

# Solidarity

## & Workers' Liberty



No 210 29 June 2011 30p/80p

For a workers' government

**Class warfare in Egypt** page 3



**UNITE THE FIGHTS** JUNE 30  
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**John Berger: art and politics** page 10



# Poor

**SEE PAGES 5-8**

# pensioners

# Rich bankers

# and bosses

# ROBBERY!

**TOP 1,000 GOT £60 BILLION  
EXTRA LOOT LAST YEAR**

**Former Network Rail boss Iain Coucher got £214,00 in pension payments after working for the company for three years!**

## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

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

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## "Facility" clampdown is anti-union

By Darren Bedford

**"Ministers are threatening to end the practice of part-time and full-time union officials working in Whitehall departments and quangos", reports the *Financial Times* (27 June).**

The threatened attack is on "facility time", the arrangement by which employers release union reps from part or all of their regular work to do union duties. The purpose is to weaken unions.

The basis of "facility time" is the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act

1992, which mandates employers to allow union reps time off for such things as representing members on individual grievances.

In larger public sector workplaces, where union organisation is stronger than in most of the private sector, bosses find it more economical to release a few people from regular work, either all hours or a fixed part of the week, than to have to release people for odd hours here and there.

Despite that:

- Large amounts of "facility time" go unclaimed;
- An official government

survey found that union reps in the public sector put in 100,000 hours each year on union activity outside their normal working hours;

● A TUC survey found that one-quarter of all union reps on "facility time" regularly put in time outside normal work hours.

● Even the Taxpayers' Alliance, a right-wing group campaigning against "facility time", finds only 2,500 full-time-equivalent units of "facility time" across the whole public sector; this out of a work force of six million.

Many union branches find it difficult to fill "facility time" posts. The work is often more stressful than ordinary employment, and going on to "facility time" can damage your chances of promotion and your CV for future employment.

There is a good trade-union case for all facility time to be partial, a few days a week rather than 100%, so that all union

reps regularly spend time in "ordinary" work, know what it's like, and relate to other workers as work-mates rather than as harassed officials.

Union branches can end up with the same people on full "facility time" for decades, and them coming to think of themselves as "the union" and their job as minimising conflict between bosses and workers.

A well-organised union branch will always seek to draw in new activists and spread its available "facility time" between as many competent people as possible.

Doing that is often not easy — especially when intense pressure from the bosses produces more and more "personal cases" of victimisation to deal with.

**However, it must be the task of the union and activists to broaden the base of those receiving facility time and to end, where appropriate, full facility working.**

## Unions push for (a little) Labour democracy

By Martin Thomas

**In their submission to the Labour Party's review of structure (24 June), the affiliated trade unions have proposed:**

\* "To remove the 'contemporary' criteria", so that Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) can put motions to Labour Party conference without having to prove that they are "contemporary" (i.e. based on events in August) and running a large risk of almost any motion being ruled out of order.

\* "To enforce the original proposal for 4 + 4", that is to allow CLPs to put four issues on Labour Party conference agenda. (At present, if the CLPs choose an issue which is also chosen by the trade unions, then the CLP choice simply falls, and conference debates fewer issues).

\* To "make it explicit that [resolutions] passed should be incorporated within our policy documents". At present, as the submission notes, resolutions passed at Labour Party conference are published *nowhere* permanent, only in the Conference Arrangements Committee reports circulated daily within the conference.

\* To reject the fashionable idea that the Labour Party should create a new "category" of supporters beyond its membership (i.e. create an ultra-passive "electorate" for certain issues, easily manipulated

by the leadership to bypass the regular structures of the party). The submission notes that there is already an easy mechanism for "socialist societies" and other campaign groups to affiliate to the Labour Party.

● To propose that Labour leadership elections be simplified to one member, one vote, across the whole CLP and affiliated (union) membership, with no special weighted vote for MPs. Voters who are simultaneously CLP and affiliated-union members would be asked to certify that they were only using one vote.

● To "rebalance" Labour's National Executive Committee, with 9 CLP reps, a rep each from Scotland and Wales, 11 trade union reps, and only 11 representatives from MPs, etc.

● To defend what remains of Labour's local democracy, including the participation of union delegates in CLPs.

All these are better than Ed Miliband's direction, with his 27 June abolition of the Parliamentary Labour Party's right to elect the Shadow Cabinet.

The report is scathing about the regime since the Blair coup: "Great iniquities... of centralised command and control"; "wilful dismissal of party option"; "apparent deafness of former Party leaders to union issues... [most obviously] the commitment to retain the majority of legislation

that restricted trade unions"; "the determination of previous leaderships to micro-manage Conference, and when that fails to greet its decision with outright hostility"; "the policy process... increasingly obscure... treated as a toolbox to use when keeping out unwanted voices".

### COMPROMISE

**The report is wordy and diffuse. It shows the signs of being a fudged compromise between different views (in the submission, as in Labour Party affairs generally, the unions almost always act as a bloc, "averaging out" between the more leftist unions and the more conservative ones).**

Union activists — probably, even union Executive members — were allowed no input to it. All those factors make it doubtful that the union general secretaries will fight for the positive proposals without strong pressure from their unions' members.

Some vital changes which in the past have had trade-union support — allowing Conference to amend National Policy Forum reports, easing bureaucratic obstacles to Constituency Labour Parties proposing rule changes — are not included.

Worst, the submission "can see no value in a return to a resolution-based

process that operates around Conference" (i.e. the relatively simple structure, based on resolutions to conference from CLPs and unions, which existed from the start up to Tony Blair's changes in 1997).

Instead, it pitches its proposals as bringing the Labour Party today back to what was outlined on paper, in 1997, but never really operated.

The reason why the National Policy Forum, the Policy Commissions, the Joint Policy Committee, and so on, have all become shams is, however, that their purpose was precisely "a toolbox to keep out unwanted voices".

Once they had done that, *no-one* was very interested in them. The decisive improvement needed (even if it goes alongside, for example, a residual NPF) is to restore real life to Labour Party conference.

Part of the unions' timidity is a *feeling* of weakness. Giving precise figures to a trend which I haven't seen enumerated as precisely before, the submission reports "the loss of 65% of union stewards since 1980, compared to a loss of 50% of members".

**Union activists need to press the union leaders to stick to their positive proposals, and fight for a more democratic structure within the unions themselves on political issues.**

## Egypt: row over election date

By Clive Bradley

**“There is total class warfare going on in Egypt right now,” Joshua Stacher of Kent State University told Time magazine.**

“If [middle-class] people in Cairo and Alexandria get some of their demands met, they could[n’t] care less about minimum wage, or the fact that the health-care system is complete crap. [They think] ‘You shouldn’t have a minimum wage right now, you’re being greedy.’” (“Has the Revolution left Egypt’s workers behind?” *Time*, 23 June).

The biggest public debate in Egypt is whether parliamentary elections, scheduled for September, should be postponed. Much liberal and leftist opinion believes they should, and a new constitution be drawn up first. A number of human rights groups, including the Centre for Trade Union and Workers Services, recently put out a statement calling for Egypt to follow the example of Tunisia, and ‘put the horse before the cart’, creating a new constitution first.

Of course this raises the thorny question of how the constitution should be written – and by whom?

But there are two fears about the imminent elections. One is that without properly defined new institutions, the army – which since the fall of Hosni Mubarak in February has ruled the country – will continue to play a central role; that elections will prove an illusion. The other – probably bigger – is that the new parliament will be dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, which is by far the best organised group (and which will then dominate discussions about the constitution).

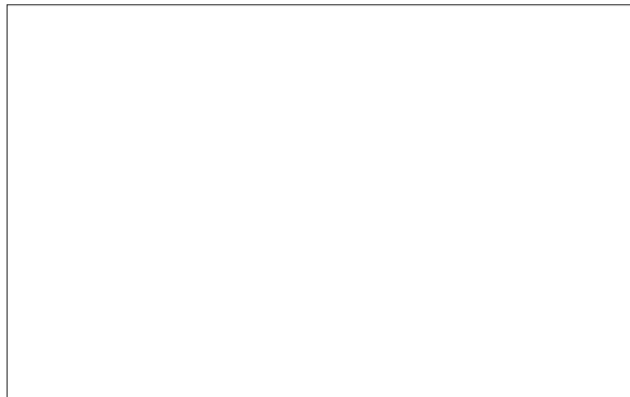
Liberal, secular, leftist – and newer – parties simply do not have time to organise.

The Brotherhood, unsurprisingly, wants elections to go ahead. A referendum in March, they say, which saw over 70% in favour of constitutional amendments, is an unquestionable mandate. The parliament, once elected, will then choose a 100 member assembly to draft a constitution.

The Brotherhood has promised to stand candidates in only half the seats. But there are now no less than five political parties which have emerged from the movement – often with very fractious and hostile relations.

The official Brotherhood face is the Freedom and Justice Party.

Perhaps the most sig-



nificant splinter group is the Egyptian Current Party, formed after around 4,000 members, mainly youth, were expelled – along with the new party’s leader, Abdel Fotouh, who is standing (against the parent movement’s wishes) in presidential elections later in the year. This younger movement, whose members were closely involved in the January revolution alongside other youth movements, is much more liberal and secular: it thinks there should be a separation of religion and politics.

### CRISIS

**Whether this signals a wholesale crisis in the Muslim Brotherhood is difficult to judge.**

A recent opinion poll suggested that only 15% planned to vote for them – which although it might still constitute the largest single vote would be a disaster for a movement which had always been expected to sweep the board in free and fair elections.

Since the fall of Mubarak the Muslim Brothers have worked closely with the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. For its part, the army is becoming more and more openly repressive. Thousands have been arrested in recent weeks (and many of them, although they’re civilians, are tried in military courts). A law introduced in March imposes heavy penalties on protests.

And the army has moved against striking workers – for instance in the Suez Canal, where a militant strike has been taking place over wages and conditions. The strike continued despite army intervention. Other – smaller – strikes have been effectively stopped or prevented.

Despite this, the workers’ movement – which was central to the downfall of the dictatorship – has continued to grow. The new Egyptian Federation of Independent Unions now represents the major sectors of the workforce, perhaps one million workers. In April alone, there were 90 labour protests, including 26 sit-ins and 14 strikes.

Previously disorgan-

ised and docile sections of the workforce have joined the new movement – including taxi drivers, and the workers who issue marriage licences (who have threatened to strike for higher pay).

The old, discredited state unions have threatened to strike in protest at the new, democratic unions’ success!

But liberal and bourgeois forces, including some of the youth movements at the centre of the Tahrir Square protests, have demanded that workers stop making ‘excessive’ demands.

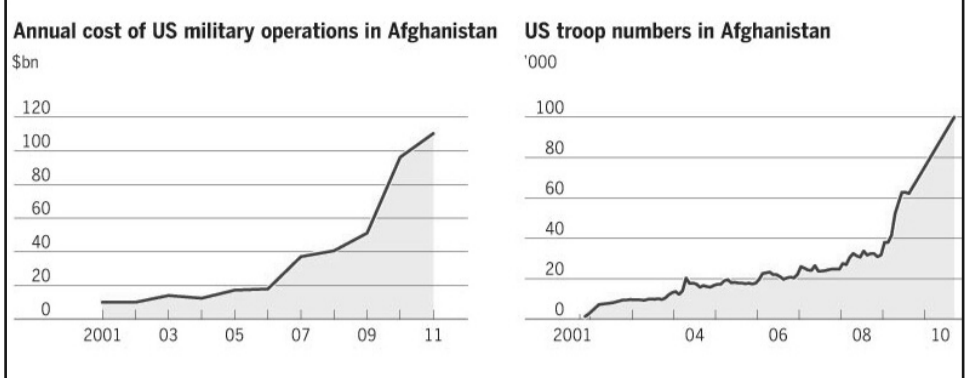
The army and the government, of course, echo this sentiment. At the same time – despite repressive measures – they are trying to appease the workers’ movement to some extent. The government secured a \$3 billion loan package from the IMF earlier in June, which like most such agreements would require ‘austerity’ measures. But now the deal has been cancelled, thanks to a reformulated budget, and, for instance, a ‘gift’ of \$500 million from Qatar, and other money from the Gulf. The government wants to pump money into welfare, health etc – and has announced a minimum wage (at LE 700 way below the LE 1200 demanded by the unions).

The depth of the economic crisis and the impoverishment of millions of Egyptians is such that such half-measures are unlikely to have much effect. Many workers have literally not been paid in months.

So workers continue to press their demands – which often include the call for the renationalisation of firms sold off under neo-liberal policies since the early 1990s.

A leftist ‘Socialist Front’ has been formed which includes the Revolutionary Socialists, the new Workers Democratic Party, and the Communist Party. Electoral laws make it very difficult for new, poorly funded movements to win official recognition enabling them to field candidates.

**But according to some spokespeople of the new coalition, that is the plan.**



## Obama tries to escape Afghan ratchet

By Rhodri Evans

**In October 2010, Ahmed Rashid, author of much-read books on the Taliban and the Afghan war, wrote: “In the past year, violent incidents have risen by 50 per cent, the Taliban have spread to the north and west of the country and the battle for control of the Taliban-dominated Pashtun south and east gets bloodier by the day”.**

The results of Obama’s 2009 “surge” of extra US troops into Afghanistan has not been significantly better since then. In May 2011 Rashid assessed “the secu-

rity situation” as “actually worsening”.

The US can always defeat the Taliban in head-on battle. But then the Taliban moves away, over the border or to other areas in Afghanistan; the rural people of Afghanistan become more resentful of US militarism and the corrupt US-backed Kabul government; and soon the Taliban are back.

On 23 June Barack Obama concluded, logically enough, that if more US troops and more billions of dollars do no good, then he should pull back some troops (10,000 now, another 23,000 by September 2012)

and spend less money.

The Taliban retorted that “our armed struggle will increase from day to day”, and many conservatives complained that Obama’s drawdown is too big, too soon.

The USA is caught on a ratchet. Since 2001 its troop numbers in Afghanistan have inched up steadily, always seeking by some extra force to pacify the country, always only making things worse. And then troop reductions become “risky”.

**“Risky” or not, the US and British troops in Afghanistan are making things worse, not better. They should come out.**

## The return of the UVF?

By Liam McNulty

**Belfast saw its worst Loyalist-origined rioting in several years on Monday-Wednesday 20-22 June.**

Three people suffered gunshot wounds and houses on both sides of the east Belfast community — on the interface between (Protestant) lower Newtownards Road and (Catholic) Short Strand — were damaged by petrol bombs, stones and other missiles. What lies behind the violence?

In the context of unemployment, deprivation and low self-confidence the Loyalist paramilitaries have thrived, feeding off various grievances and offering a

destructive means to young Protestant people of gaining status and power. The implosion of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) after its leader, Dawn Purvis, stood down last year in frustration over continued Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) violence, has left a vacuum which is only partly being filled by the main Protestant party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Many people have been completely alienated from the Stormont political system.

Now a renegade commander within the UVF has been stamping his authority in the area. New murals, flags and graffiti on a nearby bar stating “prop-

erty of the UVF” have appeared. Reports indicate that elements discontented with the rise of dissident Republican violence have been frustrated at the moves of the UVF leadership towards becoming a more civilian organisation, and are anxious over speculation about a “super-grass” trial involving a one-time UVF figure. The fact that the new commander is able to mobilise hundreds of supporters, bussing many from other areas, suggests that sizeable parts of the organisation are not willing to give up paramilitarism in the foreseeable future.

It is a worry that these tensions will escalate. We could see an intra-Loyalist feud of the sort which happened when Billy Wright broke from the UVF to form the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) in 1996. Or there could be further clashes between Loyalists and Republicans if dissident militants attempt to take the role of “defenders” of the Catholic community.

**The next few years will be testing for the political structures set up by the “peace process”.**

• Abridged from: bit.ly/mnwuns

# New lessons in online campaigning



Eric Lee

**What makes some online campaigns popular, while others are not? I've been thinking about this a lot lately, because LabourStart is today running a large number of campaigns at the same time.**

Some are wildly successful (in terms of the number of messages sent). Others, less so. A campaign we're currently running in support of Canadian postal workers has become the largest one we ever ran. After only four days online, it already had over 10,000 supporters.

But it could not really be called the most important or urgent campaign. We are campaigning, for example, in support of two jailed trade union leaders — in El Salvador and in Russia. But those campaigns got only a fraction of the support that the Canada campaign received.

Part of what is going on is enormous grassroots support in Canada for the postal workers, who are facing an unprecedented onslaught by the Conservative government. Nearly three-fourths of those who have sent off messages in this campaign are Canadians.

And yet even the non-Canadians supporting this campaign outnumber those who support the release of the jailed trade union leader in El Salvador by about two-to-one.

So it's not just Canadians supporting a local campaign.

In the past, I'd have said the largest campaigns are the ones that focus on extreme violations of workers' rights — such as the killing of trade unionists.

But this does not seem to be the case.

Part of what is going on is how people identify with the workers who are the focus of campaigns.

I think that it's easier for English-speaking trade unionists in developed countries to identify with Canadian postal workers than it is for them to identify with, for example, striking public sector workers in Botswana.

Part of that is simply a question of education. People in the UK or USA have generally heard of Canada, and though few non-Canadians can name its Prime Minister, the country is well-known to working people throughout the English-speaking world.

Botswana, on the other hand, is just another country somewhere in Africa — to most people.

Small countries, or countries where English is not spoken, or countries that are rarely in the news, are going to be harder to crack.

Some of LabourStart's biggest campaigns have focussed on Iran — but that's because Iran is always in the news.

Bahrain and Swaziland, where vicious anti-union regimes are crushing workers' movements, are much less well-known, and the campaigns are smaller.

So how do we go about building much bigger international trade union support at grassroots level for important campaigns in countries like El Salvador and Swaziland?

I think part of what we need to do is mobilize people in support of the popular campaigns, like Canadian postal workers. Those people in their thousands are now on LabourStart's mailing lists.

When we do a campaign in support of embattled trade unionists somewhere in Africa or Latin America, we'll be telling a much larger audience about it.

**And when those people, who had never previously heard about Botswana or El Salvador, are exposed every week to mailings about those struggles, they will get an education in trade union internationalism.**

# The *Guardian* vs 30 June



**Most of the press haven't been very interested in 30 June. The tabloids have only had brief factual reports of statements by government ministers and union leaders.**

The more left-of-centre papers seemed unsure how to react until they were given the line by Ed Miliband, Ed Balls and Shadow Education spokesman, Andy Burnham. Then the *Guardian*, *Mirror* and, to a lesser extent, the *Independent* warned editorially that striking unions would "fall into a trap". Exactly what this trap was and how the consequences would be worse than accepting the proposals to work until we drop, have on average extra £100 per month taken out of our pay, and then get a much worse pension, wasn't explained.

There is diversity in the press — whatever some on the left say — and its ability to speak freely about the government and powerful is real and worth defending. Strike action by workers, though, is one of those rare issues where the press is united.

The attitude of the leftish as well as the right-wing press to this strike is in line with Vince Cable — workers have the right to strike but they should never use it. I have not found a daily paper which supports the 30 June strikes. More to the point, that is practically always the case.

Occasionally the *Mirror* will get close (it did when the miners were under the most severe attack in 1984-5). But the worst offender is the middle-class *Guardian*.

There was some difference in the chosen arguments explaining why workers should never strike, reflecting the political loyalties and masters of particular papers. The right-wing press focused on the teachers, and insisted that it would set a bad example to pupils and upset parents for them ever to strike.

The *Guardian* and *Mirror* took their cue from the utterly empty and cowardly Miliband and pedalled the "falling into a trap" line.

The lack of serious detailed comment on the pension proposals or insight into the union-government talks, even in the *Guardian* and *Observer*, undermined whatever force that argument might have had. It was left to the *Guardian's* readers (obviously quite a few teachers) to fill the letters page with well-directed missives asking what exactly the alternative to this "trap" was. Aside, of course, from simply accepting these draconian attacks on pensions?

The talks are a farce. Even the non-balloted GMB made that clear in articles by their chief negotiator Brian Stratton in a number of papers. Danny Alexander's decision to announce the government's proposals in public before the "negotiations" had even finished swiped the last tiny bit of that

rug from under the feet of the so-called "sensible" union leaders.

A number of self-styled Labour modernist commentators lectured us in the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Mirror* about the need to go beyond the "knee-jerk" response of striking and develop more nuanced, up-to-date and smart ways of winning our case. I read as much of this stuff as I could find and without exception it lacked any example of these smart new strategies.

## EXPERTISE

**The most interesting aspect of the press coverage was the conclusion drawn by a limited number of commentators with some expertise on pensions. It all pointed consistently in the same direction.**

In the *Observer* (19 June) Toby Helm and Mark Townsend quoted an adviser to one of the City's main pensions firms (John Wright) stating that: "The gap between public and private sector pensions is not a reason for cutting public service pensions, but for improving levels of pension provision in the private sector."

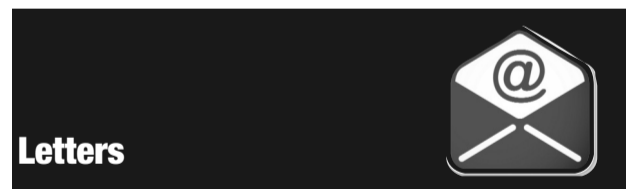
Jeremy Warner, assistant editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* published an article in that paper with the impressively honest headline "There's nothing unaffordable about public sector pensions". He described the affordability argument as "a myth" and used the fact that he had clearly read the whole of the Hutton report to explain this. Deep inside the report is a graph showing the share of GDP spent on public sector pensions going back to 1999 and projected forward to 2060. It peaked two years ago (2009-10).

The *Financial Times* has been warning for some weeks now of the risk of millions of workers opting out of their schemes due to higher contribution and questioning the need for, and the sense of, these proposals.

As the industrial conflict heats up the right-wing press, tabloids in particular, will get more combative and nasty. There were early signs of that last week with a front page splash in the *Daily Mail* claiming that Christine Blower had received a 10% pay rise at a time when her members were getting a pay freeze and going on to provide the salary levels for Mark Serwotka and Mary Bousted. The story was potentially damaging and a reminder of one reason why there has been a tradition in the socialist movement of arguing for elected trade union leaders to receive a wage which reflects the earnings of their members.

But the "facts" in the story about Christine Blower didn't fit the headline — her salary is linked to that of the head of a large secondary school and she receives the same increase as teachers (2.3% last September, 0% this year). By conflating some pension contributions and an incremental rise the *Mail* got to 10%.

**There will be a lot more of this stuff in the weeks and months ahead as we see the British press do what it does best — going to war against organised labour on behalf of the bosses. The job of the socialist press will be more important than ever.**



## SP's working-class base

**In general, the "Who are the Socialist Party?" (*Solidarity* 209) article is a fair assessment of the history and politics of Militant/SP.**

But what it doesn't mention is the class nature of the SP's base, and that is important. I only have my own impressions on which to base this judgement, but as an experienced observer of these things, my estimate is that the SP is alone on the British far left in having a predominantly working-class make up.

Yes, I know that this is not decisive. 30 years on the far left have taught me that political ideas outweigh sociological composition or weight of numbers. But it cannot be insignificant that the SP recruits workers, on a scale that no other Trot group currently can touch. I include the AWL in that stipulation.

Trotsky somewhere uses a phrase about the importance of "smelling of the workers' whisky". The thing that strikes me more and more about the SWP is that it smells of the university seminar room and the academic journal. The SP, whatever the deficiencies of its ideas — and its "theoretical" output is weak — is noticeably more proletarian and less ex-studenty.

Its members are also simply nicer human beings. Although they are deferential to their group's received wisdom, they are not as robotic as goodthinkful SWPers. They know how to operate as citizens of the labour movement, in sharp contrast to some SWP I have observed in my own union branch. Sometimes civil conversation about political differences is possible.

**And as Marxists believe that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself, I will freely admit to a grudging respect for the SP. So wrong on so many issues, but still ...**

Dave Osler, writing on the AWL website

## Andy Murray: strike-breaker?

**I was amused to see the integral role played by tennis stars in Britain's industrial relations being reaffirmed recently when the *Evening Standard* enlisted Andy Murray and Elena Baltacha in its ongoing hate campaign against Tube workers and their union, the RMT.**

Baltacha was said to be "worried" by the strikes, and the *Standard* had Murray, in a front-page lead headline, "pleading" for the strikes to be called off.

In reality, all that either of them had said was that they "hoped it all gets sorted out" — hardly the kind of spittle-flecked anti-strike invective the *Standard* likes to employ.

Murray and Baltacha will surely have been delighted, then, to see that the dispute was indeed "sorted out" by the workers winning reinstatement for their sacked colleague.

**Game, set and match to the RMT.**

Percy Shelbourne, north London

Local government workers in Southampton are taking sustained strike action to defend wages, conditions, jobs and services.

## Seize the loot — or be looted!

**Ed Miliband says the unions should not strike on 30 June because they risk alienating public opinion. Thousands of teachers, civil servants and lecturers know he is wrong. Striking on 30 June — and organising for further strikes — is right and necessary.**

Striking is the most effective way to stop the government from destroying public sector pensions, reducing health and social services to a “death’s door only” minimum and condemning millions to a “choice” between penury or becoming cheap labour for multi-millionaires.

Striking is necessary because the government wants to negotiate only on details of its pension reform.

Striking is necessary not just because it is a more effective protest than demonstrations or lobbies. Strikes are a direct challenge to the power of bosses and the government and their ability to implement reforms.

The bosses and government know they cannot run public services without teachers, civil servants and other public sector workers. If the bosses also know workers will not put up with job losses, wage freezes, pension cuts they will feel a lot more pressure. They may respond with belligerence. They may back off. We have to know what we are up against and what we can do to strengthen our fight.

Do the unions have all of “public opinion” on their side? Probably not. But they have a lot more sympathy than Miliband and the rest of the Labour frontbench will give

## Prentis backtracks

**Dave Prentis has already started rowing backwards. At the conference (19-24 June) of the big local government and health union Unison, which he leads, Prentis promised a huge campaign of industrial action to beat back the Coalition government.**

As soon as the conference delegates went home, Prentis declared (27 June) that now Unison “has no plans to ballot members on strike action yet.

“The government is willing to take these negotiations [on the public sector pension schemes] seriously. We have agreed to two more meetings in July and we will continue to negotiate throughout July”.

There is no evidence that the Government is willing to do more than negotiate on the details of the pension changes — and it has always been all too happy to negotiate on those details, as long as it gets the basics through.

This shows that union members must have the chance to discuss, and impose on their leaders, precise demands and precise plans for action, not be satisfied with vague promises of “action” and “continuing campaigns” some time in the future.

credit for. Millions of people are in the same boat as teachers and civil servants, facing an old age of poverty, restricted opportunities and fear of losing their independence.

And other public sector workers are looking to the teachers and civil servants to start a fight. They do not want to do what Tony Blair — a man truly despised in the “court of public opinion” — calls “engage with change”. They know that “engaging with change” means seeing “non-essential” hip operations cancelled, nurseries closing and teachers forced out of their jobs.

Ed Miliband didn’t back the strike on 30 June because this and further strikes will change the nature of the opposition to the coalition. They will require him to change his “I’m getting tougher” stance. He is less able to say “leave it to us, and when Labour gets into power we will make it all right.”

Anyway Miliband and his Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls have not said they will repeal the Tory policies. They have not committed to opening nurseries, reversing privatisations, and cutting the new pension age?

We cannot and should not “leave it to them”. Nor should we not let them get away with their disgraceful, anti-strike, demagogic lecturing. The unions should call them to account.

The labour movement needs political alternatives — in the first place a clear idea of what it is fighting for and not just on the pension issue.

Over the last few years Workers’ Liberty has argued for Workers’ Plan for the Crisis — a programme which brings together ideas for action and demands to inspire, shape and advance the class struggle against the bosses’ drive to make the working-class pay for the crisis; a programme for union and anti-cuts activists to fight for in the labour movement.

In the wake of 30 June this programme can be a tool that will strengthen our struggle. The programme must include:

### PENSIONS

- Fully fund public sector pensions, no rise in worker contributions!
- Immediately reverse the index link for pensions back to RPI from CPI.
- Pensions (and benefits and the minimum wage) should rise in line with prices or earnings, whichever is higher. (At the same time the unions should calculate an inflation figure which matches the real spending needs of workers and the poor.)
- Make the state retirement age for men and women 60. All workers deserve to enjoy life “after work”.
- Tax the private bosses to fund pensions for private sector workers, levelled up to the value of public sector pensions.
- Workers’ control of pension funds.

### BENEFITS

- Oppose and reverse Tory Welfare Reform, which will force jobless and disabled into low paid, insecure employment.
- End all “workfare” cheap labour schemes.

- Benefits should be at levels appropriate to need — sufficient to cover all extra costs for childcare and disability — and be enough to live on.
- End all means testing.

### JOBS

- Stop the job cuts in public services. Jobs for all!
- End and reverse the privatisation of public services.
- Cut the working week without loss of pay to create jobs for all who need them.

### WORKERS’ GOVERNMENT

**To many working-class people such policies seem hard to win. The first question asked is “how can we afford it?” The straight answer is that “we” cannot afford it unless we seize the wealth of the ultra-rich.**

Seizing the loot which the ultra-rich have extracted over years and centuries of exploitation, taxing rich households and companies, taking banks and industry into public ownership, could finance all of this and much more to meet the needs of working-class people. For instance, serious taxation of just the top 1000 richest people in this country could yield hundreds of billions of pounds.

Many unions already have policies along these lines — less radical, but roughly speaking similar. If the unions were even pursue their own policies with conviction, such demands would seem much less “unrealistic”.

The demand to “end to means testing” — to stop the state shaming the poor — was once a well-understood and “bottom-line” policy in the labour movement. Years of inaction by union leaders, and pleading for “crumbs from the bosses table” have meant such policies have faded from political life. Debating and discussing what should be the labour movement’s new “bottom line” can restore such ideas, restore the practice of having principles and the idea that it is right to fight on a point of principle.

In the fight to save pensions, jobs and services we need something much much better than little concessions from the bosses and deals negotiated behind the backs of the workers. We should not leave it to Miliband to “get on with it” if and when Labour gets elected to government. We call on the unions to put pressure on Labour, and that could commit Labour to stronger opposition. But at the same time we know that, left to its own devices, Labour merely stands for a more “humane” deficit reduction and that too is an attack on working-class people.

To win our whole programme and a radical transformation of society, we need a different kind of government — a workers’ government — one which understands the necessity of attacking the wealth and power of the ruling class.

**That’s a big idea — a socialist idea. We hope labour movement activists who now see better possibilities of fighting back will want to discuss that idea with us in the coming months.**

[www.workersliberty.org/workersplan](http://www.workersliberty.org/workersplan)

# The battle after 30

By Stewart Ward

**Some recent disputes have, to great effect, employed the sorts of tactics and strategies that can turn an industrial dispute into a real weapon, used to force concessions from bosses rather than just to register a protest.**

A dispute on London Underground to win the reinstatement of sacked union reps, strikes at Rawmarsh school in Rotherham against job cuts, and the Southampton council workers' strikes, are proving that there is an alternative way of conceiving of and running industrial disputes. In the case of London Underground and Rawmarsh they have already won. What are they doing differently?

## RANK-AND-FILE DEMOCRACY

**Who runs a strike? The officials of the union, or the striking workers themselves? A union with sufficiently democratic structures for these two groups to be the same is rare indeed.**

Often, strike strategy is cooked up behind closed doors by union leaders and then presented as a fait accompli to workers, they are pressurised to "support their union". This is a recipe for a strike over which workers feel no ownership.

But in Southampton, at Rawmarsh and on London Underground, rank-and-file democracy has been crucial.

Although few unions have structures that give formal control of disputes to rank-and-file strike committees, socialists involved in each dispute have fought for as much control as possible to be given to democratic bodies representing the grassroots membership. Mike Tucker, the branch secretary of Southampton District Unison, told *Solidarity* last week:

"The effective sovereign body in the dispute is a joint Unison-Unite strike committee. It's made up of branch officials and stewards and it meets weekly to take decision about the direction of the dispute and which sections will be called out next. No group of workers is called out without meetings involving reps and stewards from that section to make sure they're on-board with the strategy. We've also been holding mass members' meetings since November."

Regular mass members meetings, which discussed and debated strike strategy, were also key at Rawmarsh. In both cases they represented channels by which workers could take ownership over their own strike rather than being used as foot-soldiers for union leaderships.

On London Underground, Workers' Liberty member Janine Booth stood for election to the union's executive promising to act as a voice for the rank-and-file; in the victimisation dispute she has fulfilled that promise. Strikes need leadership, but that doesn't mean unaccountable union officials telling "ordinary members" what to do.

Janine has consistently developed strategy based on discussions, debates and decisions taken by the rank-and-file Train Grades Committee. Janine and other AWL members working on the Tube have argued for particular approaches, but within the context of a debate amongst rank-and-file workers about the direction of the dispute, rather than with the old "the Executive knows best" attitude.

The experience shows how revolutionary socialists who stand for, and win, leading positions within a union can disrupt and subvert the bureaucracy's traditional modes of

functioning, and it also shows how much more effective a strike campaign can be when the workers involved take the lead in planning action.

For Workers' Liberty, the 30 June strikes are an opportunity to make the case for how the whole labour movement can be transformed. Rank-and-file committees which have real control over the direction of disputes are integral to our vision of what a fighting, democratic workers' movement looks like. In places like Nottingham, AWL members have led the fight to set up joint union committees and won official support and backing from the unions locally. But where unions won't support rank-and-file strike committees, they should be organised independently, both within and across unions. Ultimately, we want permanent rank-and-file networks (again, both within and across unions) that can force union leaderships to act – and, when they won't, organise action independently.

## ORGANISE

**Even in a workplace like the London Underground combine, which has relatively high levels of union density and a history of militancy, strikes will not be solid automatically.**

Every strike needs to be backed up by ongoing organisation, before and in between strike days, to make sure workers on the job – union and non-union – know what's going on, know the arguments and know how to get involved.

On London Underground, RMT branches, the Train Grades Committee and the Regional Council worked hard to build the anti-victimisation campaign in workplaces. Reps consistently visited groups of workers, union activists collected petitions and flooded the job with stickers and badges. Branches and the region published regular newsletters that kept members up-to-date with the latest development and tackled management propaganda. RMT reps also sought support from the other unions in the workplace, particularly ASLEF.

If management can see that a strike is being backed up by this kind of ongoing workplace organisation and campaigning, and is therefore more likely to be solid, they'll be more likely to feel under threat.

## REAL DEMANDS

**Many recent strikes, even significant national disputes like the postal workers' strike of 2009, have been based on no concrete demands. CWU officials would sound resolute in telling their members that the strike was "against what management is doing", but the actual position of the union – its only demand – was that management negotiate with it.**

This reflects a lack of strategy from union leaderships, and a means by which union bureaucracies can engineer sell-out deals. Once in negotiations, rank-and-file members have little control over what's discussed. Striking workers become a stage army for the bureaucracy rather than a conscious agency acting in their own interests. It's not that the bureaucrats are consciously trying to make life worse for their members; it's more that they see their role as managing and mitigating practically-inevitable defeats rather than ever actually winning anything.

In the recent Tube workers dispute to win reinstatement for sacked reps Eamonn Lynch and Arwyn Thomas, the demand was singular and clear: reinstatement, and nothing less. The industrial campaign would continue until both men were back in London Underground employment. In the Rawmarsh strikes, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) made the demand for the withdrawal of all threatened redundancies central to the strike. Workers knew that they weren't striking in general protest against what management was doing, but were active participants in a campaign aimed at winning specific concessions and forcing specific action from their bosses.

## TAKE STRATEGIC ACTION, ESCALATE WHERE NECESSARY

**At Rawmarsh, when sustained strike action had worn management down to the extent that only one worker now faced redundancy, received wisdom would have seen the strike de-escalated to "match" the de-escalated threat from management.**

But the workers were fighting to stop all job cuts – no compromises – so they stepped up their action and began working a two-day week. Management soon caved.

On London Underground, the experience of the recent job cuts dispute – where the RMT and TSSA staged several 24-

## Battle-plan in brief

- **Strike committees within and between unions**
- **Effective picketing: stop the scabs!**
- **Mass meetings and assemblies, not just rallies.**
- Renew the unions. Fight for union democracy**
- **Set dates for new action. Discuss rolling and selective action. Organise local and national strike levies**
- **Combat the anti-union laws. Prepare for unofficial action. Move union funds so unions can continue to operate after "sequestration"**
- **Make the unions fight for Labour Party democracy. Fight for a workers' government!**

hour strikes – is still fresh in workers' minds. They have very recent and painful experience that a one-day strike is not enough to win concessions. Activists worked out a strategy that involved 48-hours' worth of strike action, but strategically spread across shifts to ensure an entire week's worth of disruption.

It certainly had an impact; after the strikes were announced, the *Evening Standard* was shrieking, terrified, at the prospect of the "longest Tube strikes ever". The lesson is clear: if you want to win, you have to be prepared to take the kind of action that will achieve victory – take action that has an impact.

Southampton also shows how strikes can be creatively planned to do the maximum damage to management plans. The council workers' strike is indefinite – they will not go back to work until their demands are won. But it is also "rolling"; different sections of the workforce strike on different days, for a week at a time, ensuring the impact is spread as widely as possible across the council's functioning. The walkouts are supplemented with ongoing campaigns of action short of strikes (such as work-to-rules and overtime bans), meaning that even when particular sections are not on strike, they are still having an impact.

The old labour movement saying "the longer the picket line, the shorter the strike" also rings true. Sometimes it's not enough to strike longer; you have to strike bigger.

Strikes often lose when they become protracted and stagnate. Looking for ways to spread the dispute is better and almost always necessary. After two days of localised strike action on the Northern and Bakerloo lines (the lines on which Eamonn Lynch and Arwyn Thomas worked) failed to have any significant impact on management, the RMT stepped up the action and launched a ballot of all its driver members across the whole of London Underground. This was a risky step, but a necessary one. Management could ride out disruption on two lines. When threatened with disruption across the whole network, they had to move.

## STRIKE PAY

**"I can't afford to take strike action" is perhaps the most frequently heard reason for people to cross a picket line. Sometimes it's a disingenuous excuse to scab, but it can represent a real financial concern.**

It's an issue that can be dealt with in one fell swoop if unions organise proper strike pay. "No benefit but strike benefit" was said to be a favourite slogan of GMB founder Will Thorne. It's an important principle; unions should exist as means by which workers can take action against their bosses, not service-providers.

In both the Rawmarsh and LU disputes, workers knew strike pay was available. Unions in the Southampton council workers' dispute are also paying strike pay, taken from branch funds but supplemented by financial support from the unions nationally.

Strike funds should be levied from members' dues. That's what your union dues *should* be paying for; not flashy new skyscraper offices or inflated salaries for union leaders. Hardship funds and strike pay should be paid out to those who need them most, so lower-paid workers can participate in disputes alongside better-paid ones.

100% strike pay is impractical; it would mean that strikes would collapse when the money ran out. The purpose of strike pay is to facilitate sustained action rather than one-day stoppages, and to soften the financial hit of striking so as to prevent management starving us into submission.

Almost all strikes will involve some level of financial sacrifice for workers, and every victory depends on convincing the bosses that the workers won't blink first, but no strike should set out *aiming* to be long-drawn-out. Every strike – unless it is explicitly understood as a demonstration or protest – should aim to win, and win quickly.

**We Stand for Workers' Liberty: an activist's guide to changing the world**

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# June: how to win

Strike rally during RMT fight to reinstate sacked union reps. Photo: Vicki Morris.

## DON'T CALL STRIKES OFF FOR EMPTY PROMISES

After the initial nine days of strike action at Rawmarsh, school management were looking shaky. They reduced the number of threatened redundancies, then announced there would be no job cuts until the following September.

Prevailing trade union culture would have led the National Union of Teachers (NUT) to calling off the strikes, but this time it didn't. Although the announcement of the next set of strike dates was sometimes put on hold while talks were ongoing, the dispute was never called off, the ballot mandate was kept live and management went into negotiations knowing that the threat of further strike action was still hanging over them. The NUT negotiated from a position of strength.

The RMT remained similarly resolute. On the eve of a planned 48-hour strike (strategically spread across shift patterns over a week to maximise its impact), Arwyn Thomas's Tribunal panel unexpectedly delivered an early verdict — ruling, as expected, that he was unfairly dismissed. Although LU

bosses clamoured for the RMT to call off their action, the union refused; the demand of the strike was reinstatement, not a particular Tribunal verdict, and until Arwyn was re-employed the strikes remained on. It is unlikely that the Tribunal verdict in and of itself would have been enough to force management's hand. The threat of a week's worth of disruption to their profits did that.

## BUILD A STRIKE SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

Strikes need solidarity to win. In Southampton, action has been complemented and fed into by regular demonstrations, rallies and mass meetings that give supporters of the strike a chance to actively participate.

Unions have conducted an awareness-raising campaign across the city to make sure other workers in Southampton know what the dispute is about, building an understanding of the strike as not just a sectional squabble between employers and employees at the council but a class battle across the whole city. The NUT at Rawmarsh and the rail union RMT on

London Underground also turned outwards, building campaigns of solidarity and inviting support from local and national labour movement bodies. The RMT held a public strike rally on the eve of the last planned strikes (the threat of which finally forced bosses to cave), and organised leafletting of the public to build support for the campaign. They also organised an email campaign through the LabourStart website, which saw London Mayor Boris Johnson and TfL management bombarded with thousands of emails supporting reinstatement for Eamonn and Arwyn.

No strike is guaranteed victory. But a strike based on these kind of steps has a better chance of victory than one which fits the pattern of after-the-fact protests led from above.

**Hundreds of thousands of workers are about to participate in the first set-piece industrial confrontation with the government; if militants in workplaces and union branches can build strikes fought to win, based on rank-and-file democracy and solidarity, then action after 30 June will be more than a one-day set-piece.**

## From Tunis to London, the workers' agenda

**Ideas for Freedom is the annual weekend of socialist discussion and debate hosted by Workers' Liberty. IFF 2011 takes place on 8-10 July at Highgate Newtown Community Centre, 25 Bertram Street, London N19 5DQ.**

For a timetable, more details and to book tickets online see [www.workersliberty.org/ideas](http://www.workersliberty.org/ideas)  
Email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org), or ring 07796 690 874

### Friday 8 July 7pm-11pm

Showing and discussion of Eisenstein's film *Strike* with screenwriter Clive Bradley and Janine Booth.

At the Exmouth Arms, 1 Starcross Street, London NW1 2HR

### Sessions on Saturday 9 July include:

- Eyewitness report from Benghazi by Libyan activist Huda Abuzeid
- The fight for a workers' government, with Sean Matgamna and Jill Mountford
- Chavs: the demonisation of the working class, with Owen Jones and hip-hop artist The Ruby Kid, aka Daniel Randall
- Is anti-semitism marginal? with Robert Fine, Warwick University and Eric Lee of [labourstart.org](http://labourstart.org)
- The working class in the North African and Middle Eastern



revolutions, with speakers from Morocco, Tunisia and Iraq

- Edd Mustill on British workers' "Great Unrest", 1910-1914
- Marxism and anarchism: Martin Thomas of the AWL debates Iain McKay of Anarchist FAQ.

### Sessions on Sunday 10 July include

- Should we be saying "General strike now"? Elaine Jones, vice-president of Wirral TUC, debates Richard Brenner of Workers' Power
- Why we do not denounce NATO intervention in Libya
- How can Labour councillors fight cuts? Poplar, the GLC and today, with Janine Booth, John McDonnell MP and anti-cuts Labour councillors
- The 1880s and 90s: Marxists and the rise of "New Unionism", with Louise Raw, author of *Striking a Light*, on the 1888 matchworkers' strike.
- The Eurozone crisis and workers' struggle across Europe, with John Grahl, Middlesex University.

Tickets bought before end of June are £20 waged, £12 low-waged/students, £7 unwaged/school students (one day £11, £7, £5). From 1 July, £22/£14/£8 (£12/£8/£6) — that's still cheaper than on the day!

# Pensions: who loses, who gains?

Briefing by Chris Reynolds

**Almost all workers and pensioners lose. Employers and the Government gain. The Government plans to save £2.8 billion a year immediately by levying bigger pension contributions from public sector workers from April 2012.**

Already the Government has changed inflation-uprating for pensions from one price index, RPI, to another, CPI, which on average is about 0.8% lower each year. That's an accumulated cut of 15% in your pension after 20 years of retirement. Or if, say, you work as a teacher for 20 years, then do other work for another 20 years, then the value of the pension you claim from your teaching work will have been cut by 15% even before you retire.

The RPI-to-CPI change applies to all pensions: public-sector, state, and private-sector schemes too (unless their terms state explicitly that inflation-uprating means RPI: the Government talks of legislation to override the terms for those schemes).

The Government estimates that the change means a cut of £83 billion in pension liabilities (i.e. in the sum required today to cover future pension payments).

The Government is also increasing the age at which the state pension and public-sector pensions can be claimed. Last October, the Government announced that it would speed up the increase in women's pension age, so that it will reach 65 by November 2018. The state pension age will then increase to 66 for both men and women from December 2018 to April 2020. Chancellor George Osborne has talked of further increases in state pension age which could push it up to 70 before the middle of the century.

The Government plans to change the "accrual rates" for public sector pensions (from 1/60 to 1/80 or 1/100); and to change public-sector pensions from "final salary" to "career average".

## THE GOVERNMENT GAINS? SO THE TAXPAYER GAINS?

**Some taxpayers, maybe. The Thatcher government after 1979 made much noise about cutting taxes, and did cut taxes for companies and for the rich. But for the average working-class household it raised taxes, mostly by shifting the tax burden from visible progressive taxes like income tax to less-visible regressive taxes like VAT.**

The top one thousand people alone in the UK have wealth which increased by £60 billion in 2010 to reach £396 billion, according to the *Sunday Times* Rich List. If those top thousand were reduced to £1 million each (to routine luxury, rather than ultra-riches) then that would yield £395 billion. The total liabilities of the public sector pension schemes, for all the millions of workers they cover, are only £770 billion. Seriously taxing the rich could easily solve any pension-funding problems.

**DON'T WE HAVE TO CUT SOMEWHERE TO LIMIT PENSION COSTS? PEOPLE ARE LIVING LONGER. The Government's own Hutton Report shows that existing public sector pension schemes can balance their books up to about 2060, which is as far ahead as any one can see.**

The schemes vary. The Local Government Pension Scheme is a fund, invested in the stock market, from which pensions are paid. In 2007 its liabilities, at £159 billion, slightly exceeded its assets, at £132 billion. Such comparisons fluctuate from year to year depending, for example, on the state of the stock market.

The NHS, teachers', and civil service schemes are not funds. The Government collects the contributions as current revenue, and pays the pensions out of current revenue. Currently payments into the NHS scheme, for example, far exceed payments out.

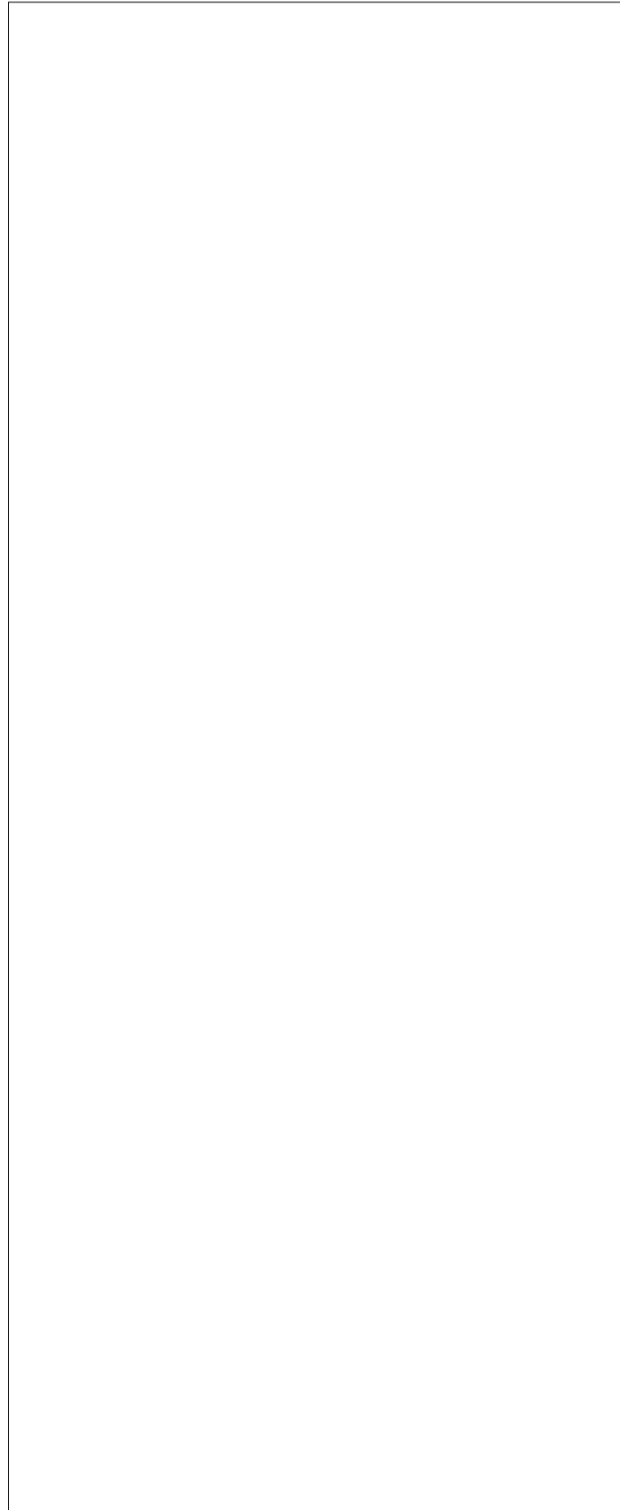
The extent of "living longer" varies enormously with social class. Men in the Parkhead district of Glasgow have a life expectancy of 59, so they will be lucky to claim a pension at all. In well-off Kensington men's life expectancy is 84.

In any case, economic output generally rises over the decades, so a greater share can be allocated to pensioners without having to cut down standards for working-age people or children.

The problem is not that economic output is insufficient in general. It is that over recent decades private employers have almost entirely opted out of contributing to pensions.

In years of stock-market boom they took "contribution holidays", saying that their pension funds were flush so didn't need contributions. Then when harder times came they shut down the schemes.

Compulsory private-employer contribution to pensions — in one way or another, perhaps to pension funds controlled by workers — is the answer.



**Former employees of Visteon UK (offshoot of Ford Motor Company) have fought a long running battle to get full entitlement to their pension.**

## PUBLIC-SECTOR WORKERS GET BETTER PENSIONS THAN PRIVATE-SECTOR. SURELY THAT CAN'T CONTINUE?

**The average pension payouts are £4,000 for the Local Government Pension Scheme, £7,000 for the NHS Pension Scheme, £10,000 for the Teachers' Pension Scheme, and £6,200 for the civil service schemes.**

Even those low figures are better than for most private-sector workers. That is because private-sector pensions have been trashed, and, according to the *Financial Times*, the Government's planned changes in state pension provision will now push the "diminishing rump" of private-sector employers with decent pension plans to scrap them.

The answer is compulsion on private-sector bosses to contribute to decent pensions for their workers.

The grievous inequality in pensions is between top managers and officials and the rest of us. Network Rail boss Iain Coucher has just retired from the job, after only three years, with a lump-sum of £1.6 million including pension payments of £214,000.

Hundreds of thousands of other well-off people retire relatively early, in relatively good health, with pensions not at Coucher's level but better than the highest wages most people can aspire to. For example, a university professor can retire on a pension of £40,000.

If these people have paid off their mortgages, as often they have, they are very well-off in retirement. Routine workers retire on much lower pensions and claim them for fewer years.

## DON'T PEOPLE HAVE TO WORK LONGER WITH THE INCREASE IN LIFE EXPECTANCY?

**More people still feeling youthful at 60 or 65 will work longer. That's fine. But what about the people whose jobs leave them worn out at 60? There are still plenty of jobs that do that.**

Meanwhile the Government is forcing many people much younger than 60 out of the workforce, by cutting public-service jobs and deliberately sustaining mass unemployment as a bludgeon to force down pay and conditions. Lose your job at 50-plus these days, and however hard you try to find a new job, there's a good chance that you'll get nothing except scraps of casual work.

When the economy is run so that everyone young or middle-aged, and in passable health, has a decent job open to them, then perhaps we can start listening to what the Government says about more over-60s or over-65s working.

## WHAT DO "ACCRUAL RATES" MEAN?

**In the private sector, "defined contribution" schemes are now common. You pay a fixed amount into a fund (and, with luck, your employer pays too), and at retirement you get a lump sum depending on how the fund has prospered.**

You can then trade in that lump sum for an annuity (a regular yearly payment until you die).

You take the risk. If there is a stock-market crash, your pension goes down with it.

The public-sector schemes are "defined-benefit", which means that whatever the stock market you are promised a pension related either to your "final salary" or your "career average".

Most people do not work in the same job, or even in the same sector, all their life. If you work as a teacher for 20 years, for example, then you "accrue" 20/60 (one-third) of "final salary" as your pension. You may also accrue other pension rights from other jobs.

Part of the Government's plan is to reduce "accrual rates" from 1/60 (the usual rate now in the public sector) to 1/80 or 1/100. With a 1/80 accrual rate, you have to work 40 years in the same sector to get 40/80 (one-half) of your "final salary", or "career average", as a pension. This move obviously goes together with the Government's plan to raise the age at which you can claim your pension.

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "FINAL SALARY" AND "CAREER AVERAGE"?

**Most public-sector pension schemes promise a pension linked to "final salary". (That may mean not literally your pay in the last year before retirement, but, say, the average of the best three years in your last ten years before retirement).**

The Nuvos pension scheme in the civil service (for everyone joining the civil service since 2007) is "career average". The Government wants to change all schemes to "career average".

There are advantages to "career average". Managers and the like usually get many promotions in their working life, and end up on much higher pay than routine workers, and so inequality during working lives is preserved and magnified in retirement under "final salary" schemes.

There is a very big hitch. A calculation of your "career average" pay depends on the inflation-uprating applied to the pay you got 30 or 20 years ago. If the inflation-uprating is at a low rate, and if the "accruals" rate is not improved (since, even for the less-promoted, "career average" will still be less than "final salary"), then a "career average" scheme ends up much worse than "final salary".

## SHOULDN'T THE UNIONS NEGOTIATE MORE BEFORE STRIKING?

**The Government is happy to negotiate on details. It is rigid about demanding an extra 3%-plus of workers' pay in pension contributions, overall, but happy to talk to the unions about whether Jack should pay 6% extra and Jill 0% extra, or both 3%, or Jill 6% and Jack 0%.**

It has already implemented the RPI-to-CPI change. It is rigid on all the main principles of its plan.

Union leaders may win some concessions on details. Mainstream experts have warned that the Government's plans risk "crashing" public-sector pension schemes by prompting so many workers to opt out that there aren't enough current workers paying in to cover the pay-outs to pensioners. The Local Government Pension Scheme already has over 25% of workers opting out, and about 10% of new teachers now opt out of the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

**The union leaders could present small concessions as grounds for calling off action. But unless the basics of the Government's plan are defeated, working-class pensioners across the board will lose billions.**



# The left and 30 June

By Martin Thomas

**AWL was distributing leaflets calling for rank and file control in the unions' battle against the Coalition government cuts, for the use of selective and rolling strikes and strike levies, and for a political fight for a workers' government. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP) were distributing leaflets calling for a general strike.**

It was a meeting in central London on 22 June, entitled "Unite the Resistance", in effect an SWP rally but nominally non-partisan and giving platform slots to Rob Williams, for the SP's National Shop Stewards' Network, and Andrew Burgin, for Counterfire's Coalition of Resistance.

A large-ish meeting was applauding calls for a general strike, and we were finicking about union democracy and political machinations? Why?

In essence, the SP's and the SWP's demand is not that the unions plan anything different. It is that a different, more revolutionary-sounding, *name* be attached to what the unions are already planning.

The big unions are already talking of another one-day strike, involving Unison, Unite, and GMB public sector members as well as teachers and civil service workers, in mid-October.

Talking is not organising. Now his union conference delegates have gone home, Unison leader Dave Prentis is already rowing backwards, and pretending to find "positive" things in union negotiations with the Government on its plans to trash public-sector pensions.

Activists have to fight hard even to hold the union leaders to what they have promised. However, there was not much about that from SP, SWP, etc. on 22 June.

The mood was summed up best by Mark Campbell, a UCU union rep at London Metropolitan University and an SWP member. The main public-sector unions will all be striking together in October, he said, and "we should call that what it is: a general strike!" Wild applause.

## GENERAL STRIKE

**The SP had posters saying "24 hour public sector [small] General Strike [big] Now! [huge]". Here, "now" cannot be read too literally to mean "today" or "this week". To give the name "General Strike Now" to the plan recommended in the NSSN's leaflet and the SP's paper is, however, asking too much of literary licence.**

The leaflet talks only of "reaching out to... unions such as Unison, Unite, the GMB and NASUWT to draw them into further coordinated action as soon as possible. This would pose the idea of, at least initially, a 24-hour public sector general strike of some four million workers".

The SP/ NSSN hopes that the union leaders will do what they promise in October, and the SP/ NSSN's contribution will be to give the action a different *name*: general strike.

This is not the sort of renaming that can be useful in politics, as when we convince a young person that their attitudes add up to being a feminist, or a socialist, although the person has thought of herself or himself as "not wanting to get involved in politics". The renaming of the union leaders' plans encourages not a sharper awareness, and steps forward like recognising kinship with the other feminists or socialists, but a more phrase-fuddled satisfaction with what is.

30 June, and the promised bigger one-day strike in October, are big enough and important enough as they really are, as protest demonstrations, not to need dressing up. But SWP opposes calling meetings on 30 June where strikers can discuss and demand sharper plans for their unions on the grounds that the unions "already have a plan".

There is no point in pretending that teachers, civil service workers, local government staff, and NHS employees can hit capital hard, economically, by a one-day strike. Those public-sector workers who *can* hit hard even by one-day action, Royal Mail and London Underground workers, are not on course for inclusion in October (they are not affected by the pension changes currently the focus for October). The leaflets and the speeches on 22 June had no talk of, for example, modifying October's prospectus to bring them in.

Pumping up the October one-day action in that way would obviously have advantages, though on the whole I think that would be a wrong choice for socialists to focus on that option. The point here is that the SP and SWP, focused on the October action and its "renaming" into "general strike", do not address what might be done to boost it into a more substantial "general strike". Instead, they attribute almost magical powers to the existing October plans.

SWP/ Right to Work: "In the autumn all the unions, including the big three — Unite, Unison, and the GMB —



**SWP-organised invasion of ACAS during talks in the BA dispute — to "expose" the union leaders. Short-term agitation replaces serious political campaigning.**

need to strike together... If we all struck together — a general strike — it would stop the Con-Dems in their tracks". RTW's model motion for union branches demands nothing from the union leaders but support for demonstrations which RTW is planning at the Lib-Dem and Tory conferences in September and October.

In an interview published in the *New Statesman* on 23 June, PCS [civil service union] general secretary Mark Serwotka, who spoke on 22 June, proposed a perspective of working-class action building up "incrementally" for the next four years, over the whole life of the Government.

## GARBLED

**As with the renaming of October, we have here a good socialist idea garbled, or rather two good socialist ideas garbled so as to transform them from spurs to organising into demagogic self-consolation.**

Often working-class action starts with a warning strike, or a strike in only one section, and then builds up or spreads out as workers gain confidence and a sense of solidarity. But to rename a possible October protest strike as the decisive "general strike", and to dismiss the need for rank and file control to redefine action beyond protest strikes, does not help extension.

Again: today, the battles against the first big round of council cuts budgets, against higher university tuition fees, and against the first rush of job cuts in the civil service, have been lost. That does not mean that future battles will be lost.

In 1970-1, the Tory government of the time, driving a policy of Thatcherism-before-Thatcher, won a series of victories over a labour movement slow to adjust to the sudden shift of government policy away from over twenty years of softly-softly. Then in early 1972 a wave of militancy began which would rise as high as the 1920s.

Today the labour movement has lived through a long period of relative capitalist upswing (1992-2007) and a long period of growth in public-service employment. Maybe it will take time to readjust, and then readjust fast.

That is a fundamental idea for socialists *after* setbacks. To make that thought an excuse for not speaking honestly about the battles *now* is another matter.

Serwotka's "incremental" perspective comes down to him saying: what I, and my [SP-controlled] union, are proposing now will lead to defeat on the immediate issues. But never mind. The workers won't be daunted. Bit by bit they will push the unions generally into stronger action, and by 2015 to adequate action.

It is a hindrance, not a help, to serious working-class strategy to have the SP and SWP decorating Mark Serwotka's "incremental" plan with claims that the October plan is "really" a general strike, likely to bring the Government down, or a step on an escalator smoothly leading to a full-scale general strike.

We (AWL) must not allow our opposition to making "gen-

eral strike" an (empty) slogan now to trap us into a static or gradualist view of things. The class struggle can sometimes "skip stages". The 1926 general strike in Britain came when union membership had been falling since 1920, to only 63% of the 1920 figure, and strike-days had been decreasing since 1921. In the run-up to the French general strike of June 1936, Leon Trotsky denounced the Stalinised Communist Party for constantly appealing for strikes on limited economic issues. He wrote: "The masses make hardly any response to appeals for strikes on a purely economic plane... The masses understand or feel that, under the conditions of the crisis and of unemployment, partial economic conflicts require unheard-of sacrifices which will never be justified in any case by the results obtained. The masses wait for and demand other and more efficacious methods".

But the SP's and SWP's implausible calls on the TUC to launch a general strike are very different from Trotsky's arguments in 1935. They are implausible even as a "measuring rod" to judge the TUC by, because the blunt truth is that if the TUC suddenly called on all workers to strike, then the "adventurist" about-turn would produce chaos and demoralisation rather than powerful action. Their dressing up of October as "the general strike" differs from Trotsky's arguments in 1935 for general-strike agitation because it lacks honesty, thought-through-ness, and grounding in reality. Their agitation is a hindrance, not a help, to real advance towards a general strike.

## TROTSKY

**In 1935 in France, Trotsky was demanding of the recently-formed United Front of the Communist Party and Socialist Party "a broad political offensive". "The workers' alliance of parties and trade unions must be formed... [It] will have no revolutionary value unless it is oriented toward the creation of:**

"1. Committees of struggle representing the mass itself... 2. Workers' militia..."

"Committees... must become, during the course of the struggle, organisms directly elected by the masses... On this basis the proletarian power will be erected in opposition to the capitalist power, and the Workers' and Peasants' Commune will triumph".

Trotsky knew that the Communist Party and Socialist Party leaders were frauds — but also that beneath them there was a bubbling mass of organised and revolutionary-minded workers who could (and would in June 1936) go over their heads. Honestly and clearly, he mapped a course by which the "going over the leaders' heads" could win.

We do not have that bubbling mass, yet, but we too need honesty and clarity.

The agitation of the SP and SWP is unpolitical, except on the level of routine populist denunciations of Cameron and the ultra-rich.

The SP/ NSSN blusters: "Cameron, Clegg, Osborne... the people are coming! Get out now!" The SWP orates: "Let's march together, let's strike together. Let's bring them down".

Neither says anything about what should replace the Coalition. They know that Ed Miliband is useless. Instead of developing any agitation for the unions and the left to reshape the Labour Party, they effectively recommend workers to "forget" Ed Miliband's uselessness temporarily, all the better to sound a militant note about bringing down the Government. (Later — "incrementally", no doubt — they will turn back to routine anti-Labourism).

The Coalition's measures can be deflected or limited here and there by local and sectoral action, and that is vital, but to reverse them fully we need a different government, and a means of exerting organised working-class pressure on it.

**It is in part because the path to getting such a government and such means is currently so very obstacle-strewn and impassable-looking that "general strike" calls are unrealistic as yet. There is nothing for it but to set to shifting the obstacles.**

## Chris Bambery's *The Left and the Crisis: a critique*

**Tom Unterrainer of Workers' Liberty responds to arguments in a new pamphlet by Chris Bambery, former leading SWPer and now a chief theoretician for the Counterfire group. More in *Solidarity* 211.**

<http://bit.ly/m8XgRF>

# “I take it you know the way out”

Martyn Hudson reviews *Bento's Sketchbook* by John Berger, Verso,

**Whatever the vagaries of his political positions and assessments since the early 50s (including a softness on the Stalinist regimes, a huge silence about the Nazi death camps, and a disposition to support essentially feudal resistance movements to capital) John Berger remains an important resource in thinking about the nature of oppression and its relationship to art.**

His critical writings on art (certainly his work on Picasso and Soviet sculpture) are fundamentally questionable whilst his critical survey of everything from Guevara to Rushdie, the Hungarian uprising (where he stood with the regime) to the revolutions of 1989 demonstrate a profound political naivety. Yet, much of his other work displays a passionate commitment to witnessing that period of capital as it extended its dominion in the late twentieth century. It is here that his importance lies.

Berger's work on the country doctor, *A Fortunate Man*, with Jean Mohr, and his fictional trilogy *Into their Labours*, about peasant life and mythology in the French Alps, are absolutely necessary to understanding the historical memory of the working class. The trilogy documents the migration of the peasantry into the cities and the birth of a new European working class. Berger welcomes this whilst having grave reservations about what would be culturally forgotten or superseded in that transition.

Along with work of the same period about migrant labour, Berger did not just speak of the oppressed, but stood with them, talked with them, drew them, and documented the passing of ancient regimes and doomed class formations. One of his most moving tributes to the culture and history of the working class is in his essay on miners where he talks of the relationship of art to political emancipation: “I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that often art has judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past suffered, so that it has never been forgotten.” (*Miners* 1991).

In this new work the project of understanding the relationship between oppression and supporting liberation through creation (in this case, drawing) continues.

Ostensibly masquerading as Bento's [the philosopher Spinoza's] lost sketchbook, it weaves a complex journey through landscape and history to look at how drawing is inextricably linked to Berger's and in turn, Spinoza's at-

## John Berger

tempt to overcome a materialist/spiritualist dichotomy to create a Marxism which is fundamentally linked to both rationality and to “salvation”.

This problem has been addressed many times in Marxist historiography and philosophy, often by way of using Spinoza to refute Hegel and Hegelian dialectics. It often takes its inspiration from a reading of the *Grundrisse* with that work being read “against” *Capital*.

Toni Negri's reading of Spinoza in *The Savage Anomaly* sees Spinoza as a new foundation for a “Marxist politics of the multitude”. It is up to others to assess whether this is any development from Althusserian readings of Spinoza. In any case it lays the path for an alternative reading of the development of Marxism and class politics and undoubtedly has political consequences for class organisation, the role of intellectuals and for the role of the party as the historical memory of the working class (and not necessarily positively).

It is in uncovering historical memory that this book excels. Beginning from the historical memory of Spinoza the lens-grinder and expert in optics, it reveals a Spinoza obsessed with the nature of visibility and rendering visible what is unseen — particularly with regard to drawing. Berger's sketches in the book are central to understanding observation and creativity.

As Berger has noted elsewhere, “creation is a constant cor-

recting of errors”, and in the book that journey to making visible through drawing a line on the page is likened to Berger driving his motorbike through the Alps to reach a destination which becomes observable as he reaches it.

Spinoza becomes a vehicle for drawing the other world of the future. “Right from the beginning,” Berger says, “I didn't think it was a book about Spinoza. I thought of it as a book about the world we are living in, and which so often we refuse to look at, for the good and the bad. The project was to see the world today in which we are living”.

Rendering visible the world in which we live through drawing then becomes a journey to understand that world through the trivial items of everyday existence — an old bicycle, a swimming pool. Perhaps most movingly this is done in a painting by an obscure artist called Kleber in Petrograd in 1922 in that decisive moment where the gains of the revolution are fading.

The sheer power of writing the word “Kleber” in memory of that moment a century ago in a midnight very different to ours seems to me to be hugely significant — as much as the last words of Babel from the NKVD archives or the uncovering of lost works of Platonov, a writer again rethought in terms of historical significance by Berger in the sketchbook

The optics of Spinoza become a measure of perpetuating liberty and creation against totalitarianism and indifference — Spinoza was himself exposed as a heretic and expelled from the Jewish community of the Netherlands. Berger uses drawing to elaborate freedom against those who would eliminate or de-create. The “act of liberation” embodied in describing the real becomes for Berger part of a global resistance and struggle to find spiritual satisfaction in the materialist overturning of the statues of tyrants.

The Arab spring becomes a summer — made possible by the constant creation of the working class — drawing their routes to the future on the ground before them, on the walls of buildings, and on the banners hoisted over the palaces of the despots (and in memory of those who perished in its basements).

**Finally and amusingly, Berger himself still retains that revolutionary urge to stand against authority. Forbidden by a private security guard to draw a sketch of one of the Christs in the National Gallery, he swore and was asked to leave the building — “I take it you know the way out, Sir” said the guard. Berger knows the way out and has plotted the route for all of us.**

## F is for Factions



**ABC of Marxism**  
By Tom Unterrainer

**The ins-and-outs of revolutionary organisation may seem like a “side issue” when set against some of the bigger, weightier-sounding concepts. That there is such a lot of confusion surrounding the question of how socialists can and should organise is a symptom of wider political misunderstandings.**

The words “faction” and “factionalism” are particularly loaded. Only recently the Socialist Workers Party — the largest revolutionary group in Britain — suffered not one but two splits. Both times, “factions” and “factionalism” were thrown about as insults against those who split. But not every faction is a manifestation of unhealthy “factionalism”.

A faction is a group within a revolutionary organisation that organises to win the majority to a particular perspective or point of view. In healthily functioning groups, factions are granted minority rights: the ability to communicate with the entire group as well as amongst themselves; a platform at conferences and deliberative meetings; and, usually, space in publications like journals and newspapers. Importantly, members have the right to form factions at any time.

Factions have duties, too: the duty not to disrupt majority decisions in practical activity, and the duty to deal honestly and loyally with the majority.

A well-functioning organisation will be able to argue out big and sharp differences without the overhead costs of fully-fledged factions. But the right to form factions must always be there.

As Leon Trotsky put it: “If factions are not wanted, there must not be any permanent groupings; if permanent group-

ings are not wanted, temporary groupings must be avoided; finally, in order that there be no temporary groupings, there must be no differences of opinion, for wherever there are two opinions, people inevitably group together. But how, on the other hand, to avoid differences of opinion...?”

Or again: “If the membership is fairly homogeneous, there will be only temporary groupings — unless the leadership is incorrect. And this will be shown best in practice. So, when a difference occurs, a discussion should take place, a vote be taken, and a majority line adopted. There must be no discrimination against the minority; any personal animosity will compromise not them but the leadership. Real leadership will be loyal and friendly to the disciplined minority”.

Factions are not simply a “democratic right” within revolutionary organisations. Comrades with dissenting views have the political responsibility to argue their case and if necessary to form a faction. It is always possible that the formation of a faction could result in a split, so serious revolutionaries go for explicit faction-formation only as a last resort. But the imperative to argue out the politics is overriding.

Organisations with a healthy internal democracy do not encourage factions; they strive, by open and patient discussion, to make them unnecessary. But they are ready and willing to accommodate them.

Groups like the SWP and in fact most of the Trotskyist left tolerate factions, if at all, only for short prescribed periods before their conferences, and only as “limited issue” groupings — not as efforts to unseat one leadership and install another (as may sometimes be necessary). After the conference, the faction must not only accept the majority decision (for now); it must dissolve (or pretend to dissolve), regardless of whether or not the dispute has been adequately resolved. Such an attitude is alien to the real spirit of our movement.

Take for example the history of Lenin's Bolshevik party. The Bolsheviks themselves originated as a faction within the larger Russian Social Democratic Party. “Factions existed in

the Bolshevik party as temporary groupings of opinion”, wrote Trotsky, “during its whole life — except for a brief period in 1921 when they were forbidden by unanimous vote of the leadership as an extreme measure during an acute crisis”. The 1921 decision was surely a mistake, but it was also never effective, until Stalin suppressed not only factions but the whole Bolshevik party as a living force.

“Factionalism”, in the sense of a premature and unjustified drive to form factions, is a different matter. Our movement and organisations attract some individuals and groups of individuals who are either essentially hostile or susceptible to influence by outside ideas. It is also not uncommon for one organised group to enter another with the express purpose of causing problems. In either case, the political and organisational disruption caused by these people can be called “factionalism”.

“Factionalism” can manifest itself in frequent and repeated demands for the formation of factions within the democratic framework. Historically, those who practise factionalism often combine with others on a very weak and ill-defined premise. Other times, “factional” groups remain outside of the democratic framework and sow seeds of despondency. Either way, persistent factionalism is very damaging.

One further issue to consider is this: if even tiny revolutionary organisations can be split or splintered by the formation of factions, how can we hope to unite the left into one, coherent party? Again, history points the way.

All historical examples of the formation of large revolutionary socialist parties and organisations are the story of separate groups and factions coming together on a principled basis. This coming together never meant the cessation of political discussion and debate. It required, of course, some will to see the old divisions as “old”, and approach things afresh, but it also never meant a ban on factions.

**Everything points to the fact that unless the revolutionary left accepts the necessity of consistent democracy within its own house, including the rights of factions, then left unity is off the cards.**

## Southampton workers press onwards

By Stewart Ward

**Southampton council workers' strike movement continues after talks with ACAS broke down in late June.**

Tuesday 28 June will see street cleaners, parking staff, refuse collectors, librarians and others take renewed strike action in a dispute that involves over 2,000 workers — members of Unison and Unite.

Over 4,000 workers face redundancy on 11 July if they refuse to sign up to the Tory council's new terms, which will mean significant pay cuts of between two and five per-

cent, as well as other attacks. The tactic of imposing new conditions by threatening, or actually carrying out, mass redundancies has become increasingly common since the coalition government came to power, with London firefighters along with local government workers in several authorities across the UK facing similar attacks.

As the right-wing press begins to overflow with scandalised articles about the amount of rubbish piling up on the streets, the council has moved to hire agency workers to clear the backlog of refuse that has built up due to the strikes and refuse workers' ongoing work-to-rule. The legality of this move is questionable; it is illegal for bosses to hire agency workers to do the jobs of strikers, but a loophole in the law allows them to hire strike breakers if they are

employed directly. The hypocrisy of a council which can afford to employ strikebreakers while claiming its existing employees must take pay cuts will undoubtedly anger an already bitter and resentful workforce.

A feeder march of local government workers and their supporters will join a joint PCS-NUT rally on June 30 as the council strikes intersect with the national pensions dispute.

**In a labour movement where one-day protest strikes, called and controlled from above, are all too often the only weapon in a union's arsenal, other public sector unions should learn from Southampton's example.**

• For an interview with Mike Tucker, branch secretary of Southampton District Unison, see: [bit.ly/mPl3Kk](http://bit.ly/mPl3Kk)

## British Airways: uneasy truce in a fight that deserved more

By Darren Bedford

**British Airways cabin crew workers have voted overwhelmingly, by 92% on a 72% turnout, to accept a deal from management that restores an uneasy peace and ends a dispute which has seen nearly a month's worth of strike action since 2009.**

The deal represents some very real concessions from management which should not be dismissed or downplayed. It includes the complete restoration of staff travel allowances (a contractual "perk" without which many workers, deliberately recruited by BA from abroad because of their language skills, could not afford to actually get to work) which Willie Walsh abolished during the dispute as part of a sustained campaign of belligerent union busting aimed at breaking the morale of a well-organised workforce who had consistently turned out in large numbers to vote by large majorities for strikes. It is a real climbdown from Walsh, and one which he must have based on a desire to avoid further confrontation with a workforce whose actions have already cost him £150 million.

The massive majority by which the deal was endorsed must be seen as an indication of the weariness of most BA workers, and against such a backdrop any shrill cries of "sell out!" or demands for further strikes would

only appear as ultra-left posturing without any appreciation for the realities of the industrial situation. But the inescapable bottom-line fact of the deal is that Walsh's scheme (variously referred to as "new fleet" or "mixed fleet", and based on significant cuts to staffing levels, pay freezes and the establishment of a two-tier workforce within the company), the very thing against which the dispute was launched in the first place, will be introduced in more-or-less the form that Walsh wanted in the first place. While the reversal of some of the attacks suffered during the course of the campaign is real and significant, the final balance sheet of the dispute must conclude that it is a defeat for the workers.

### TERRAIN

**Could that defeat have been avoided? Certainly by the time the final deal was put on the table it was difficult to see how things could've been turned around.**

The campaign was conducted defensively at least from early 2011 (when the last round of strike ballots was conducted, specifically over the issue of travel allowance rather than the initial cuts), and in practice from a long time before that. The terrain of the dispute had shifted so fundamentally away from the issue of Walsh's project and onto the removal of travel allowance that it was hard to see it being shifted back.

On that terrain, the workers have landed a blow. But if the tone of the strike had been more "offensive" from the get-go (picket line placards and union propaganda struck a consistently conciliatory and apologetic note, hardly likely to leave the belligerent Walsh quaking in his boots), and if the union had explored the possibilities for expanding the dispute to other sections of the BA workforce, and the wider workforce at Heathrow, the main hub of the strikes, then things might have turned out differently.

All of that is speculation now. What we can say concretely is that the dispute has two real lessons — one positive and one negative. Positively, it shows that workers who are prepared to take strike action and remain resolute, even in the face of a union-busting management, can win things. The restoration of travel allowance is a concession forced from management and without their history of massive strike votes and solid action behind them it would not have been won. Strike action does get the goods.

But the negative lesson is that a dispute fought on an entirely defensive basis, with little or no concrete demands, gives management the upper hand from day one.

**The cabin crew workers, so keen to let people know that they "weren't militants", have in many ways distinguished themselves in this dispute, and deserved more.**

## Unison: tough talk, but...

By a conference delegate

**As the sovereign decision making body of over one million public sector workers, Unison's National Delegate Conference 2011 (21-24 June) should have been one of the most significant labour movement events in recent years.**

As the government tries to impose the biggest assault on working-class pension provision in the history of British capitalism, this conference was an opportunity to get our union geared up for action.

By his tough talk in the run-up to conference, Prentis repositioned himself as the leader of the awkward squad of union leaders, despite the fact that he has refused to call out Unison members for 30 June.

However, there was a noticeable and real leftward shift. The union leadership are calling for a turn away from the servicing model and towards an organising approach. The Executive also supported some amendments arguing that branches should be able to talk to one another and have access to the email addresses of their members (things currently blocked by union officialdom). These were small but important victories for democracy in the union.

More significantly, in his speech to conference Prentis signalled the end of the witchhunt by stating "there are no enemies in this room". The imagina-

**Dave Prentis backtracks, see page 3**

tive use of the union's disciplinary apparatus to silence left-wing activists has caused enormous damage over the last five years.

On Wednesday afternoon, conference voted to maintain a boycott of Histadrut pending a review, against the recommendation of the NEC.

On Thursday afternoon, conference unexpectedly overturned the leadership on a number of rule changes which sought to further centralise power away from branches. By the end of the session, Prentis looked like a beaten man.

Apart from these minor skirmishes, there was no satisfactory debate and no discussion on our industrial strategy. Prentis managed to outflank the other union leaders and the left by saying we need more than one day of action. However, Unison members still have no timetable for action nor any answer on what will constitute a victory.

The problem we face is that it is impossible to ballot 1.2 million people strictly within the confines of the anti-union laws. If the government is feeling

confident, then they will be able to find a minor discrepancy in the ballot (e.g. some workers who have been redeployed) and challenge the union in the courts. Activists need to start discussing what we do in the event of a court injunction and start organising for unofficial action.

Conference made some strong commitments to turn away from social partnership and towards a class struggle approach.

Time will tell if the strong words can be turned into a reality. For the past fifteen years, the bureaucracy has trained up a generation of activists in social partnership and sectarianism towards the left. The leadership now recognise that they need the left if they are going to make Prentis' words a reality.

**We should have no illusions in Prentis and his cronies, but their verbal leftism may yet unleash a movement from below that can beat the government and rejuvenate the union.**

### Unison and Histadrut

**For an article on the debate in Unison about the union's relations with the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut, see [bit.ly/kbZHwY](http://bit.ly/kbZHwY)**

**For a review of Omar Barghouti's new book on the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, see [bit.ly/IDASuK](http://bit.ly/IDASuK)**

## 30 June round-up

By Kieran Miles

**Public sector pensions strikers will be joined on June 30 by workers taking action in a number of local disputes.**

In south London, journalists continue to strike over job losses at Newsquest. 33 workers took to the picket line in Sutton on 27 June, the second strike in a month.

Teachers' unions NUT and ATL will be striking at Strode's College in Egham. Students from Royal Holloway will be going to the pickets, and students in the college will be walking out of classes. Then in the afternoon, hundreds of strikers from across Surrey, including representatives from Save Our Services in Surrey, and all 16 unions that work in Surrey County Council, will be meeting in Camberley to discuss future industrial action over the summer. This will culmi-

nate in a demonstration outside Education Secretary Michael Gove's office.

A Doncaster Unison strike ballot found 66% in favour of striking on June 30. The ballot was in response to proposed local cuts of £70 million — including 700 job losses. The Unison strike will involve classroom assistants, lunchtime supervisors, cleaners and other non-teaching school staff, as well as other council workers such as grounds maintenance workers, council drivers, and social workers.

Unison members in the repairs and improvements section of Camden Council's Housing & Adult Social Care directorate will be striking on June 30. Over 80% voted in favour of striking in the ballot. Camden branch secretary George Binette said: "The overwhelming Yes vote reflects the anger felt by members at the dismissal

of their colleagues, especially when two-dozen or more agency staff are undertaking work those at risk could well be doing and when numerous posts in the new structure are still vacant." He added: "The impact on black staff of this restructure and the cuts programme as a whole seems to have been very disproportionate. At least half of those at risk of redundancy in repairs and improvements are black."

Unite members working at Fujitsu in Crewe will be striking over the victimisation and sacking of union representative Alan Jenney.

**Strikers are also rejecting offers from a pay review which would give them a 3.3% pay cut — despite having had a pay freeze in 2009, and recent news that many managers have received "Fujitsu Stars" holidays on company expense.**

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Victory on the Tube: Arwyn Thomas reinstated!

By Ira Berkovic

**Arwyn Thomas, an RMT (rail union) rep unfairly dismissed by London Underground management, was reinstated on 22 June to LU employment on drivers' pay.**

Although he still faces downgrading and a sixth-month suspension (during which time he will be employed by the RMT as an organiser), his reinstatement is an enormous victory for Tube workers against a management which seemed, until recently, intransigent.

Arwyn is one of three prominent RMT reps sacked during the course of the 2010/2011 job cuts dispute (the others are Peter Hartshorn and Eamonn Lynch). Arwyn's reinstatement makes the scoreline in that particular conflict 3-0 to the workers, after Peter and Eamonn were also reinstated earlier in the year.

Success in this campaign may give Tube workers a much-needed morale boost to take into their next battle — a fight over pay in which bosses are attempting to impose a 5-year deal at rates only very slightly above inflation. The dispute also has extremely significant lessons for the wider labour movement (see centre pages).

Janine Booth, London Transport region representative on the RMT Executive, said: "This is a very important win that reps and activists worked very hard to achieve. Arwyn has been steadfast and principled throughout, and the union adopted a strategy where we escalated action when we had to, put the rank-and-file train grades and strike committees in the driving seat, and called imaginative action which we refused to call off until Arwyn's return to work was secured. The outcome is not 100% perfect, but in the circumstances, it is a big victory."

**"We will now be using this momentum to build union strength in the workplace to enable us to fight off future attacks."**

• For more, see centre pages

# 48-hour general strike in Greece

By Alan Gilbert

**Greece's two union confederations, Gsee and Adedy, have called another general strike on 28 and 29 June, this time for 48 hours.**

It is to apply pressure on the parliamentary vote on the Pasok government's new plan for cuts and privatisation, imposed in order to get new IMF, EU, and European Central Bank credit.

Buses, air traffic, docks, power stations, etc. will be

all be strikebound. Hospitals and health centres will operate emergency cover only.

Greece's small-business federation is also backing the site.

The Indignant Citizens' movement which has demonstrated in Syntagma Square since 25 May, and whose pressure must have contributed to the union confederations moving from 24 hour strikes to a 48 hour one, is holding its own rally, joining the union demonstrations later on

Tuesday, and then encircling parliament on Wednesday.

However, yet more action will be needed to defeat the cuts plan, which is pushed by big world powers, promoted by Pasok (Greece's equivalent of the Labour Party), and opposed, in mainstream politics, only demagogically by New Democracy (Greece's equivalent of the Tories: they demand more cuts instead of Pasok's planned tax rises).

Vasilis Grollios writes from Thessaloniki: "Every-

one will be on strike on Tuesday and Wednesday [28/29 June] and thousands of people will gather in Syntagma Square and at the White Tower in Thessaloniki. The question is whether the new bill on taxes and privatisations will be voted through by the MPs.

"I think yes, it will. There are a lot of Pasok MPs who grumble, but they will finally succumb to party discipline, as usual".

**A political alternative is needed, too.**

## "Black men are not safe in police custody"

By Pdraig O'Brien

**Demetre Fraser, 21, from Peckham, south London, has died in suspicious circumstances after a visit from the West Midlands police.**

Staying in Birmingham as part of his bail conditions following an assault charge by his girlfriend (later withdrawn), Fraser was visited by police on 31 May, apparently for a rou-

tine check of his electronic tag. He died the same day after a fall from the 11th floor of the building where he was staying; the police insist the death was suicide, but neighbours report hearing a huge commotion and seeing evidence of a struggle.

Fraser is the third black man, after Smiley Culture and Kingsley Burrell, to die recently in extremely suspicious circumstances in po-

lice custody or following encounters with the police.

Fraser's mother, Ms Josette Fraser, said "They are trying to tell me my son jumped off an 11th floor balcony and killed himself. Why? His girlfriend had withdrawn the charge against him [...]"

**"The idea that my son committed suicide is some sort of sick joke. Black men are not safe in police custody."**

Demetre Fraser

## Further Education staff fight cuts

By a UCU member

**Further education (FE) lecturers are bracing themselves for a round of cuts taking effect in the autumn. Some colleges are already in dispute with management.**

Further cuts will be inevitable when the change in eligibility to free courses for those on benefits comes through. At the moment there is free provision for individuals on benefits. Next year this will only apply to those on job-seekers' allowance and who are actively seeking work. Those on inactive benefits (Income Support) will no longer be eligible for free provision and will have to pay fees which are 50% of their programme.

This affects many students who want to study on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses.

In the meantime disputes are ongoing at:

- Westminster

Kingsway — in dispute over redundancies and have balloted for industrial action. 88% voted for strike action and 95% for action short of strike.

- Croydon College over redundancies. Messages of support to Margot at hillm@croydon.ac.uk .

- Ealing and Hammer-smith over redundancies. Messages of support to Tim at timothy.dalrymple@wlc.ac.uk
- Conel, although they have won on compulsory redundancies, are still in dispute over provision. Messages of support to Jenny at jsutton@staff.conel.ac.uk

- City of Westminster over redundancies and victimisation. Messages of support to Phil at phil.flanders@cw.ac.uk

- Barnsley College are set to escalate their action to four days next week over redundancies and union busting. Send messages of support to Dave at d.gibson@barnsley.ac.uk