewheeling dialogue with other leftists, including Tony Cliff's *International Socialism*, the CPGB's *Marxism Today*, and libertarian Marxists and anarchists around the Solidarity group.

Corrin is particularly perceptive in locating the demise of the Catholic left. It was not just in the failure to grow beyond more than a few hundred members and break out of its middle-class, academic milieu, or begin to win influence in working-class communities; it was also as a result of the conservative backlash in both the Church and society and the neo-liberal attack on the post-war consensus around welfare provision, full employment and industrial relations.

China

From page 9

It is very unfortunate that this book is marred throughout by a gargantuan political error that undermines the efforts to get to grips with current realities.

The mistake concerns the nature of the 1949 revolution, which brought Mao Zedong and the CCP to power, and the nature of the regime they established.

The authors suggest that China had some sort of socialist revolution in 1949 and that China was some sort of post-capitalist workers' state from 1949 throughout the Maoist period until the 1990s.

The so-called Fourth International, reconstituted after World War Two on the basis of very different politics from the time of Trotsky, initially defined the Mao's regime as a "workers' and peasants' government", before deciding in 1951 that it was a "deformed proletarian dictatorship" or "deformed workers' state". This is the depiction by Pierre Rousset in *The Chinese Revolution: Part II: The Maoist Project Tested in the Struggle for Power* (1987).

It clear from this book that key contributors retain this assessment. Rousset's chapter attempts to iron out the contradictions, but his weasel words are unconvincing. Rousset refers to the idea of a socialist revolution in China in 1949 as "iconoclastic", claiming that it confirms Trotsky's theory of analysis of combined and uneven development, and the theory of permanent revolution. In the absence of working class agency, the events of 1949 do nothing of the sort. Sadly his musings are repeated by Au Loong Yu, who claims that China "lived through socialist revolution" and that the bureaucracy "originates from a workers' and farmers' revolution".

Rousset asks: which party conquered power in 1949? However his answer is miserably evasive. He states: "No abstract definition can replace a concrete and dynamic historical analysis. Let's just say that in 1949, the CCP was at the same time the party of a great victorious social and national revolution, hence the depth of its links with the population, and also the new state-party within which the ruling elites will become autonomous and constitute itself as a bureaucracy. It will become, through sharp crises, the party of the bureaucratic counter-revolution before becoming the party which will steer the (re)formation of a Chinese capitalism."

Rousset states that "the Chinese Revolution and the Maoist leadership have contributed a great deal to the development of Marxist strategic thinking". In particular he highlights Mao's conception of the "protracted people's war". Apparently, "the failure of the Great Leap Forward should not make us forget that the Maoist leadership was attempting to respond to real problems". Although "senile Maoism offers us only 'negative lessons', "this tragic ending should not overshadow the richness of the Chinese revolutionary experience".

STALINISTS

This is toxic politics. The Maoist CCP was not a workers' party in 1949. It was a party-state composed of peasants and led by Stalinists, who surrounded the cities and pulverised the Chinese workers and peasants into submission from the beginning.

The bureaucracy acted and functioned as a ruling class from the start, savagely exploiting workers and peasants — with perhaps 45 million dying during the so-called Great Leap Forward. The CCP atomised the Chinese working class, bonded it to the state while it extracted huge amounts of surplus labour, sometimes in semi-slave labour camps, barracks-like state factories and forced-march communes.

The authors fall back on the argument that Trotsky predicted that the Stalinist bureaucracy (in the USSR) would either have to restore capitalism or be swept away by workers' revolution. But Trotsky expected the USSR, which he defined as a degenerated workers' state (because it had at least had a workers' revolution in 1917), to collapse during the Second World War. In the last months of his life he recognised that the Stalinist USSR had spread its relations of production through Red Army bayonets into Eastern Poland. However his judgments were conjunctural and fluid. He did not make the argument that workers' states could be created *without the active intervention of the working class*. Yet this is the absurdity the book expects readers to swallow.

Au Loong Yu warns of the dangers of "nostalgia for Mao's crude communism" among the today's New Left (as the only ideological alternative to neoliberal discourse). He also warns

against the Deutscherite position, namely that the Chinese bureaucracy retains some semblance of "socialism" at its core, or that it has the capacity for progressive self-reform. This will generate "illusions" within the Chinese working class. He rightly criticised *Monthly Review* writers such as Mingqi Li, who prettify and cover for the Maoist period.

None of this should be dismissed as "squabbles among little sects". The abstract political formulas are important, as they are a guide to real struggles in the real world. In fact Au Loong Yu comes close to identifying some the main mechanisms of exploitation under Mao, when discussing the workers' position as one of "institutionalised dependence". Workers were "denied the freedom to choose their occupations or the freedom to choose the particular enterprises they worked in. In the same way, they were also denied the freedom to resign from their enterprises and shift to other plants of their free will".

Workers' "personal files were held in the hands of the party committee and were kept secret from them". These included "records of things which they might have said before, especially where they were critical of the party or cadres. All this could be used to incriminate them in possible future political purges". All in all, workers had to behave under this system and became part of a system of personal dependence with a feudal flavour".

Similarly, Au Loong Yu points to the hukou (household registration) system. Although dating back millennia, under the CCP government "the hukou system's functions of political and social control grew to unprecedented levels". Whereas all previous practices had not nullified the peasants' right to move around the country, it was the CCP which did that. With the onset of "socialist transformation" in 1956, "the party began to restrict the peasant's right to move as part of its plans to put in place the command economy". In 1958, the state passed laws to prevent the peasants from entering the cities altogether. In 1975 "the nominal right to movement was simply deleted from the constitution altogether, and remains so until today". Since the middle of the 1990s the hukou system has been gradually relaxed — although it is not expected to disappear soon.

QUESTION

At one point Au Loong Yu asks how, "if workers had always been the genuine ruling class since Mao's era, how was it possible that they were defeated without even an open and nationwide struggle?"

This is the right question, but one that cannot be answered satisfactorily within the theoretical framework of this book. If China had a socialist revolution in 1949 and a workers' state, however mangled, was created, then the transition to capitalism in the 1990s was an historical retrogression (the line taken, wrongly but at least consistently, by Socialist Action). If so, why did workers not seek to defend the state in which they were, at least nominally, the ruling class? And how can this transition have taken place without conceding, in Trotsky's words, that the film of reformism was running backwards? The idea of China as a workers' state simply collapses.

But an alternative explanation is available. The 1949 revolution was never a socialist revolution and the working class has never ruled China. The Maoist-Stalinist bureaucracy was always an exploiting ruling class, although its mode of exploitation was not capitalist for its first 30 years.

This bureaucracy developed the productive forces, but only by savagely exploiting Chinese workers and peasants after 1949. When that mode of exploitation reached its limits, the ruling class opted to integrate with the global capitalist economy and in doing so, become a capitalist class itself. This sideways move in the 1990s, although not without contradictions, is now largely complete.

Transitions from one class society to another can be "cold" from above or "revolutionary" from below. But the only transition that must be carried out consciously, smashing to the old state and creating another, is a socialist revolution carried out by the working class. This road lies ahead for the Chinese working class — if it can develop the ideology, leadership and organisation necessary.

Marxism and socialism are both discredited in China, because of the association with Maoism. For the Chinese working class to cast off this excrescence, there can be no concessions about the nature of Maoist Stalinism. For the Chinese workers to be free, they need to look to the authentic Communist traditions from the early 1920s, continued by the Chinese Trotskyists under Chen Duxiu and Wang Fanxi.

The emerging Chinese working class movement is a great source of hope: to fulfil this potential it will have to remove Stalinist obstacles from its path.

Where next for the universities dispute?

By a college lecturer

After three one-day strikes — and three two-hour strikes by UCU members — the universities' pay dispute looks no closer to resolution.

The employers are refusing to talk, and say they regard the 2013/14 round as settled with the imposition of a 1% rise.

The UCU leadership has not delivered the escalation strategy proposed back in September — which would have seen a marking boycott begin in time to hit first semester exams in a significant proportion of institutions.

Instead there have been two-hour strikes which, although not badly supported, have not caused the disruption necessary to move the employers.

The UCU's Higher Education Committee is due to

meet on 14 February to discuss the next steps, and many branches have submitted calls for quick escalation.

However, there are no easy answers about exactly what that should mean. The delay in moving to a marking boycott means we've missed the chance to hit January exams, and realistically that tactic will now have to wait until the summer exam season.

In the meantime the difficulty will be maintaining mobilisation of members until after Easter. Joint action with the NUT, which has called a one-day strike for 26 March, is an obvious option. Rolling strikes, hitting different departments in sequence, may also prove more fruitful than repeated one-day action.

There is also a question over the operation of the marking boycott tactic. It



looks increasingly likely that — unlike in 2006 — some employers will immediately move to withhold full pay on the basis that refusing to mark is partial performance. Work needs to begin now to convince members of the need to have that fight. It's also important to start thinking now how union members not directly involved in marking could be mobilised if the dispute moves in that direction.

Ineos sacks union convenor

By Dale Street

Unite convenor Mark Lyon was sacked by Ineos (Grangemouth) last week.

His dismissal follows the resignation three months ago of another Unite convenor, Stevie Deans, after a witch-hunt based on collusion between Ineos, the police, the media and the Tories (with some assistance from people in Labour).

According to a statement issued by Unite:

"Mr Lyon's sacking comes in the face of significant medical evidence that he is suffering from a serious stress-related illness as a result of the treatment he has endured at the hands of the company."

"Unite believes that

Ineos was determined to rush through a disciplinary process against Mr Lyon, denying his legal representatives the appropriate time to prepare his defence."

"Mark Lyon has been subjected to a grotesque mockery of the disciplinary system which saw him tried in his absence. While he attended a doctor's appointment, his employer was sacking him on trumped up charges."

According to the Scottish media, the pretext for Mark's dismissal was that he failed to stop Unite from issuing press releases last year which criticised Ineos for threatening to axe jobs at Grangemouth.

Clearly, Ineos thinks that the role of a company union convenor is to represent the company in the union rather than vice

versa.

When the witch-hunt of Stevie Deans began last year the workforce threatened to walk out on strike. When the witch-hunt resumed later in the year, the workforce voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action.

But now, although Unite is initiating legal proceedings for a claim of unfair dismissal, there is no strike ballot. This is not surprising: one element of last year's "deal" between Ineos and Unite was a no-strike agreement of three years' duration.

With Ineos exploiting the no-strike agreement to sack a union convenor, there is no reason why Unite should feel bound to "honour" that agreement. Even so, strike action appears to have been ruled out as a viable option.

Although it is no substitute for industrial action, Labour MPs and MSPs have tabled an Early Day Motion condemning Mark's dismissal and demanding his reinstatement.

Scottish Labour Party leader Johann Lamont has issued a statement condemning the dismissal. Scottish Labour Party deputy leader Anas Sarwar has issued a similar statement.

Mark's dismissal raises yet again the extent to

For some branches, a strong mobilisation over the strikes to date will have strengthened their hand in local negotiations. There will be opportunities to build on that — alongside students — to fight for demands like the Living Wage on campus, against the use of zero-hours contracts, and against the increasing commercialisation of universities more generally.

Students should talk to their local trade union reps about how best to support this campaigning — and what they can do to build solidarity with the ongoing action.

Protests around extravagant pay hikes for top managers, organising initiatives for casualised workers, and debates around the future of the university are all good options.

which inequalities of economic power undermine formal democratic rights.

Last year Ineos owner Jim Ratcliffe threatened to lay waste to local communities unless Unite accepted his demands for cuts in the terms and conditions of Grangemouth employees, and unless the Westminster and Holyrood government provided him with more financial subsidies.

This year Ineos is exploiting its gains of last year in order to sack an elected representative of the workforce, even though he is accountable to his members for his actions, not to Ineos.

Apart from ensuring that MPs and MSPs back the motions, Unite members attending this year's Unite policy conference should also back the motion submitted by a Glasgow branch which calls on the conference to:

"Commit Unite the Union to campaign for the nationalisation without compensation and under workers' control of all Ineos assets in the UK."

"To make campaigning for this demand a major focus of Unite campaigning in the run-up to the next Westminster and Holyrood elections, including by withholding support from any candidate who does not support that demand."

Edinburgh rolls on

Lecturers at Edinburgh College are continuing their rolling programme of strikes.

The aggressive campaign of walk-outs has met with the overwhelming support of members of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) at the college, 92% of whom backed strike action. The union is striking in protest at the 3% pay rise offered by management, a deal which is tied in with a

number of attacks on workers' terms and conditions, including the abolition of a class-contact maximum. Lecturers fear that with these protections removed, they could face a major increase in their work load with little to show for it.

The strikers have received support from the students' union and other workers at the college.

Aramark caterers struggle for 3 Cosas

By Ira Berkovic

The 3 Cosas Campaign at the University of London has turned its attention to the catering provider Aramark, another outsourced company providing services.

Though the University claims to be a Living Wage employer, the campaign has produced evidence that some Aramark workers are being paid below the London Living Wage rate of £8.80 per hour. An Aramark worker's payslip posted on the 3 Cosas Facebook page shows that some employees are earning just over £8.

Aramark employees have not benefited from the changes introduced to the Balfour Beatty and Cofely GDF-Suez contracts after the two-day strike by Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB) members last November. Aramark workers still receive only the statutory minimum levels of sick pay and holiday pay.

An officer of the University of London IWGB branch told Solidarity that the union has received an influx of members from Aramark in the last week, complaining of bullying and



harassment from managers. One worker told him that she was dissatisfied with the local Unison branch, which as far as she was concerned "works for Aramark."

This is the same Unison branch whose Cofely representative recently took two workers to a disciplinary hearing in her capacity as their manager. Unison members, who are overwhelmingly in support of the 3 Cosas Campaign, should demand that the national union investigates its Senate House branch and the regional officers responsible for overseeing it.

After last month's three-day strike, the 3 Cosas Campaign is continuing its fight for equal sick pay, holidays and pensions for all workers at the University of London.

Free school strikes against double-cross

Teachers at the Stem6 Academy, a "free school" in Islington, suspended three days' strike on 11-13 February after bosses agreed to talk about union recognition.

Management at the school have been trying to force teachers onto "zero-hours" contracts, with legal consequences threatened for those who don't comply.

Management have also refused to recognise the NUT as the union representing the teachers.

At the end of January, a threatened strike action forced the bosses into offering union recognition.

They went back on their word but a strike on 5 and 6 February made them renew the offer.

Ambulance bosses back down

Yorkshire Ambulance Service has backed down on plans to withdraw payments for late meal breaks, as a result of threatened industrial action from Unison and two days of action from the minority union, Unite.

The final rejection vote from Unison members on the changes was 80% despite a branch committee recommendation.

There are still important

issues remaining, not least a small group of members facing a 25% pay cut through a rota change, but the strongest message to go out at this stage is that even in these hard times members working together at workplace level can achieve victories.

Members meetings of Unison and Unite this week will plan what next.



New law whips up anti-migrant racism



By Michéal Ennis

The Tory's nasty new Immigration Bill is expected to pass into law this spring.

The Coalition has said that it wishes to reduce yearly net migration to the "tens of thousands". And Home Secretary Theresa May admits that the Immigration Bill is about "making it harder for people who are here illegally to stay here".

The new law will turn landlords and GPs into border guards.

Landlords will be required to check the immigration status of potential tenants or face a £3,000 fine. Many landlords will simply refuse to rent to anyone who looks or sounds "foreign".

Similar checks apply to opening bank accounts and issuing driving licenses.

The Tories also intend to restrict migrants' access to the NHS. GP practices will have to check the immigration status of potential pa-

tients.

People from outside the EU and without indefinite leave to remain will be asked to pay a further contribution towards the NHS regardless if they are already paying tax and National Insurance.

A separate charge will be introduced for international students.

Also included in the bill is a "deport now, ask questions later" system.

In future, those found to have committed a crime can be deported before their appeal is heard if they do not face "serious irreversible harm" at home.

Inconveniently for the government, "too many" migrants are having their deportations reversed on appeal so, in the face of basic justice, the bill is designed to make grounds for appeal much more limited, impossible in many cases.

Clause 14 of the bill is straightforwardly inhuman. It introduces new considerations for when a court or tribunal is asked to decide if

a decision, such as deportation, breaches a person's "right to respect for private and family life" under Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

Those able to speak English or the wealthy are considered less of a "burden on taxpayers" than non-English speakers or the poor and their deportation is therefore considered less in the "public interest, and in particular the economic well-being of the United Kingdom" than others.

Deportees' private lives and relationships formed while their immigration status was "precarious" or unlawful should, it is advised, carry "little weight."

The government has also accepted an amendment which will allow the state to strip naturalised citizens of their citizenship if they are suspected of terrorism. Note, "suspected" not "proved to be". However in other countries (e.g. Canada) this measure is being applied to other crimes.

The government has already given itself the right to strip dual citizens of British citizenship.

All of this is designed to create a hostile environment for migrants into the UK. Like all border controls, the new and intricate system of checks and restrictions sends out the message that all migrants are "suspect" and must be vouched for, or vouch for themselves by having plenty of cash, before gaining acceptance.

The bill chimes with the worst rhetoric coming from the far-right, legitimised by "mainstream" politicians. Just last week, UKIP MEP and party executive member Gerard Batten stood by the "charter of Muslim Understanding" he commissioned in 2006, which asked Muslims to renounce passages in the Koran.

Meanwhile, the *Observer* that LGBT asylum seekers have been subject to inappropriate and degrading "interrogations" about details of their sexual preferences. Immigration barrister Colin Yeo told the paper that: "The underlying problem is that officials believe everyone is a liar. It leads to a fundamental lack of respect for the people they are dealing with."

This is the case with all border controls, which empower capitalist states to choose those workers which serve the needs of capital while forcibly and violently removing those who do not.

Socialists must demand the opening of borders and uphold the freedoms of those wishing to make a new life for themselves in another country, for whatever reason.

The labour movement needs to organise all workers, regardless of immigration status, and open its doors to migrants.

Swiss vote against migrants

A closely-fought referendum in Switzerland has returned a narrow 50.3% in favour of bringing back strict quotas on immigration from EU countries.

The quota was opposed by the Swiss government and goes against the principle of the free movement of labour between the EU and Switzerland, as enshrined in carefully negotiated bilateral agreements.

Though it is not an EU member-state, Switzerland has adopted many EU regulations. Since 2007, most EU residents have had equal access to the Swiss

labour market. The result of the referendum could restrict Switzerland's access to the EU market where over half the country's exports are sold.

The referendum campaign was led by a coalition dominated by the right-wing nationalist and anti-migrant Swiss People's Party (SVP), the largest party in the Federal Assembly.

Like many conservative parties across Europe, the SVP has been blaming migrants for job insecurity and pressures on housing and services.



Sochi games: gay rights protesters arrested

On Friday 7 February, the Russian authorities arrested at least 61 people in the run-up to the Winter Olympics' opening ceremony in Sochi .

The arrests spanned from the Caucasus to the capital St Petersburg. The government is seemingly tolerating no dissent, even far away from the location of the games in the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

According to the *New York Times*, 19 were arrested near Red Square in Moscow at gay rights protests, including several foreign activists (pictured above). At least two of the activists report having been beaten and threatened with sexual abuse.

In the capital, four activists were arrested for unfurling a banner near the State Hermitage Museum which read: "Discrimination is incompatible with the Olympic Movement. Principle 6. Olympic Charter." These included Anastasia Smirnova, who recently met with the president of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, on the issue of Russia's restrictions on gay rights.

In a pathetic and supine public statement, the IOC's head of media relations Emmanuelle Moreau told the internet aggregate site Buzzfeed that: "We understand that the protesters were quickly released. As in many countries in the world, in Russia, you need permission before staging a protest. We understand this was the reason they were temporarily detained."