

For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 305 27 November 2013 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

TORY PLOT **SEE PAGES** 6-7 AGAINST YOUTH



NOT WORKING

ONE MILLION YOUNG JOBLESS

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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Genoa revolt subsidises

By Hugh Edwards

After five days of all-out strikes by Genoa's public sector transport workers, a ferociously contested four-hour mass assembly on Saturday 23 November resulted in resigned acceptance of a shabby deal cooked up by the local mayor and the bureaucrats of the major unions involved.

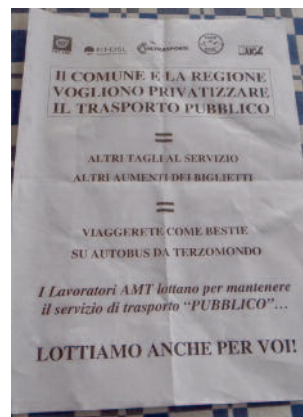
The strike had been launched by rank-and-file workers against the "left-wing" Mayor's plans to privatise the local public owned transport company, against a background of cuts to wages and conditions.

Almost instantaneously the radical momentum of the collective "downing of tools" of nearly 3,000 workers spread across the city, bringing council workers out in solidarity and the mass of the working public in open sympathy.

After workers invaded the council meeting which was due to sanction the privatisation plan, the dynamic of the action changed and the city had an air of revolt. "This is no longer a strike, but a revolution" one of the workers stated.

Transport workers in Torino and Rome announced immediate financial support if there was any attempt to prosecute the workforce (for invading the council meeting).

The prospect of national contagion grew fast, and the local and national union bureaucrats decided to act fast,



Transport workers' strike leaflet for passengers, predicting a "third world" transport service. It ends: "we are fighting for you!"

cynically and ruthlessly.

In Rome they announced a four-hour strike — on the 5 December! — for local transport workers, smothering any independent initiative.

At an enormous mass meeting on Friday 22 November in Genoa, proposals for the setting up of a national strike fund and ideas about spreading the strike were contemptuously dismissed by local officials.

There followed a nine hour meeting in the residence of the Prefect with the Mayor, the President of the region and representatives of the two major unions. All sides were desperate to stitch up a "reasonable compromise" that they might sell to the workers.

The mass assembly the next day was presented

with a document which was basically the same plan.

Speaker after speaker railed against the proposal. But when officials taunted them: "what is your alternative?" they were compelled to resort to abstractions and well-intentioned pieties.

When a vote was eventually called, many were outside having a break. A majority for the bureaucrats' proposal was announced and chaos reigned, as hundreds responded in anger, calling for a proper, organised vote. The bureaucrats stood their ground, at least until tables and chairs were overturned.

LESSONS

Crucial lessons must be learnt from a strike which undoubtedly signalled the still-burning hope and potential of the working class capacity and willingness to fight.

The lack of an independent self-organised strike committee was the achilles heel from the start. The local officials were never forced to cede, let alone surrender, control in any of the negotiations.

Related to this was the overall lack of the necessary awareness of how absolutely imperative a sharp, clear political direction is for any struggle that finds itself on the road to challenging the organs and institutions of local, regional and national power.

In this the workers of Genoa are not alone.

Ireland to vote on gay marriage

By Michael MacEoin

Just over two decades after Ireland de-criminalised homosexuality, the Irish government announced on 5 November that it will call a referendum on the issue of gay marriage in the first half of 2015.

The announcement follows lobbying from the deputy prime minister, Labour's Eamon Gilmore, and has been given support by the Fine Gael prime minister Enda Kenny.

In April, constitutional amendments to allow gay marriage were overwhelmingly endorsed by the Constitutional Convention, a body established in 2012 compromising mostly of

randomly-selected citizens and some politicians from both sides of the border.

The recent movement on gay marriage comes months after the government granted partial liberalisation of Ireland's highly restrictive abortion laws, and four years after Ireland recognised legal rights for same sex couple for the first time in the civil partnerships bill in 2009.

This will be a further blow to the influence and prestige of the Catholic Church, which has suffered from the revelations over its handling of widespread abuse by priests and members of religious orders. The Church has announced that it will actively campaign against the changes.

Though the government

has said that it will campaign for a yes vote in the referendum, there is disquiet in Fine Gael, with some rural TDs understood to be opposed to gay marriage. A wider layer of the party is worried about holding another referendum after the government was weakened by its failure in the vote to abolish Ireland's second chamber, the Seanad.

The government has announced that in the run-up to the vote, it will prepare legislation on adoption and other measures.

According to a poll carried out by Marriage Equality, 75% of people would vote yes in a referendum to extend civil marriage to same-sex couples.

Iran deal

By Rosalind Robson

The agreement between Iran and western governments, on Iran freezing its nuclear programme, in return for some relief from economic sanctions, is a good thing.

The Geneva deal eases political tensions and reduces the possibility of military action against Iran. Political friction may still ratchet up if either side fails to deliver, if further investigation of Iranian nuclear capability shows military development, or if Israel kicks up enough fuss to undermine the agreement.

Lifting sanctions means the Iranian state and bourgeoisie will be able to claw back billions of dollars from frozen bank accounts.

But sanction conditions have been used to attack Iranian workers, to suppress working-class leaders, and these attacks will not be lifted.

February date for Bob

By Jonny West

Australian trade union activist (and Workers' Liberty member) Bob Carnegie is due back in court on 4 February 2014, with Abigroup taking on the unions as well as Bob in a civil case.

The construction firm Abigroup, part of the Lend Lease empire, is claiming millions of dollars in damages from a dispute at the Queensland Children's Hospital construction site in August-October 2012.

Bob has been acquitted on contempt of court charges brought against him for his part in helping the workers organise and win. (Bob himself was out of work at the time of the dispute, and joined in because asked by the workers). But the bosses aren't giving up yet.

Bob's supporters around the world will be organising leafleting, protests, and other actions in the run-up to the court date.

● bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com

Will this report save NHS emergency services?

By Andrea Bailey

The first part of the Keogh Report into urgent and emergency care was published last week. It claims it will lead a complete overhaul of the system it acknowledges is at breaking point.

The numbers of people accessing urgent and emergency care have risen year on year. Though there is little detailed analysis of what has caused these rise, the report cites an increased elderly population with complex health needs, difficulty accessing out of hours GPs, and the government raising expectations of the system by promoting a market style consumer ethos towards the NHS.

Keogh wants fewer people to access services, fewer people to go to hospital, and fewer people admitted for shorter periods.

These aren't in themselves bad aspirations. Peo-

ple being informed and confident to manage their own health, and being able to access support locally in their community would be a good thing. But in the context of cuts, privatisation and marketisation of the NHS, these aims are likely to give the government the justification for further reducing publicly provided services.

Even at this early stage the Report is specific on the proposal that many A&E departments could be downgraded to urgent care centres, but is very vague on the increase in community based services it says are needed to replace hospital based care.

The report proposes increased support for self care, improving out-of-hospital urgent care facilities and designating certain A&E centres as major emergency centres to provide the most acute life saving care.

Again in theory these could be sound proposals.

The problem is the reality of implementation in a system where community services are inadequate and hospital services have been designated too expensive and face cuts. The whole Report has cost-saving running through it. Any talk of alternative services in the current climate is code for privatisation.

SELF-CARE

Self-care in the report is defined as access to information and peer support patient groups.

Providing information is of course good, and peer support has been shown to be highly effective for those with chronic conditions. But with decades of the medical professions claiming elite status and not involving patients in their care, it will take a bit more than a few internet sites for people to really be able to make informed decisions about their health.



More information in this context can increase anxiety and demand on services. The talk of using symptom check technologies evokes visions of vulnerable people being monitored at home by machines.

The proposals for extended urgent care services are aimed at the millions of people who turn to A&E in non-emergency situations.

Proposals include an increased role for paramedics, who would act as "mobile urgent treatment services",

pharmacists and telephone based advice.

All well and good, as long as the extended roles of these services are resourced and backed up. A paramedic taking time to treat someone at home and make a patient feel confident that they don't need immediate hospital treatment is possible, but not a cheap option.

It would need to be closely linked into the rest of the NHS, less likely to happen within an increas-

ingly fragmented privatised ambulance service.

The report reports the evidence for centralised emergency treatment for certain conditions — some heart attacks, major trauma and strokes.

But the report uses this to advocate *reduction* of services at other hospitals.

The system of regional or area specialist services is already in place and maybe extended for other conditions, but this cannot be used to close down A&Es elsewhere without reducing access and bringing huge risks to patients in those areas as well as undermining local general hospitals — the argument was put powerfully by the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign.

Community campaigners will need to keep a close eye on these proposals. The health trade unions urgently need effective campaigns in defence of NHS services.

Unions walk out in disgust

By Paul Vernadsky

International climate talks in Warsaw ended in disarray on Sunday 24 November. NGOs and trade union delegates walked out in disgust at the lack of ambition and progress.

After international unions, Greenpeace, WWF, ActionAid, FoE, Oxfam, Aktyon Klimy Pilipinas and other NGOs had walked out, a statement said governments "cannot be trusted to do what the world needs".

The tone of the event was set by right wing governments backtracking from even the modest commitments made previously to tackle climate change. David Cameron has promised to "get rid of the green crap", while governments in Japan, Australia and Canada junked their carbon policies. The Polish hosts ran a coal and climate business-fest throughout the talks. In the short run no doubt the sceptics and the business lobbyists will crow and claim they have the upper hand. But the disgust many climate activists will feel after yet another setback may fuel a revival in climate campaigning.

Next spring the IPCC will issue its fifth report on climate causes, impacts and



The coal-fuelled Zeran Heating Plant in Warsaw, Poland.

strategies. It was recently announced that the so-called surface temperature slowdown over the last 15 years may have been misestimated. Two Canadian climate scientists Kevin Cowtan and Robert Way added the difficult-to-obtain Arctic readings into the regular Met Office data set.

When these figures were put in, the rise in temperature is more than double that announced in September and more consistent with the rising pattern since in the 1990s (see *Independent*, 18 November).

A further exposé of the fossil fuels firms that are wrecking the planet has also been made (*Guardian*, 19 November). Richard Heede traced anthropogenic carbon dioxide and methane emissions from fossil fuel and cement pro-

ducers from 1854 to 2010. He found that just 90 companies — 50 privately-owned, 31 state-owned and 9 nation-state producers of oil, natural gas, coal, and cement — produced nearly two-thirds of the greenhouse gas emissions generated since the dawning of the industrial age.

The list of 90 companies includes well-known names such as Chevron, Exxon, BP, and Royal Dutch Shell and coal producers such as British Coal Corp, Peabody Energy and BHP Billiton.

The state-owned companies include Saudi Arabia's Saudi Aramco, Russia's Gazprom and Norway's Statoil. Government-run industries producing mainly coal in China, Russia, North Korea, and Poland also figure on the list.

The conclusion is very simple. To tackle the climate crisis, labour movements across the globe should campaign for these producers to be taken into public ownership, but crucially under workers' democratic control.

Take over these industries, convert their technologies to low-carbon alternatives and utilise the immense skills and capacities of their workforces for the global good.

Solidarity with Ifa Muaza!

By Tom Harris

Ifa Muaza, a refugee from Nigeria, has been on hunger strike for over 80 days after his request for asylum was rejected by the Home Office.

Muaza is being held at Harmondsworth immigration removal centre, near Heathrow. His lawyer argues that keeping him in detention amounts to a death sentence, and staff at the centre have been warned to expect a detainee to die.

Muaza says he came to Britain after being threatened by the Islamist militia, Boko Haram, in Nigeria. He says that he was pressured to join the jihadist organisation, and that if he refused, he would be killed. Boko Haram have an extensive record of burning schools and churches, and murdering civilians. They were recently categorised as a terrorist organisation by the US State Department.

Muaza originally came to the UK on a valid visa,

but remained in the country after its expiry because he was too scared to return home. He applied for asylum, but was immediately detained, and his request rejected. He later began his hunger strike, saying he would be killed if he returned to Nigeria. It is feared he will soon die.

The Home Office's refusal to release Muaza, even if that means his death, is part of a hardening of government policy against refugees.

Deadline on 24 December

By Gerry Bates

The Defend the Link campaign, boosted by a decision from the Labour Representation Committee conference on 23 November to build it "as widely as possible", is circulating a "model response" to the interim report by Ray Collins on the Labour-union link.

Collins was asked to write the report by Labour leader Ed Miliband after Miliband's 9 July speech calling for a change in union-Labour relations in

the wake of lurid allegations about the Unite union's activities in Falkirk CLP.

Both a police and a Labour inquiry have found nothing against Unite, but Miliband is pressing ahead.

Responses to Collins' interim report must be in by 24 December. Then Collins will prepare definite proposals to go to a Labour Party special conference in spring 2014.

Pressure from local Labour Parties is important. Even more pivotal is the response of unions,

and in the first place of Unite itself.

Unite's dominant United Left faction meets on 30 November, and the first item of business will be a discussion on the issue led by Unite general secretary Len McCluskey.

The previous United Left meeting passed firm policy to maintain trade-union representation in Labour structures. That policy should be reaffirmed.

• More: defendthelink.wordpress.com

How we stopped an Academy scam

Press
By Patrick Murphy

facebook

On 22 November something odd happened. The *Daily Express* published an article which implicitly criticised one of Michael Gove's key reforms to education and quoted, approvingly and prominently, the condemnation of this policy by Labour Education Minister, Tristram Hunt.

The article also reported the comments of NUT Deputy General Secretary Kevin Courtney to support the thrust of their story.

The cause of all this an "exclusive" by the paper, about: "A failing academy advertises for Maths teachers who have just FOUR Grade C GCSEs". It seemed fairly clear that the paper wanted to endorse Hunt's statement that "David Cameron only stands up for a privileged few and is failing to deliver for all children. While Labour will end this scandal and ensure all teachers become qualified, this Tory Government is damaging standards by allowing unqualified teachers into our children's classrooms."

The story was only "exclusive" in the sense that the *Express* was the first national newspaper to pick up on information started on Facebook by teacher union activists. One of the most interesting aspects of this episode was the manner and speed in which social media exposed and, in the end, knocked back an attempt by a major academy chain to recruit absurdly unqualified staff to work as teachers in one of their schools.

Only two days before the *Express* story an eagle-eyed teacher spotted an advert for "Unqualified Teachers of Maths x 2" to work in South Leeds Academy, a challenging inner city Leeds school run by the academy chain Schools Partnership Trust (SPTA).

The teacher, an NUT member, posted it on Facebook, including on the union's FB pages. The advert was so bad many people initially thought it was a spoof.

But Academies and Free Schools can employ unqualified rather than qualified teachers, and there is a national pay scale applicable to this role. Where this happens the candidates will usually have a degree in the subject (or at least a degree of some kind). In this case the only qualifications required were "4 GCSE's (sic) Grades A*-C including English and Maths or equivalent". The jobs were temporary until July 2014 and term-time only. So no paid school holidays.

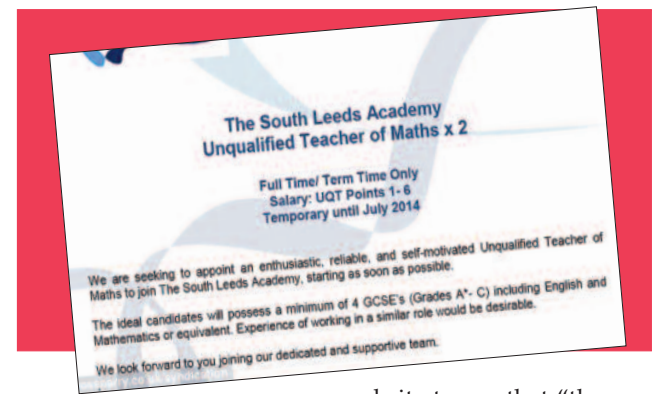
The application pack made it clear that the job would require successful candidates "to teach Mathematics to the whole age range and ability of students within the academy" and to "develop schemes of work, resources and learning strategies".

Within hours the NUT FB community kicked into action. There was plenty of anger and incredulity but with these came research, investigation and imaginative actions. The application pack was downloaded and its contents disseminated. The idea of stunt applications took off. One activist sent an application in the form of a video clip of the Sesame Street character "Count Count" a Transylvanian Dracula pastiche used to promote basic Maths. The local NUT then contacted the sponsor to demand that the issue be put on the agenda of a meeting with them the following week.

By the following day (21 November) the story was all over Twitter on a popular activist hashtag TeacherRoar. It was picked up by comedian Mark Thomas who apparently displayed the advert on the screen of his show and organised the audience to put in applications en masse.

The story was picked up by the local press, the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, on Friday 21st. Following the *Express* and *Yorkshire Evening Post* stories, it was also picked up by the *Independent*.

By midday Friday a message appeared on the recruitment



website to say that "the employer has withdrawn these posts". The academy sponsor claimed that there had been "an omission" in the ad. It should have made clear that these were training opportunities, they said, and pointed to the school's involvement in an on-the-job training scheme known as Schools Direct.

There are two problems with this which none of the press reports picked up on though the teacher activists did. First there was no mention in any of the application material. Secondly, and more revealing, anyone who bothers to check Schools Direct on the web will see that, to be eligible, applicants need "a good degree".

Game, set and match to the union activists and their supporters who used social media with tenacity and imagination to force this story to the forefront of the official media and left no hiding place for the sponsor or the academy.

In doing so they not only defended the right of the children in this inner city school to qualified teachers, they put the spotlight on the Tory-Liberal policy of allowing their flagship academy schools to provide teaching on the cheap.

Which way will Left Unity go?

Left
By Tom Harris



Saturday 30 November will see the founding conference of Left Unity.

Left Unity was launched in late 2012 by Kate Hudson and Andrew Burgin. It reached a wider audience after film-maker Ken Loach and left-wing academic Gilbert Achcar sent an open letter to the *Guardian* in March 2013, promoting Left Unity as a new party to challenge Labour from the left.

The organisers of Left Unity claim to have struck a chord with the public — thousands have signed up to the appeal and even more have "liked" it on social media. There's some truth to this claim; the media publicity has undoubtedly given Left Unity a larger audience than most left-wing groupings enjoy, but how much this online interest translates into people becoming actively involved remains to be seen.

The Founding Conference will discuss and vote on a range of business, from a Safe Spaces policy, to priority campaigns, party name, and aims. It is the last category which will likely prove most controversial.

A number of platforms have been produced by different political tendencies in Left Unity, each outlining the kind of organisation they hope the project to come, and setting down a basic political programme.

Although this debate is supposed to defend LU's basic aims, just 54 minutes have been given to it: three minutes to explain each platform, and just 20 minutes for speakers from the floor of conference.

The two major positions in the debate are the "Left Party Platform" and the "Socialist Platform". The LPP has the backing of Hudson, Burgin, and Achcar, and senior ISN figures Richard Seymour and Tom Walker.

The LPP conceives of Left Unity as a broad, pluralistic

"left" party on the model of the electorally successful Die Linke, Syriza and Parti de Gauche in Europe.

The rightward drift of Labour, so the argument runs, provides an opening for a new party to soak up the votes of disillusioned Labour voters by tacking just to the left of Labour.

The language of the LPP is deliberately vague and non-specific. The party should be "anti-capitalist", in favour of a "transformed society" and against "neo-liberalism". Will this party tinker with capitalism or replace it? The Platform doesn't tell us, and deliberately so.

The "Socialist Platform" proposes Left Unity should be an explicitly working-class socialist organisation. Where the LPP is designedly vague, the SP makes it clear that Left Unity should seek to end capitalist rule, and replace it with the democratic, collective rule of the working-class.

The last few months have seen local meetings in which the relative merits of the platforms have been debated. Many of those debates have gone to the root of whether socialist activists should hide their politics in favour of (vain) hopes of short-term popularity, or whether we should work to honestly convince people of our class-struggle ideas.

Workers' Liberty thinks that the SP side of the debate is the right side and will be arguing for the adoption of the Socialist Platform at this Saturday's conference.

• <http://leftunity.org>

Week of action to stop workfare and benefit sanctions
2-8 December
<http://www.boycottworkfare.org>

Safety in Turkey

Letter



We have been waging a campaign against work accidents which are rampant in Turkey.

Central to the campaign is a petition to be finally submitted to parliament. Hundreds of UID-DER activists worked hard during the campaign which has the main slogan: "Work Accidents are not Destiny, Stop Workers Dying of Work Accidents!"

During the campaign about 500,000 people have been contacted face to face. We have already surpassed our specific goal which was 100,000 signatures.

To appeal to workers, the activists worked under all kinds of hardships in working-class neighbourhoods, at factory entrances, so called industrial zones and city squares during the campaign. They set up stalls, organised street activities etc.

UID-DER's Workers' Health and Safety Committee visited the workplaces in which work accidents occurred and workers who experienced work accidents and recorded such cases. Many cases which were tried to keep secret by the bosses were publicised by UID-DER. Meetings about workers' health and safety were held in many workplaces and working-class neighbourhoods.

The petition [was handed in] on November 21.

We will hold a public event on December 15. The event will be in a trade-union hall with the participation of trade-union officials, some socialist MPs and workers who experienced work accidents from diverse industries and families who lost their loved ones in work accidents.

An important part of the event will be international solidarity messages.

In solidarity,

Activists in the Turkish workers' movement UID-DER

How to rebuild after the defeats

After a spike because of the 2011 public sector pensions dispute, the level of strikes in the UK fell to a seven-year low in 2012.

Royal Mail, a key bastion of public sector unionism and industrial strength, was privatised in October 2013 without any effective resistance. A strike planned for 4 November was called off and anyway was called *after* the privatisation had gone through.

At the Grangemouth oil refinery and petrochemical plant, arguably the most economically significant workplace in Scotland, bosses were able to inflict a crushing defeat on a well-organised, industrially-powerful, and previously-militant workforce.

Teachers' unions have dithered on calling a national strike in their dispute on workload, pay, and pensions, and university workers' unions' held back from escalating their strikes by calling another one-day walkout for 3 December.

Firefighters remain in dispute over pensions, but the strikes are sporadic.

Another concerted mobilisation of the big battalions of organised labour against the Tory government, along the lines of the 2011 pensions dispute, seems unlikely soon. Unison's leaders promise a fight on the public sector pay freeze "next year", but recent history suggests that "next year" for the Unison leadership never actually arrives; it always means the year after the current one.

But as Tories hail the "economic recovery", workers continue to suffer the worst squeeze on real wages since the 1870s. A barrage of Tory triumphalism about a recovery that workers are frozen out of cannot but lead to explosions of resistance, even if they are at first episodic and small scale.

Revolutionary socialists in the labour must orient to those explosions whenever they occur, and do whatever we can to support them, broadcast them, and help them win. In the meantime there is much work to do, educating, organising, preparing.

Tube workers' union RMT has already declared a counter-offensive in response to London Underground bosses' announcement of job cuts and ticket office closure, planning a campaign of industrial and political action involving passengers' advocacy groups, disabled activists, and the wider London labour movement. The campaign is not just industrial-economic, but political — the impetus for the cuts is the 12.5% reduction in central government funding to Transport for London.

The RMT's "Every Job Matters" campaign challenges the logic of the government's cuts project, a full-frontal class assault on working-class living standards.

The approach of declaring a counter-offensive for positive demands, rather than calling one or two days of tokenistic strike action when a bosses' attack is imminent, or even al-



Socialists need to organise in the unions for positive campaigns

ready carried out, is one from which the whole labour movement should learn.

The campaign by outsourced cleaning, catering, and security workers at the University of London for equality with their directly-employed colleagues is also an example to follow. Organised through democratic assemblies of workers where the direction of the campaign is discussed and voted on, the "Tres Cosas" ("Three Things") campaign shows that precariously-employed, migrant workers, who have been ignored, poorly-served, and even undermined by some mainstream unions, are not incapable of organisation and militancy; quite the contrary.

Socialists should take up the cause of the Tres Cosas campaign throughout the whole labour movement, agitating for political and financial support from other trade union bodies, inviting speakers from the campaign to union branches, and publicising its actions. Wherever other such campaigns and disputes emerge, like the Curzon cinema workers' fight for living wages or the Hovis bakery workers' successful battle against zero-hours contracts, we should do likewise.

The revolutionary left is too small to effect a large-scale revival of industrial class struggle through acts of will. But we can help amplify those disputes that do emerge, not as passive supporters but as active agents embodying class-struggle memory and experience that can help shape disputes and help them win.

Workers' Liberty's dayschool, "Marxism At Work", on 7 December aims to help comrades develop the practical skills necessary to carry out this work, and the political understanding that must underpin it.

Marxism At Work: Marxists, Trade Unions, and the Workplace

**Saturday 7 December, 11am-5pm,
SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square,
London WC1H 0XG**

Workshops and discussions will include:

- Marxists in unions and workplaces
- Producing and distributing socialist workplace bulletins
- What is "the rank and file"? What is "the bureaucracy"?
- Our Fantasy Union

The event will involve various learning formats. For more, see bit.ly/7dec-maw

Co-op scandal shows banking crisis is not over

The "personal" problems of Paul Flowers, former chairman of the Co-operative Bank, have created a major political storm.

The Tory press has been scandalised by revelation that Flowers bought and used Class A drugs. Flowers had had to resign as a local councillor over other problems, and had a record of dubious expenses claims.

Earlier this year, the Co-op announced that it had made a pre-tax loss of over £709 million, with the profits it had made in its supermarkets wiped out by bad debts in its banking arm.

Before Flowers' other issues came to light, he had already been criticised for his inept performance at a Treasury Select Committee. Asked about the Co-op's assets, Flowers guessed that they amounted to £3 billion. In fact, they were £47 billion, or more than fifteen times Flowers' estimate!

The Tories and the right-wing press have attempted to exploit the scandal to attack the Labour Party.

The Co-operative has its historical roots in the labour movement; its political wing, the Co-operative Party co-sponsors Labour MPs such as Shadow Cabinet members Ed Balls

and Luciana Berger. The Tories are trying to implicate Balls and Miliband in the scandal, pointing to the £50,000 donation that Balls accepted from the Co-op, and his alleged involvement in the merger between the bank and the Britannia building society.

However many damning criticisms we make of the Labour Party leadership, responsibility for the appointment and subsequent incompetence of Paul Flowers would be stretching it a bit. Nevertheless, the degeneration of the Co-operative Group does raise political issues for socialists.

One thing we can learn from the scandal is that the banking crisis is far from over. When other major British banks went into crisis in 2008-2009, the Co-operative was held up as a safe alternative.

Treasury ministers encouraged the bank take over the failed Britannia Building Society and then to try to buy branches of Lloyds. The Lloyds scheme collapsed, despite Tory encouragement, when a £1.5 billion hole was found in the Co-op's balance sheet.

The appointment of Flowers, and the fact that he was almost allowed to drive the bank off a cliff, also makes a non-

sense of the Tory claim that the bosses of banks are now subject to proper accountability and regulation.

The Co-operative Bank is not now, in any meaningful sense, a co-operative. The Co-operative Group, Britain's largest mutual, will now only own 30% of the bank. Two-thirds of it is owned by bond-holders, including two large US hedge funds.

The co-operative movement, set up in Rochdale in 1844, had originally been closely tied to organised labour, and its move into banking had been proposed as a collective, ethical alternative to capitalist finance. Today, the difference between the Co-op Bank and its conventional rivals are minimal. Like most would-be islands of socialism within capitalism, the Co-op was eventually soaked through by the capitalist sea around it.

Socialists and the labour movement should demand and campaign for the only rational and humane solution to the financial crisis — the expropriation of the banking sector under democratic control.

Sheffield: “The Roma are under the cosh”

Andy Shallice, an socialist activist based in Sheffield, spoke to *Solidarity* about the background to David Blunkett’s recent attacks on Roma migrants living in Page Hall, Sheffield.

In the original “Radio Sheffield” interview Blunkett did [about frictions between Roma and other communities living in Page Hall] there were no quotes about race riots.

Yet the *Daily Telegraph* picked up on this in their subsequent report of the radio interview. To me the reporting is part of what the right wing press will be doing for the next six months up to the European elections.

It is what Blunkett said about the Roma having to “change their culture” that is slightly more frightening.

Blunkett is not ignorant about Roma culture and the context of Eastern Europe. He has been to Bulgaria and Romania on visits recently, he has met government officials and people from Romani civic organisations. He says he doesn’t expect a mass arrival of migrants from Bulgaria and Romania in January 2014 [when immigration rules relax for those two recent entrants to the EU]. He has distanced himself from the right-wing scare campaign. He has been supportive of community organisations who are working to improve the situation for everyone in the country.

But he accepts the local popular view that Page Hall has “gone downhill” since Roma migrants arrived. There is a back story to this which people need to know. Ten years ago Page Hall was marked down for demolition under the Pathfinder Programme. 600 existing houses would be knocked down and the land used to create a so-called “mixed community”, of owner-occupier and rented homes. Because of local pressure that programme never went ahead.

Now house prices have dropped. Buy-to-let landlords have bought up lots of housing. 35% (up from 10%) of houses are now privately-rented accommodation. The houses are badly managed and run down. That is why a big concentration of migrant families are living there — it is the only place they can go.



David Blunkett’s comments risk stoking racism.

Blunkett has never really understood the changing nature of the working class and what diversity means in practice. He has a traditional view of the working-class — manual workers, self-educated, striving to “get on”. The world has moved on in the last 30 years. We have seen mass migration and globalisation. And massive cuts have affected all working-class people, all communities.

Blunkett has been running a campaign against the British government, for the UK and get European structural development money to support social projects. And he is right, such money might help Roma inclusion and general social progress. The government does not want to go to the EU on this because of its political stance against the EU.

Stupidly, Blunkett has tried to use shock tactics. He says to the government, sort yourself out and get some money to Sheffield (he mentioned the Migrant Impact Fund) or bad things will happen. But his words are divisive and irresponsible. The actions and behaviours of some people cannot be assumed to be the culture of the many.

INCOMPARABLY

No matter how grim it may be for Roma living in this country — the overcrowding in these rented homes — it is incomparably better than where they have come from.

Slovakian Roma have no running water, no electricity, no chance of work, and benefits are being cut. In 18 settlements, including big cities, local authorities have built walls, brick walls, to separate Roma communities from “non-Roma” people.

Here the opportunities for work are not good — low paid, casualised. But in nooks and crannies — the local pizza outlet, the corner shop, local builders’ cash-in-hand, the chicken processing plant — Roma men are finding some employment.

Page Hall is a place with dense housing. It is an intensively-lived community and actually it has always been like that. There is an increased use of the street, but at a time when all local facilities are being cut. Youth services have been decimated. Support for people in private sector housing has been cut. Street cleaning has been hugely reduced — once streets were cleaned four times a week; now it is every 13 weeks.

Romani parents have been labelled as people who do not send their kids to school. It is untrue: the average attendance of Romani children at the catchment primary school is exactly the same as other children. But if migrant families arrive mid-year, children can be placed in schools two miles away from where they live. Naturally these families struggle to get children to school on time, particularly if siblings are at another school.

The Roma are really under the cosh, in eastern/central Europe and in the west, and do not have political organisations to fight back.

The left should protest, but in my view the emphasis should be on the idea of pan-European unity, organising across Europe. Withdrawal from Europe is going to be pushed by all the right-wing parties in the next months. The left should not do the same.

A Tory plan



Youth unemployment is at a record high. When jobs are available, they’re often in low-paid, semi-casualised industries like fast food.

By Dale Street

Young people are being used as a battering ram to attack the pay, conditions, and rights of all working-class people. Despite the supposed upturn in the UK economy, youth unemployment — especially long-term youth unemployment — remains at record levels.

In the third quarter of this year (July-September), the unemployment rate for those aged between 16 and 24 and not in full-time education was 19% — 664,000 people, many of whom would still be looking for their first job.

Although slightly lower than the figure for the preceding quarter, this was still a higher figure, by around 16,000, than a year ago.

Well over a third of them, 282,000, had been unemployed for 12 months or more. This was 7,000 more than in the previous quarter, and 15,000 more than a year ago.

Including youth in full-time education who had looked for work in the last four weeks, and were available to start work within two weeks, the unemployment rate for 16 to 24-year-olds was slightly higher than a year earlier: 21%, over 958,000 people.

The current figure for NEETs (“not in employment, education, or training”) in the same age bracket, which includes those who are unemployed but not in receipt of benefits, is 1.09 million. And in the 18 to 24 age bracket, 115,000 have been unemployed for two years or more.

Despite the fact that most people under the age of 18 are not entitled to any benefits, and those in the 18-24 age bracket receive a lower rate of benefits, youth unemployment cost the government £4.8 billion in 2012. This was more than the entire budget for further education for 16 to 19-year-olds in England.

High levels of youth unemployment are not confined to the UK. They exist throughout Europe, and in some countries are even higher. Youth unemployment in Spain is 56%, and nearly 65% in Greece (over 75% in some regions).

What are now classified as “low” rates of youth unemployment would have previously been classified as unacceptable: one young person in 13 in Germany, one young person in 11 in Austria, and one young person in nine in the Netherlands are unemployed.

Throughout the European Union as a whole, nearly 25% of people under the age of 25 are unemployed, as against an overall unemployment rate of about 12%. By contrast, in the

ot against youth

Great Depression of the 1930s, it was mainly middle-aged males who could not find work.

But in the UK, and the rest of Europe, current levels of youth unemployment are not simply a reflection of the generally high levels of unemployment. Patterns of youth unemployment diverge radically from patterns of “adult” unemployment.

Unemployment amongst under-24s is 3.74 times higher than among over-24s. A year ago it was “only” 3.5 times higher. While unemployment rates for the over-24s fell by 0.2% during the past twelve months, youth unemployment (i.e., including those in education but also seeking work) increased by 0.5% to 21%.

Similarly, over the same period the number of people in work among 25 to 64-year-olds increased by 0.4%, while the number of under-25s in work declined by 1.1%.

In fact, patterns of youth unemployment had already begun to diverge from those of “adult” unemployment even before the recession of 2008. Whereas in 1989 youth unemployment in UK was 1.5 times higher than its “adult” equivalent, over the next 25 years it increased to being 3.5 times higher. The same trend is at work in other European countries, albeit not as pronounced as in the UK.

The disproportionate growth of youth unemployment is not the result of there being “too many” young people. In 1990 56 million Europeans were in the 20 to 24 age bracket. Today, there are 48 million people in the European Union’s 1990 borders in that age bracket.

The right wing has two simple answers to the problem of youth unemployment. One is to scrap benefits for the under-25s, just as the last Tory government scrapped benefits for the under-18s. There would still be just as many unemployed young people, but they would not show up in government statistics. Any young person who could not live with their parents would be potentially destitute.

CAMERON

At this year’s Tory conference Cameron claimed that it was “still possible to leave school, sign on, find a flat, start claiming Housing Benefit, and opt for a life on benefit.”

That speech was a “softening up” exercise. He went on to say the Tories would consider whether “that option should exist at all” as they draw up their manifesto for the next general election.

On 19 November, the *Daily Telegraph* claimed that Labour would adopt the same policy of scrapping benefits for the under-25s. But this was denied by Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Rachel Reeves: “This is not and will not be our policy.”

The other right-wing “answer” to youth unemployment is to attack employment rights. They claim that employers are reluctant to take on new employees because employment law supposedly gives them too many rights, and it would therefore be too difficult to sack them should employers wish to do so.

The Tories have steadily whittled away employment rights since they returned to power in 2010. The result: over the same period youth unemployment has not only increased in absolute terms but also increased at a faster rate than “adult” unemployment.

In any case, fewer rights for workers do not mean more chances of work for young people. They mean a greater chance of being sacked unfairly for young and old alike.

In the face of the evidence of failure with capitalist schemes to reduced youth unemployment, we have to conclude the capitalists and the Tories do not really want to reduce it.

The socialist answer to youth unemployment is a cut in the working week with no loss of pay, full employment rights from day one, and an end to the use of zero hours contracts and other forms of casualised labour. Fight this conspiracy against youth!

Life after uni

Nearly one in ten students who graduated from a British university in 2012 were still unemployed six months later, according to a report published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency in June of this year.

Of those who were working, over a third were working in jobs that did not require a degree.

The report also found that students who had graduated in 2009 were a third more likely to be unemployed after three and a half years than were students who graduated in 2005 (3.2%, compared with 2.6%).

The number of graduates who could not find a job or could only find work which did not require a degree is all the more damning given that the number of jobs in the UK requiring a degree (26%) is now greater than the number of jobs for which no qualification at all is required (23%).

According to a study carried out by the *Financial Times*, starting salaries for students who graduated in 2012 were 12% less on average than students who graduated prior to the 2008 recession. The 2012 students owe 60% more in student debt.

A report published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) last month shows that 47% of students who graduated in the past five years are working in jobs such as sales assistants and care workers, an increase of 8% since 2008, and of 10% since 2001. This is despite the fact that over a million new jobs have been created since early 2010.

After students with degrees in medicine or dentistry, it was students who had graduated in media and information studies who had the highest employment rate (93%). But they also have the lowest rate of pay (£21,000 a year) of any student category.

Although the level of unemployment among graduates (9%) is lower than it is for those in the same age cohort who have lower or no educational qualifications, it has increased by over 10% since a year ago (8%) and by 80% compared with early 2008 (5%).

The findings of the ONS report contradict claims put forward in May of this year by Information Data Services (IDS), which claimed that it would be easier for graduates to find work in the coming months.

In fact, between October 2012 and October 2013 graduate

vacancies fell by 19%, and there are now 50 graduates competing for every entry-level post — an increase of 7% compared with 2012.

Even if the IDS research had been proved correct, it would have been of only limited consolation to graduates. The IDS found that 70% of employers planned to freeze pay for graduates.

But, in fact, employers did not freeze pay for graduates. They cut it. Between September last year and September this year, advertised graduate salaries fell by 3.4%.

While job prospects and rates of pay for graduates continue to decline, the debts with which they are burdened at the time of graduation continue to increase.

GRADUATES

Graduates from England are now likely to owe £43,500 in tuition fee loans and maintenance loans by the time they finish university. Students from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales who study in their home country are likely to owe around £23,500.

Students from England are also less likely to receive maintenance grants, and receive lower grants if eligible at all.

The current total debt of students at British universities is £20 billion — £3 billion owed to friends and family, and the remainder to the Student Loans Company.

For students from outside of Scotland — where there are no tuition fees — debts outstanding at the time of graduation are increasing as a result of the increase in tuition fees to up to £9,000, and also because of the more punitive way in which interest is calculated on the debt.

Under the system for new students, interest is charged at inflation plus 3%. And this interest is charged not just after students complete their studies, but even while students are still in Higher Education.

Overall, students leaving university are now less likely to find work, less likely to find a job which matches their degree, more likely to end up low-paid work. They will be saddled with bigger debts for longer periods of time and at higher rates of interest.

Student conference plans rents campaign

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts had its conference in Birmingham on 23-24 November.

The conference was attended by student and education activists from campuses around the country. Sessions were held discussing housing, anti-fascism, student unions and privilege theory. Motions were passed orienting the organisation to campaigns on housing, campaigning against the sell-off of student debt, facilitating the setting-up of left-wing discussion groups on campuses, postgraduate organising, and solidarity work with the Greek left.

The conference also took direct action in solidarity with a student occupation near the conference venue at the University of Birmingham, and raised money for the outsourced University of London workers’ strike fund.

• More: anticuts.com





Hacks and rats

Scotland
By Roland Wright



A decade ago the Scottish Sunday Herald had a circulation of over 60,000. But now it has sunk lower than 25,000. A decade ago Paul Hutcheon was an investigative reporter. But now he just hunts with the pack.

Could the decline in the paper's circulation be related to the decline in the quality of its journalism?

"Leading Labour MSP Urged to Resign After Taking Part in Unite Demo Outside Director's House," read the headline above an article by Hutcheon last Sunday.

Over five weeks after the event, the giant inflatable rat used in a Unite protest outside the house of an Ineos director had made a comeback: "[Drew] Smith was one of 13 people pictured. He was standing next to the rat."

Hutcheon's use of the hack-journalist technique of guilt-by-association was positively breathtaking. It ran as follows: the rat was next to Drew Smith who was next to his aide Michael Sharpe who is the son of Cathie Jamieson MP who is part of Ed Balls's shadow treasury team at Westminster.

However, Smith (sadly) was not actually taking part in the protest. He is chair of the Labour Trade Union Group in Holyrood. The Unite protest coincided with the Dunfermline by-election campaign for the Holyrood seat left vacant after the resignation of the incumbent SNP MSP. Along with two of his aides, Smith happened to be distributing Labour by-election leaflets on the estate where the Unite protest was taking place.

MOCKERY

This certainly makes a mockery of the anonymous "senior party source" quoted by Hutcheon: "A trade unionist with any sense would not have gone within a hundred miles of that protest."

Clearly, there wouldn't have been much point in distributing leaflets calling for a Labour vote in the Dunfermline by-election over a hundred miles away in Inverness.

The bigger problem with the article is the headline reference to Smith being "urged to resign." By whom was he being "urged to resign"?

Why, none other than Eric Joyce MP!

That's the Falkirk MP with the chequered history of drunken brawls in the House of Commons and Edinburgh Airport, dalliances with a 17-year-old schoolgirl, drink-driving, refusing to take a breathalyser test, and record claims for parliamentary expenses.

When it comes to speaking out about parliamentarians who should resign, Joyce clearly commands no small degree of authority on such matters! In a comment unlikely to endear him to local councillors, Joyce said:

"The image of a Labour shadow cabinet member smiling as he takes part in a leverage squad outside someone's home is thoroughly nauseating. He should resign immediately."

"The Scottish shadow cabinet doesn't feel like a serious prospect at the moment. Members are content to operate at the level of the local councillor which some of them remain."

A non-story about a man who stood next to a giant inflatable rat over five weeks ago?

It's hardly investigative journalism. In fact, it's not even news.

A spark of hope

Daisy Thomas reviews *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*

"You're the mockingjay, Katniss. While you live, the rebellion lives..."

Even though it's a cliché, I did laugh and I did cry while watching *Catching Fire*, the thrilling second instalment of the film series based on Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy. It was amusing, emotionally-touching, and it really can set a fire in your belly.

Whether it was the casual way the Gamemakers manipulated the environment, or the tragic state of affairs on the ground in the poorer districts, the story roused a great feeling of injustice and made you want to walk out of the movie theatre and start a rebellion.

In fact, it took me and my friend a moment after we left to (as they say in the film) "remember who the enemy is". It is to the writer's and filmmakers' credit that I felt almost physically ill and pained when the previous victors were forced back into the traumatic experience of the Hunger Games.

In the rich storyworld she created, Collins very cleverly exposed the corruption and class inequality between the luxury and wealth in the Capitol and Districts One and Two and the starving, oppressed masses in, say, District Twelve. At a Capitol party Peeta is offered a drink that will make him throw up so that he can keep on eating all the different dishes on display. He is disgusted by this as he thinks back to the starving, desperate people back in District Twelve.

Instead of making this a matter of lamentation or martyrdom, Collins layers it with the courage and strength of the people, as well as renewed hope.

As President Snow said in the first film, "hope is the only thing stronger than fear". So, you can see why he starts to get very agitated when people in the more remote districts start an uprising.

Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) gives another stellar performance, as she makes us both love her as well as hate her for not being totally and utterly in love with Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) as we are. Effie (Elizabeth Banks) is softer and we can connect more with her in this film. She is fleshed out and we see that below the superficiality and the over-the-top makeup, that there is a heart bleeding for the pain of others.

Haymitch (Woody Harrelson) is ever the occasionally wise, sometimes sharp, and always alcoholic mentor who we loved from his grumpy start. Most of the time he gives short bites of wisdom like "stay alive", but we see more of his softer, compassionate side when he goes out of his way to protect Katniss and Peeta.

The introduction of new characters like the cunning and strikingly handsome Finnick (Sam Claflin), the resourceful and surprisingly helpful Johanna (Jena Malone), and the other multi-talented and strong Victors who fought for their



Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss

own and each other's survival (Mags, Beetee, Wiress, etc.) enrich the story further and each lend support in their own way to the fight against the "real" enemy. Unfortunately many give their lives to this cause, but as long as the survivors can unite to defeat the oppression and injustice, their deaths will not be in vain.

This idea of unity and strength is numbers is pointed out by Haymitch to Katniss in one of my favourite lines from the film: "So it's you and a syringe against the Capitol? See, this is why no one lets you make the plans." And plans they make.

This film is riddled with clever plots; outwitting the looming, sinister forces of the Capitol; trying to stay alive against the odds that seem never in their favour; and a fight for justice.

I'm eager to see how they treat the injustice, oppression, corruption, and the growing rebellion in the next and final film, *Mockingjay*.

Catching Fire deals brilliantly with the exposure of political corruption and the oppression and injustice by those in power as well as promoting hope, love, camaraderie, and friendship. I loved it so much I'm seeing again this week and I'm very excited. So excited that I need to reread book three because I can't remember what happens next!

Read the books, see the film, and go home and think about all the thought-provoking messages.

North Korea exposed

Jim Fraser reviews *North Korea Undercover* by John Sweeney (2013, Bantam Press)

If you want to know the truth about North Korea there can be no better starting point than this excellent book by award-winning BBC journalist John Sweeney.

North Korea is one of the most repressive and totalitarian states in the world, but it is a state as bizarre as it is repressive — like a Kafkaesque nightmare combined with Orwell's 1984 and Alice in Wonderland.

As Sweeney describes it... the vast motorways with no cars, the university with no students, the library with no books, the children's camp with no children, the farm with no animals, and the hospital with patients, but only in the morning. The whole country is a living lie.

Sweeney also describes some of the suffering and grinding poverty of the people, exemplified by the woman washing her clothes in a freezing river because she has neither electricity nor running water in her home.

After the Kim dynasty the real power in the country is the Bowibu, the "security department". Even more than the Soviet Union's NKVD or Augusto Pinochet's DINA, they watch

everyone. No one other than select state officials and state appointed tour guides is allowed to come into contact with a foreigner. Even being seen with a foreigner can mean the gulag.

The regime runs a system of gulags in the freezing cold of the north comparable with or possibly even worse than Stalin's Russia. The total number of political prisoners could be as high as 200,000. The mortality rate of all prisoners is very high; people die of starvation, illness and torture.

Sweeney explains the importance of the regime of "racial purity" and provides compelling evidence of how in furtherance of that purity the regime practises infanticide on a massive scale, including the killing of babies with birth defects. Sweeney asks the question: throughout the world you see people with disabilities, especially in the Third World. In North Korea you see none. Where are they?

Sweeney documents the enduring importance of the 1990s famine, the famine the regime deny, the famine in which three million people starved to death.

This is a chilling book, but a timely one, written with both humour and compassion. Buy it, read it, and discuss it.

How schools should change

By Martin Thomas

Present-day schools teach failure more than they teach anything else. They are inefficient at teaching knowledge.

A recent survey found that MPs and business bosses, despite mostly having had many years of schooling, can't work out the probability of getting a head and a tail when a coin is tossed twice; and we all know that many of them cannot write adequate English.

Yet, by the time they have finished school, most young people will have had one big idea drummed into them: that they are failures.

Not just that they have failed at something. We all often fail at things. Schools drum into students that they are *failures*: that, despite endless "interventions" and impositions, they have failed more or less irrevocably to jump through the hoops of success.

A socialist society would, over generations, change education radically. Some changes could be made fast.

Number one: an end to petty discipline.

In an industrial society, we all must learn to work in a disciplined and cooperative way with others. Fundamentally I do not even hold it against present-day schools that they instill capitalist work discipline. As Marx put it, a necessary foundation of the socialism is the "general industriousness" bred by capitalism: punctuality, sustained effort, care with materials.

I do hold it against schools that they often try to "put down" students in a way attempted only by the bossiest, most overbearing, capitalist employers, and do it through a range of demeaning and harassing punishments.

Teenagers generally prefer capitalist work discipline, in their part-time jobs, to school discipline, because capitalist work discipline treats them with more respect.

Other methods are possible in schools. In other countries, although there is still too much petty discipline, many schools have systems which explicitly reject punishment. They "work" at least as well as the punishment-based systems current in Britain.

In some countries, teachers are not allowed to send a student out of a classroom to stand in a corridor. In Britain it's routine. Many schools reject detentions. In Britain they are routine. When my daughters, brought up in Australia, spent time in a British school, they were shocked to find collective punishment there: because my younger daughter's class was reckoned ill-behaved, the class had to carry a class report card, and since my daughter was reckoned well-behaved, she got the penalty — having to carry the card and get it ticked by teachers.

No group of workers with self-respect, let alone union organisation, would tolerate those methods. Imagine being sent out of the workshop to stand in the yard. Or having to carry your work-team's report card and get it signed off by the manager. Or having to stay after work for an hour because of some misdeed.

Schools should instill work discipline, but they should also instill a sense of the rights of collective resistance to limit and civilise that discipline.

They do not do that. Instead, they train young people in the idea that they are chronically, habitually "badly behaved" — and simultaneously train them in methods of individual resistance or dodging the system. Since the punishments are limited, schools often see individual students "getting away with things" — but rarely students being able by collective action to correct or redirect their teachers.

Schools cannot be complete democracies. For students to vote on which of two chunks of knowledge, both unknown to them, they should study, would be sham democracy. An orchestra cannot play if the violinists or the drummers are heckling the conductor or trying to set a different tempo; a teacher must be able to manage the classroom.

But schools can and should be much more democratic than they are, with real student control over many details of school life.

Number two: an end to uniforms and strict dress codes.

Uniforms are a major part of the petty harassment school students face. And easily avoidable: in France, Germany, the USA, school uniforms are rare. Students have the right to



dress as they wish — as workers do in most jobs where a uniform has no practical justification.

Some people defend school uniforms on the grounds that without uniforms students will compete to wear the most expensive designer clothes. There are four answers to this argument.

One: that school uniforms are expensive, and the student from a poor home is more stigmatised in a shabby, hand-me-down, ill-fitting uniform than in cheap regular clothes. Two: that if the competitive pressure is so great, it will work in out-of-school time as well as school. Three: that schools operate without uniforms, in many countries, without tension.

Finally: that if consumerist competitiveness is so intense, that is not human nature — not even human nature under capitalism — and it would be better to check the competitiveness, by making education generally less competitive and more cooperative, than to try to deflect it by uniform codes.

Occasionally school uniforms are defended as training students to dress tidily for work. But no worker gets about in anything so bizarre as the blazer-and-tie garb compulsory in many schools.

School students are compelled to dress bizarrely not for any good reason, but as part of petty discipline. It is as aberrant as the strange school custom of having students call teachers "Sir" and "Miss", and even having them refer to teachers in the third person by those titles: "Sir said X".

Even the most swivel-eyed capitalist manager will have workers call her or him by first name, or at worst "Mr X" or "Ms Y".

Number three: abolition of all exams in schools.

This goes together with a transformation of schooling into a fully comprehensive system, without selection (a good approximation of which exists already, in capitalist Finland).

Schools can do without exams. One state in Australia, for example, has no public exams: no equivalent of A level, GCSE, SATs, none at all. That helps learning, since less time has to be spent on cramming for exams.

The occasional "diagnostic" test may be justified in schools. Plumbers or nursery workers or teachers should have to pass an exam or test of competency before getting jobs in their trade. But school exams are quite different.

No school exams (and very few university exams) qualify anyone to do a job. The function of school exams is to brand students as failures and to filter them in a perverse way: if you fail an exam in maths, for example, thus showing that you need more maths teaching, you may be... barred from studying maths further.

Without exams, how would it be decided who gets into university? Everyone who wants to study at university should be able to. Entry should be as free as it is to "two-year colleges" in the USA, or to the main universities in France (if only you have achieved your "bac").

Wouldn't universities then be flooded? Not necessarily. Not everyone wants to spend three years studying topology or medieval history, when instead they could get a decently-paid job using skills they already have or can develop on the job.

At present many young people are pushed into going to university at 18, although they have no clear idea what they

want to study there, because schools judge their success by university entrance, and because employers take university degrees, be they in Aramaic or Zoology, as an index of young people's ability to jump through hoops and thus of their suitability for better jobs or training courses.

Make it possible for people to go to university at any time of life, at the point when they have developed an intense wish to learn about quantum physics or social anthropology, and more young people would go into work earlier, gain experience and confidence from it, and get more out of university eventually.

Perversely, so far, the expansion of university education has *diminished* social mobility. Before mass university education, few jobs required degrees, and a determined working-class kid could often overtake a dim middle-class kid by promotion on the job. Now almost all the children of the middle class go to universities, and many jobs are inaccessible without a degree (usually one irrelevant to the work). We should break the degree fetish.

Without exams, how will it be decided who gets into the posh universities and who into the less-posh? Initially, I suppose, by lottery. After a while, the hierarchy of universities from posh to less posh would be broken down. That's good.

The perversity of the current system is illustrated in Australia where, since almost everyone goes to a local university (because of the great distances), end-of-school grades determine more what course you get onto than what institution you go to.

To study dentistry at the University of Queensland, for example, you need an end-of-school grade in the top 2.7%. You can study physics with any grade in the top 55%. That is not because dentistry requires more intellect than quantum physics. It is because dentists are higher-paid than physicists. The exam system interweaves with and bolsters unjust social hierarchies.

Number four: closer integration of schools with the world of work.

Often, today, socialists complain that schools are over-gearred to producing workers for capitalist workplaces. Actually, they are only inefficiently so. They are geared more to producing jumpers-through-hoops for capitalist society. The integration of schools with the world of work is an old socialist idea: "the unified labour school".

Schools should help young people to acquire varied productive skills, to become confident and proud in their productive skills, to think critically about what they produce and how, and to cooperate with others both in production and in collectively defending their rights and dignity as workers.

School syllabuses today are packed with fiddly information which most students will forget as soon as they have done the relevant exam. Much of that should be junked. But syllabuses should not be "more relevant".

Education should introduce us to ideas and avenues of thinking which are *outside* what we are immediately spurred to think about by everyday practical life: learning about poetry as well as learning how to fill in forms; learning about the rules of mathematical proof as well as learning how to check your change.

Schools should teach more skills, too — touch-typing, sewing, knitting, cooking, tying knots, simple electrical and mechanical repairs, child care — so that young people become confident and proud about their ability to deal with daily life.

Older school students have part-time jobs sometimes (or often, in countries like Australia or the USA, where over 60% do). That is not bad. What is bad is that their jobs are almost always in sectors where they work only with other young workers, have few rights, and learn few skills.

Teenagers should have access to productive work in which they work with older people, have rights, get paid decent rates, learn new skills, and are able to interrelate their work and their studies. Both at work and in school, they should learn to work cooperatively, to help their workmates, rather than being locked into the individualistic and competitive model of education shaped by the exam system.

Schooling at present is more a filter than a pump. It enables young people to learn some good stuff. It is much better than no schooling. But at the same time it pushes students into competitive individualism. It exalts hoop-jumping above critical thought. It brands most as failures. It should be changed.

Lecturers paid £4 an hour

Many university teachers get less than the minimum wage, as little as £4 an hour, for the work they put in. Some are beginning to organise. Josie Foreman discusses the issues.

Academics love nothing more than having a moan about the terrible state of the neo-liberal university. We tend to be slightly less enthusiastic when it comes to getting up from our desks and doing something about it.

This has begun to change, as pockets of resistance have begun to emerge at several different British universities in the last few years.

There is a squeamishness among some older and more established leftist academic to organising as “workers”. At a discussion on the topic at the 2013 *Historical Materialism* conference, one participant argued that academics were more akin to 19th-century artisans, because unlike the factory workers we had relative autonomy over the process of production and we took a pride in our work.

As a feminist and as a historian who researches the history of domestic workers’ unions, I think it is crucial for us to find ways for “reproductive” workers to organise. Lecturers, like fire fighters, nurses, school teachers, cleaners, and other public service workers, risk hurting the people who use our services when we take industrial action. We do need to think creatively about how to ensure our action impacts managers more than students. But I also think that we should not feel guilty about sometimes having to withdraw our labour in order to make visible the hard work we do all day, every day. Otherwise, we argue ourselves into a position which says that only (usually white, male) factory workers can ever strike, because they are the only workers whose action directly impacts their bosses’ profits and nothing else.

Academia is becoming ever more proletarianised. Academics are expected to “produce” a certain amount of publications for the Research Excellence Framework to ensure continued funding. Our research and our teaching is now measurable according to management-defined units of value such as tiered journals and the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme; which in turn allows them to become commodified and exchanged within a global Higher Education market.

AUTONOMY

Increasingly, all that remains of academics’ autonomy is a sense of personal responsibility for our workload.

Such conditions are far from exceptional, but rather the paradigmatic experience of work under neo-liberalism, whereby workloads are privatised and even the lowest-paid workers are expected to be independently responsible for the completion of their own tasks rather than see themselves as part of a collective process of production.

Workplace organising is difficult. But because of this, I think the bonds of solidarity generated by it are all the stronger. Within a left which has a tendency to do this anyway, academics are perhaps especially guilty of projecting their desires for social change onto some other political agency, somewhere far away. I, for example, find it much easier (and even sometimes more inspiring) to write about a domestic workers’ union a hundred years ago, than to engage in the more mundane day-to-day politics of my own union.

This kind of “hands-off” or intellectualising approach to politics is not only easier, it is also more respectable. The neo-liberal university (in Britain at least) has sought to control subversive, radical thinking not so much by repressing it, but by commodifying it. Thus, academics can acquire considerable professional capital through the right kind of association with social movements (e.g., by writing books about them). Conversely, being active in your own union not only potentially damages your chances of promotion, but also marks you out among your colleagues as at best eccentric and, at worst, a head banger. While talking about social change in the abstract is still intellectually acceptable, attempting to position *oneself* as an agent of such change is often regarded as rather embarrassing.

Conversations about union organising shifted the culture within my department more generally, whereby we began to relate to each other not simply as professional colleagues but as political actors and fellow workers.

Taking the time to listen to the experiences of other workers also led me to reflect in ways I never had before on how



Higher Education workers strike on 31 October

my own actions sometimes contributed to the exploitation of colleagues in lower-status positions, and to think about how to carry out my day-to-day work in a way that maximises my ability to disrupt rather than support the neo-liberalisation of Higher Education.

One third of my department is made up of workers on casual contracts who are not told whether they will have work for the following year until two weeks before term starts. This is not unusual, even at a wealthy Russell Group university. Higher Education has one of the highest levels of casualisation within the British employment.

Conditions for casual workers in my university are no better or worse than at other institutions. Tutors are paid a wage according to how many hours of seminars they teach: £24 for those yet to complete their PhDs, £32 for fully qualified academics. This “hourly” wage in fact includes all work related to this single unit of teaching, including preparation (large quantities of academic reading as well as lesson planning), marking, meeting students and answering their emails, and staff meetings.

A report into working conditions completed at the end of last academic year showed that once preparation, marking, meeting students and answering emails has been taken into account, pay worked out as £4-5 per hour, less than the minimum wage.

The union rep took this report to an academic staff meeting (rather than a union branch meeting), thus taking advantage of notional structures of self-governance which still exist in many universities. This ensured that all members of permanent staff, whether they were union members or not, were required to acknowledge the conditions faced by Hourly Paid Lecturers (HPLs).

A number of permanent staff expressed shock at these conditions, of which they claimed to have been previously unaware despite these HPLs teaching on modules convened by such staff. On the whole, however, the response was supportive. It’s hard for anyone who, rightly or wrongly, believes in the value of a PhD to argue that seven years in Higher Education does not even earn the right to the minimum wage.

The Head of Department was therefore mandated to “look into” this situation, and produced a document clarifying the amount of time tutors were expected to spend on preparation, etc. Her eventual response was completely unrealistic (the bosses are not able to stipulate in writing that they expect you to be earning £4 per hour) and many HPLs remarked that it would be impossible to teach if only the designated amount of time were spent on preparation. However, it provided us with a basis around which to organise – we now had a “legitimate” document to refer to when pushing for better conditions.

Seeing that it was possible to see some movement regarding their situation, HPLs began to join the union. Another issue which helped to generate involvement with the union was a campaign organised by the university-wide branch’s “hourly-paid working group”. They had discovered that HPLs were eligible to claim back holiday pay for the last two academic years, which HR had failed to inform them they were entitled to.

Spreading the word about this both demonstrated that the union could do something concrete to improve the lives of HPLs and also drew them into online networks where they began to discuss their situation more generally. Three weeks into the start of term, 19 out of the 20 HPLs in my department

had joined UCU.

The strike on 31 October provided a further focus for organising. HPLs proved the most militant out of all the union members in the department, despite the fact that the pay claim over which we were striking did not directly affect them.

I found that HPLs were far more willing to stick their necks out and demand an end to their hyper-exploitation than I had expected. Perhaps this is because unionisation among HPLs is so solid and they have been very effective in speaking with a collective voice. But it is also surely due to the fact that people are beginning to see through the fantasy we are sold: if we work hard and keep our heads down for a few years of misery, we will eventually be rewarded with a cushy permanent post.

Increasingly, hourly-paid employment is becoming a permanent state of affairs. I know one academic who received her PhD in the late 1990s and who has been stuck in short-term, hourly-paid posts for 15 years. At the age of 40 her income is still so low that she is eligible to claim housing benefit. If the situation of such academics is to improve, it can only be through collective action. An individual escape route is no longer possible for the majority of university workers.

Organising around such issues in my department has so far generated more opposition from the union branch than it has from university management. The “old white dudes” (as we like to call them) who have run the union for years are threatened by the prospect of young radical members asking the branch to respond to their interests as well as those of more established permanent staff members.

TEACHING

For many HPLs (and thus for a significant proportion of academic staff overall), the strike day fell on the one day a week when they did all their teaching, meaning that they effectively lost a week’s instead of a day’s wages by taking part in industrial action.

When my department started up a solidarity fund, asking permanent staff (some of whom earn well above £60,000) to donate £20 each towards the lost wages of striking HPLs, the union branch executive tried to block us, claiming that this would alienate our members. In fact, the fund was extremely well supported and helped to generate conversations between different levels of staff as well as a feeling of solidarity within the department.

The branch exec also opposed us having a picket line outside our department building rather than joining the central picket line on a sparsely populated roundabout on the edge of campus. Again, we went ahead anyway, after someone from the law school confirmed that the spurious legal reasons they had given us for opposing such action were unfounded.

Having a picket line outside our actual place of work was much more fruitful, allowing us to have conversations with colleagues with whom we already had relationships, in which we explained the reasons for the strike and asked them not to cross the picket line. One HPL from another department joined the union on the picket line as a result, and many students also came out in support. Again, an unusual sense of solidarity and relationships outside of the confines of the workplace began to be forged in this exceptional and politicised space.

UCU have called us out once again on 3 December. This time we will be better prepared, but already the enthusiasm for one-day, largely symbolic strikes has begun to wane. UCU will need a clear strategy of escalation, as well as forms of action more directly targeted against management.

Forcing the local union branches to take on board the degree to which the university labour market has been fundamentally restructured around greater dependence on precarious, low-paid teachers, is going to be a long hard job. But small groups of HPLs at universities including Birkbeck, Goldsmiths, Leeds, Leicester, LSE, and Warwick, have, over the last few years, begun to make a start.

It is their experiences which point in the direction that Higher Education is going, but it is also upon their militancy and willingness to act collectively that any challenge to the neo-liberal university will be founded.

• A longer version of this article appears online at bit.ly/josie-foreman

Uni workers' strikes must escalate

By a Unison HE activist

Higher education workers will strike again over pay on 3 December.

The employers have tabled a 1% pay offer, which is effectively a cut, and are currently refusing to improve on it.

The first strike day, 31 October, saw lecturers' union UCU and support workers' unions Unison and Unite come out. This time we will be joined by Scottish teachers' union EIS.

It seems that UCU wanted a two-day strike, but for the sake of unity with the other unions have settled for another one-day action.

The Halloween strike was patchy, seemingly stronger on the academic side than it was among support staff. UCU activists have been through a lot in the last few years, whereas the support staff unions are

almost coming from a standing start.

Cross-union committees have been meeting in a number of universities to plan strike activities; this is a positive development which needs to be encouraged.

One of the most encouraging things has been the level of student support. When UCU struck a few years ago, many student unions took a stance of outright opposition. This time around, a lot have come out in support, and even the National Union of Students executive has passed a motion in favour of the strike.

This is all great news, and maintaining student support will be more important as the dispute goes on, particularly into exam periods. On the other side of the coin, solidarity actions around the pay dispute can also help to revive the student movement and orient it to class struggle.



But student support won't win us the dispute; industrial organisation will.

Unfortunately the strategy of the leaderships (if it exists) is not being widely disseminated (except, partially, in UCU), so it is difficult to persuade colleagues of the need to join the union and participate in the action, because we don't know where the action is going. We need to pressure the leaderships to develop and communicate a national strategy and, if they don't, come up with one of our own.

The living wage claim is a big card in our hand. The moral force of the demand is very strong. But we need to make sure that campaigning for the living wage doesn't become the preserve of the great and the good acting on behalf of poor unfortunate workers. The living wage issue needs to be approached industrially — we need to see it as a demand around which we can build union

power. One of the problems in this dispute is that most (but by no means all) of the staff who are paid below the living wage are outsourced. Because they work for private companies, they have not been balloted for the national action, so it almost feels like we are fighting on their behalf, which is far from ideal.

Nevertheless, in my workplace we have managed to build loose co-ordination between the living wage campaign and joint activist meetings, using each to help build the other.

Even if we don't win our national claim, I think it's likely that we will win the living wage, which will be a big victory for us in a workplace where the unions aren't particularly strong.

In all honesty, it feels unlikely that we will win the pay dispute if it continues at its current level and pace. The employers can easily sit out a few one day strikes, if that's the road we're going down.

But we can push for escalation, and even without it the dispute can still result in increased union strength, a culture of cooperation across unions, and victories on the living wage if we play things right.

Rank-and-file teachers' committee meets

By an NUT activist

The steering committee of the Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC), a rank-and-file network in the National Union of Teachers (NUT) met on 23 November in Nottingham.

The meeting was attended by over 20 delegates from NUT associations (branches), and others. Its main discussion was on the union's ongoing dispute over pay, workload, and pensions. Delegates discussed how to revive national action, and how to build a real campaign over workload. LANAC will circulate a model motion calling for national strikes, and for the union to promote local strikes over workload, and to publicise successes.

A second model motion was also endorsed encouraging associations to build networks of reps, joint action committees, and other local rank-and-file structures to escalate the action-short-of-strikes at a

local level.

The meeting also voted to write an open letter to the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), asking them to withdraw the candidacy of their comrade Jess Edwards, who plans to stand against Socialist Party member and LANAC convenor Martin Powell-Davies in the forthcoming election for the Inner London seat on the NUT's Executive.

Despite claiming to support LANAC's strategy of escalation, the SWP are standing as part of a slate with Alex Kenny, a leading "left-wing" supporter of the current leadership's "strategy". LANAC also agreed to support AWL member and Notts NUT activist Liam Conway against a possible victimisation from union officialdom for his role in raising questions about possible financial corruption by officers of his local union.

Minutes of the meeting, and the model motions for NUT associations, will appear on the LANAC website at nutlan.org.uk.

UCU members in Further Education will also join the 3 December strike after they voted by 71% to reject a 0.7% pay offer.

A union statement said: "College lecturers have seen their pay fall by 15% in the past four years and fail to make up any ground against school teachers' pay, despite increasing workloads."

Cinema workers continue fight

By Ira Berkovic

Cinema workers employed by the Curzon chain have promised to escalate their campaign if management backtrack from an agreement to recognise their union, BECTU.

Curzon management have agreed in principle to recognise the union, but for reasons which a campaign statement says are "unclear", have stalled in signing it. The campaign has agreed a truce until 25 November, in which time it expects management to sign the agreement.

The statement said: "De-



spite going through a potential agreement with officials from the BECTU union last week, clause-by-clause and word-by-word, Curzon have not organized any future meetings to sign the agreement.

"Staff are not sure if Curzon are serious or whether they are just wasting time,

but members have decided to act responsibly and suspend the campaign for a week until Monday 25th November. This gives Curzon time to sign the agreement without any more distractions from activities that may make them feel pressured or worried."

Workers have been cam-

paigning for the London Living Wage and union recognition since spring 2013. Writing to support their campaign, filmmaker Mike Leigh said: "I use and love Curzon cinemas, and as a film-maker I have enjoyed their hospitality.

"So I am shocked to discover such an obscene difference between the exemplary way they treat their public and their cynical exploitation of their staff."

Follow the campaign online at @CurzonWorkers on Twitter, or search for "Curzon Workers' Party" on Facebook.

Blacklisters targeted

By Darren Bedford

Trade union activists targeted blacklisting employers on a 20 November day of action.

The day, which was called by the TUC, saw demonstrations, rallies, and other direct actions targeting companies such as Sir Robert McAlpine, a construction firm.

An ongoing parliamentary enquiry has revealed that the firm spent £28,000 on union-busting and blacklisting activities.

Demonstrations were held in Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Hemel Hempstead, London, Leeds, Manchester, New-

castle, Wolverhampton, and elsewhere.

Campaigners from the Blacklist Support Group say the government should properly investigate and stamp out the practise of blacklisting, rather than using its current industrial relations enquiry to attack unions' "leverage" campaigns.





Solidarity

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Outsourced workers strike for equality

On Wednesday 27 and Thursday 28 November, outsourced workers at the University of London will strike as part of their "3 Cosas" ("3 Things") campaign for equality on sick pay, holidays, and pensions with their directly employed colleagues.

The strike coincides with the University's "Foundation Day", due to be attended by Princess Anne. A protest is planned for 6pm on Wednesday 27 November at Senate House. A University of London worker spoke to Solidarity about the strike.

What are the demands of the strike?

The three issues are union recognition, terms and conditions, and job losses.

We want a formal recognition agreement in order to set up a proper negotiating infrastructure.

The current terms and conditions are far inferior to those of direct employees of the University of London. We want parity in these terms and conditions



between directly-employed and outsourced workers.

The University of London is planning on shutting down the Garden Halls, a halls of residence where many of our members are employed as cleaners, next summer. We want the company to re-allocate these workers within the company as vacancies arise in order to prevent job losses.

What can people do to support the strike?

People can come to Senate House, where workers will gather, on the strike

days. We will be there from 6am to 1pm on 27 November, and from 6am to 3pm on 28 November. The second way to help is by donating to the strike fund, so that those low paid workers going on strike won't lose as much money. You can donate on line at bit.ly/3cosas-fund

What do you think about the University's use of surveillance and police intimidation, including arrest, against activists on campus?

The University of Lon-

don has turned to increasingly aggressive tactics in order to silence the campaign. This includes attempting to ban protests on campus, collaborating with the police in order to arrest students, closing off spaces on campus with barricades and chains, and filming staff and students who protest peacefully. The University of London is resorting to these tactics because they simply do not have a moral argument.

Furthermore, after the campaign ignored the University's ban on peaceful protests, I believe that management felt the need to become even more aggressive in order to not lose face. Given that they are now arresting people for organising demonstrations, and the demonstrations continue to occur, I am not sure what their next move will be. Perhaps banning students from campus altogether?

What else does campaign have planned?

27 and 28 November are just the first strike days. If we do not make progress we will continue with a series of rolling strikes until Balfour Beatty starts to take us seriously. The status quo, where outsourced workers are forced to work when sick or injured, do not have enough time to visit family, and don't have a decent pension, simply cannot continue. We have offered to sit down at the negotiating table with Balfour Beatty on various occasions. We agreed to talks through ACAS, but after four and a half hours of dithering they offered nothing.

We had a 97% yes vote in our ballot. We expect the picket line to be quite large.

• Abridged from bit.ly/3c-interview

Workers will fight Tube cuts

By Gerry Bates

On 21 November, London Underground announced plans to close all its ticket offices and cut nearly 1,000 station staff posts.

Passengers and trade unionists responded with immediate opposition: within hours of the announcement, disabled campaigners held an impromptu protest at Westminster station, and the RMT trade union announced an industrial action ballot.

The proposed reduction in station staffing is driven by a 12.5% cut in government funding for Transport for London. London Underground's new plan will save only a fraction of this money, so we can expect many more cuts.

Janine Booth, who represents London Transport workers on RMT's national executive, told *Solidarity*, "London Underground is preparing to run a service accessible only to those with the wherewithal to travel around the system without help. People who need assistance from staff in a ticket office or on a station — because they are unfamiliar with the system, they are elderly or disabled, they have been harassed or assaulted, or many other reasons — will no longer be welcome on London's Underground.

"LU has served a 90-day notice of redundancies and clearly intends to ignore opposition and push this through. It is fully backed by Tory Mayor Boris Johnson, despite his



Disabled activists protest ticket office closures

promise not to close ticket offices when he was chasing Londoners' votes. This is why RMT has called immediate action, and we are confident that the other Tube unions will oppose this attack too. LU has based its plans on a fake 'consultation' exercise called 'Every Journey Matters', so we are calling our campaign 'Every Job Matters'."

London Underground announced on the same day that it would begin running trains all night on Friday and Saturday nights on five lines, creating 200 jobs. This is a separate issue from the station staff cuts, and LUL's announcing the two together was a cynical act designed to see all-night running on the front pages with the huge station staffing cuts relegated to the small print.

IDEAS

Workers' Liberty's Tube-worker bulletin will be playing an active part in this fight, and putting forward ideas for winning strategies.

Its new issue welcomes RMT's promptness in calling action, and argues for all grades and unions to unite; for regular information from the unions to members; for an alliance between workers and passengers against the cuts; and for effective, creative, sustained industrial action discussed and drawn up by rank-and-file members. *Tubeworker* will soon be holding a special meeting to discuss lessons from previous battles.

While Underground workers' own action is essential to defending Tube funding, London's whole working-class movement needs to rally to defend its public transport system.

• rmtlondoncalling.org.uk
• @LULnojobcuts on Twitter
• EVERY JOB MATTERS on Facebook

Universities strike on 3 December

By a UCU activist

Members of UCU, Unite, Unison in higher education will be striking again on 3 December.

This time they'll be joined by Scottish education union EIS and UCU members in further education.

The background to the strike is a 13% real-terms pay cut since 2009: the equivalent of working half a day a week for free. Employers have offered just 1% — well below inflation — and have made no concessions either on the living wage or the gender

pay gap. On the advice of university employers' organisation UCEA, some institutions have imposed the offer and will be paying a back-dated 1% rise before Christmas. This is a cynical attempt to undermine the dispute and it's vital to get the message out to members that the fight is still on.

The unions also need to respond to the news that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has massively overspent on subsidies to private HE providers and intends to impose huge cuts — £570m and £860m over the

next two years — to student support and research funding. On the one hand this shows up exactly where the government's priorities lie — with privatisation and the creation of a rigged market. Many people will rightly be furious. But on the other it could fuel pessimism about the possibilities of winning on pay.

To date the unions have focused on arguing that the money is there in university surpluses. Now we need to turn our fire on the government too.

• More on pages 10 & 11