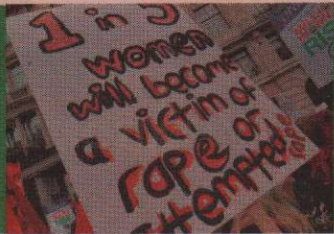


# workers power 5



Let's build  
Left Unity



Fight for  
women's  
liberation



Syrian  
activist  
speaks

May 2013 ★ Donation – £1 suggested ★ Issue 371

Monthly paper of the British section of the League for the Fifth International



**Carla Turner**

1 APRIL 2013 could go down in history as the day that marked the beginning of the end for our National Health Service. If, that is, we don't rouse ourselves to massive nationwide action NOW. General practitioners (GPs) have already started the takeover of the lion's share of the NHS budget



**1 in 10  
A&Es to close**

and services are being handed to private companies such as Serco and Virgin to run. A&E units face closure across the country.

It is an outrage that the Labour Party, which created the NHS in 1946-48, and the trade unions – especially those representing health workers – have done little in response to this danger.

Despite the fact that millions see the NHS as the most loved and necessary institution in Britain, the health unions and the Labour Party have not organised a single national demonstration or nationwide day of action.

The large-scale local protests against specific closures – like the recent Defend Stafford Hospital demo – show that such a



**40,000  
march in Staffs**

call could have put millions on the streets. It has been left to local or citywide groups to organise events like the 18 May Defend London's NHS demonstration.

The People's Assembly planned for 22 June must put a rocket under the union leaders and launch the call to take to the streets and launch industrial and direct action to save our NHS.

**Defend London's NHS – demonstrate – 12pm  
18 May – Jubilee Gardens, Waterloo SE1**

# Inside the NHS: the wreckers go in

Carla Turner

THE HEALTH and Social Care Act became law a year ago and is now well down the road of implementation. The new structures – implemented on 1 April – mean that GP-led groups are taking control of local budgets and a new board, NHS England, has begun to oversee the day-to-day running of our services.

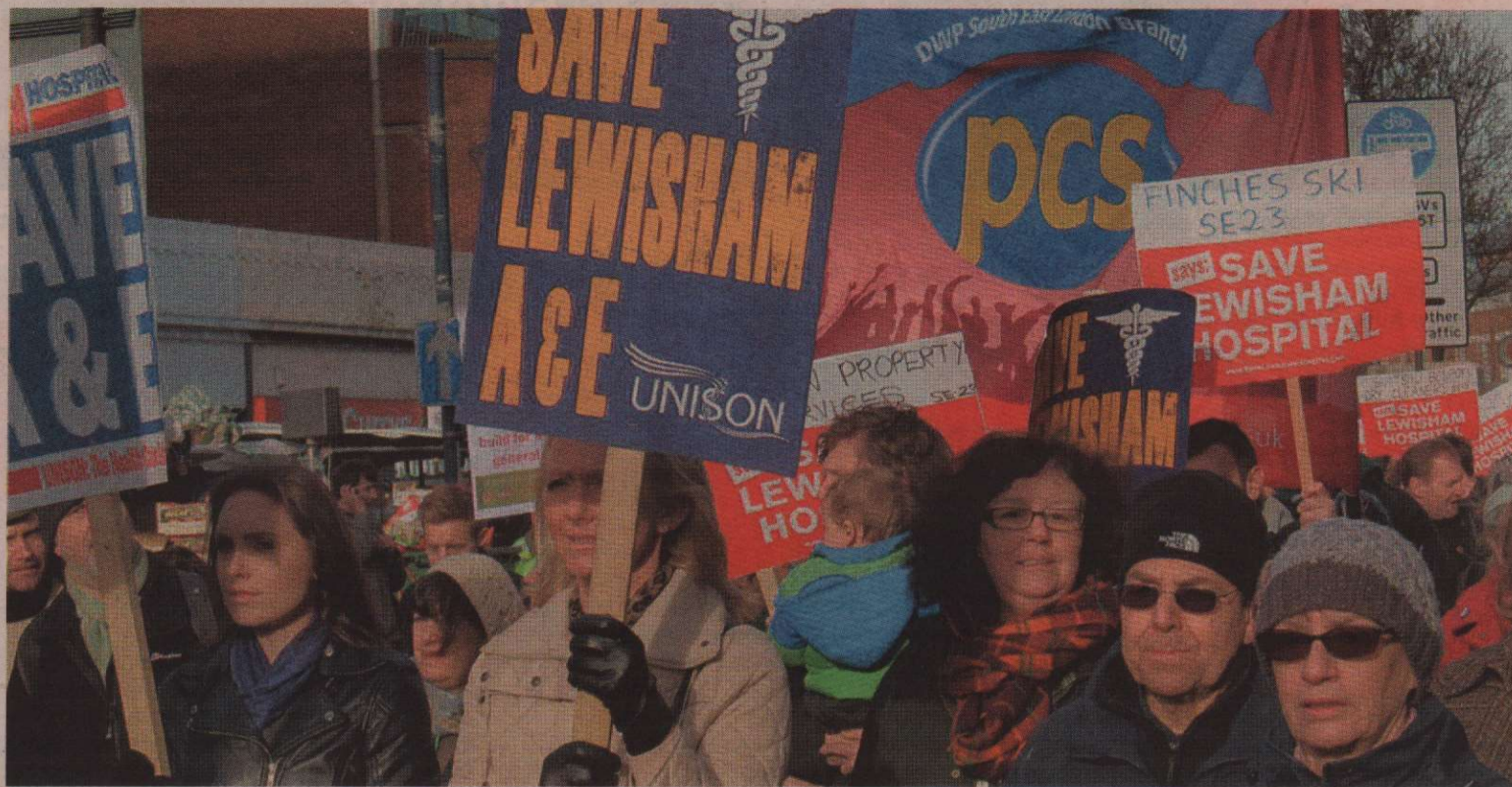
Rather than allowing GPs to make the best decision for the patients, because ‘they know them the best’ as the government has been suggesting, it’s obvious that the Department of Health is deciding how GPs spend the money.

It’s also clear that with GPs already stretched for time the job of controlling local budgets will just be auctioned off to private companies allowing healthcare to become even more fragmented.

## Hospital wards face the axe

Many wards all over the country are facing the axe, from maternity and paediatrics to care of the elderly. With an increased aging population, shutting down wards is putting the general public at risk. With the majority of wards already understaffed it’s becoming increasingly difficult to keep them open, particularly at weekends or at nights. With 11 out of 175 children’s wards being shut down waiting lists are simply going to grow as hospitals become more and more stretched for beds.

What we need is to create more jobs rather than cutting them to ensure that wards can be staffed at a safe level and the wards which provide our care aren’t just closed



The recent march of thousands to defend Lewisham hospital is a taste of things to come

down with no thought for the consequences.

Accident and Emergencies across the country are under pressure with fast rising numbers of patients and falling numbers of staff.

As more people find it harder to get doctor’s appointments and drop-in centres are being closed down, people are resorting to A&E for non-urgent issues. But these are becoming increasingly prone to greater risk as doctors and nurses work overtime with no sleep breaks to make up for the loss in staff. And with one in 10 closed or set to close, a vast number of people are going to have to travel

some distance to reach their local A&E department.

It’s clear that closing down A&Es is just a prelude to closing the whole hospital, as you lose all your acute admissions and a domino effect occurs.

The push for closing these departments is simply cost cutting without any thought to how people in the community are going to be affected. With A&Es already seeing waiting times of over four hours, cuts will see waiting times rocket.

## NHS Trusts look for cuts

NHS Trusts all over the country are beginning to refuse operations

under the NHS. These range from hip replacements to cataract removal and wisdom tooth extraction. People are also being refused surgery if it’s believed to be linked to their so-called ‘life style choices’ such as drinking or being overweight.

NHS Portsmouth will not allow patients classed as overweight to have routine hip or knee replacements whereas before they only said the obese could be refused. And NHS West Kent is forcing smokers to go on quitting courses before they can join waiting lists for operations.

NHS Warwickshire is cutting ‘low

priority’ treatments, which include injections for back pain, and managers must first clear any orthopaedic surgery.

The NHS in Greater Manchester and Oldham is refusing surgery for mild varicose veins and strict criteria must be met before removal of warts or tonsils will be considered. It’s going to be the poorest who cannot afford to pay for these operations privately who are going to suffer.

To top it all off, we are told to swallow cuts to frontline services to ‘reduce spending’ whilst the top managers recruited to do the cutting pocket obscene wages.

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## Editorial

**REVOLUTIONARY UNITY** is a burning question today.

The crisis in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has implications for the entire left. Allegations of rape against a leading member were shamefully mishandled. Expulsions and a clampdown on dissent provoked an ongoing exodus from the party.

The International Socialist Network (ISN) is grouping together many who have left the SWP. It held its first national meeting in London on Saturday 13 April. The ISN adopted a draft constitution, elected a provisional steering committee and pledged to discuss and develop its politics in the months ahead.

It also indicated a willingness to discuss the issue of revolutionary unity with other groups on the left both in Britain and internationally. This is certainly an offer that Workers Power will take up. Indeed we made such a proposal ourselves in the February issue of our paper.

At the same time, the Ken Loach appeal for Left Unity has created a flood of interest amongst former members of left groups and Labour, as well as new activists.

Workers Power strongly supports this initiative and believes that we should do all we can to draw in the largest possible number of those fighting to defend the gains of the working class against the heirs of Thatcher and those disillusioned with the wretched policies of Ed Miliband's Blue Labour.

Of course we recognise that in its first phase such a new party will draw together a plurality of traditions; this makes the fundamental question of a reformist or revolutionary alternative an open question yet to be decided. For us though this does not mean that this is either an unimportant issue, one we should keep quiet about now nor that we can devise some sort of a halfway house between them.

What we do believe is that if revolutionary socialists want to go beyond the stage of small propaganda groups – even ones with a few thousand members like the SWP – then we will have to have these debates out again with a far larger audience, with a new generation of fighters.

But amongst revolutionaries who stand in the classical Marxist tradition there is a powerful feeling that the divisions between us damage the influence we might have in the broader working class movement, especially in this time of deep and prolonged capitalist crisis.

This desire for unity urgently needs to be addressed. But how to do it in a principled way, one that can lead to solid and lasting unity? Well it must certainly start from the burning issues of strategy and tactics facing the working class today, which require a revolutionary, not a reformist answer. Nor for that matter an incoherent mixture of the two (i.e. a centrist answer). We can see where that leads in the policies of the SWP and the Socialist Party (SP) in the movements against the cuts: tailing the union leaders and mimicking left reformist Keynesian policies.

The questions we need to address are the following:

- How can we build mass direct action sufficient to halt the Coalition onslaught and drive them out?
- How do we unite the forces of resistance at a national and local level?
- How do we organise the rank and file of the unions against the bureaucratic misleaders?
- How do we organise powerful movements amongst women youth, the immigrant communities?

From these burning issues arise more fundamental ones – the issues of developing a revolutionary programme of transitional and immediate demands, of what democratic centralism and a Leninist party would look like today, of the need not only for international solidarity but for a new International that can raise a world vision of revolutionary change.

These are only some elements of an agenda for discussion we would like to debate with all those who see the need for revolutionary unity.

We encourage all our readers to join – or set up! – their local Left Unity group in a spirit of enthusiasm and collaboration.

## 80,000 vote for Jerry Hicks



Jerry Hicks won 36 per cent of the votes in the Unite general secretary election on a rank and file ticket – turn to page 5 for more

### Post Office workers fight Coalition's 'transformation'

POST OFFICE workers have taken strike action twice, on Easter Saturday and again on 19 April. They're angry at plans to close or franchise 76 big high street or "crown" post offices – over 20 per cent. And that's just the start of what the Coalition calls the "transformation" of Post Office Ltd (POL), aka privatisation.

The Coalition keeps repeating the mantra that "the Post Office is safe in our hands". In reality it's about opening up new areas of profit for British businesses, franchising individual offices to a few big retailers like WH Smith that will provide fewer services to the public. The aim is to commercialise and mutualise the Post Office on the model of the Co-op, since an outright sell-off would spark outrage including in the Tory shires.

Post Office bosses are completely to blame for the strike, they have refused to negotiate on these cuts which threaten 770 jobs. The 4000 PO staff are also fed up waiting for a pay rise, since their last one was Spring 2011. That's the reason for a brilliant 88 per cent vote (on a 75 per cent turnout) for strike action, and well-attended picket lines which have been joined by pensioners. Support your local post office workers and help stamp out privatisation!

### Leeds: 1000 say don't pay bedroom tax – stay put!

MORE THAN 1,000 people marched through the streets of Leeds on 20 April in protest against the Bedroom Tax. With chants of "axe axe the Bedroom Tax!" and "They say cut back, we say fight back!", we drew crowds of hundreds to watch the demonstration.

The speeches at Victoria Gardens were an emotive and inspiring mix of campaigners and victims of the Bedroom Tax. One woman spoke about how she keeps medical equipment in her "spare bedroom" and another said that if she were evicted then her grandchildren would no longer be able to stay with her.

John Davies, Chair of Leeds Hands Off Our Homes, explained that it would cost far less for the council to ignore the bedroom tax than to evict tenants.

Speakers called for non-payment and further protests. If Leeds City Council decides to evict non-payers then we must organise resistance on each and every doorstep – a wall of campaigners to defend each tenant.

- No to evictions
- Tax the rich to build homes
- Impose rent controls set by tenants
- AXE THE TAX!



In the aftermath of the tragic Boston Marathon bombing, US president Barack Obama asked why two young Muslim men, raised and schooled in America, would turn against the establishment.

Maybe another question should be asked: why, after five years in office, has Obama still not closed Guantanamo Bay or pulled US troops out of Afghanistan?

# People's Assembly can relaunch the struggle

Dave Stockton

THE INITIATIVE by the Coalition of Resistance (CoR) to hold a People's Assembly in Central Hall, Westminster on 22 June comes at a critical moment.

Despite the nearly unanimous opinion of economists and political commentators that George Osborne's Plan A has failed to lead to any real recovery, he, Cameron and Clegg have no Plan B. They are pressing ahead with savage new attacks on benefits, including the hateful bedroom tax, and the demolition of NHS is entering its decisive phase.

Indeed, the April budget has inaugurated a "shock and awe" blitz against the whole welfare state. Eighty per cent of the Tory-Lib Dem cuts programme remains to be rammed through before the general election, that is, within two years. Realisation of the scale of the attack is dawning on even the most complacent forces in the labour movement.

Now is the time to develop a direct action strategy to resist every cut, to halt the Coalition in its tracks, to create a mass movement that can culminate in a general strike to drive this reactionary government from power. Nothing less will stop them. If they are not stopped, Thatcher's unfinished agenda, to destroy the welfare state, will be completed by the Bullingdon Boys.

So the news that 1,500 delegates have already registered for the People's Assembly is encouraging. The organisers' goal is to reach 3,500 delegates and to be a "launch pad for resistance to austerity".

We need to ensure that as many of these really are delegates, that they are chosen by their union branches and local anti-cuts groups after a real debate about what strategy the Assembly should adopt. It would be good, too, to hold preparatory people's assemblies in every town and city, in every metropolitan borough, to prepare for 22 June.

The strategy we need should, in our view, be based on pulling together the struggles:

- Against benefit caps and the bedroom tax
- Against the demolition of the National Health Service
- Against the academies and free schools that are breaking up the state education system

- Against the massive job losses in the public sector
- Against the degradation of the lives of the young through unemployment and the old through poverty and pension robbery.

A monster demonstration in the autumn, to imitate, or even surpass, the great 2003 anti-war march, has been suggested. That could certainly play a role in mobilising opposition to the government but, as 2003 proved, much more than a demo is needed. What is needed is to put some muscle on the bones of the talk by Len McCluskey and the Unite leadership of a general strike.

Although their concrete suggestions of strikes by some sections, supported financially by others remaining at

work, and their attempts to duck and dive around the constraints of the anti-union laws, are far too feeble, they have posed the question of the general strike more overtly than the other leaders and we need to take them up on it.

If the Assembly will not discuss how to get a general strike to stop the Austerity Offensive, it will have failed. We will be back onto the hamster wheel of coordinated days of action "with no tomorrow", as the French say.

Indeed, talking of "launching" a fight, as the Assembly Appeal does, is inaccurate: we need to re-launch the resistance that has stalled badly over the last year. We need to face up to what went wrong with the resistance over the past three years.

We need to remember the brave acts of resistance, like the 2009 Ford-Visteon factory occupations or the December 2010 youth uprising against the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and the massive increase in tuition fees. And we

need to remember that these were left in isolation and without mass support. We also need to recall the times when the union leaders, some of whom will be in the Central Hall in June, marched us up to the top of the hill and then marched us down again, carefully avoiding any real engagement with the enemy.

We need to face the truth that this abject failure was in large measure thanks to the strategy adopted by the left union leaders. In order to avoid confronting the anti-union laws, they did not launch a campaign against the government's austerity programme but instead relied on a "coordinated" campaign on the issue of pensions. The actual result of this was very little coordination, even less action and a huge cut in pension rights.

Another issue is the so-called far left's "alternative leadership" or rather the complete lack of it. We have had conferences, more truthfully public rallies, aplenty. Every one of their platforms has been graced (if that is the word) by assorted General Secretaries but, for all the supposed conferring, no operative plan of action has emerged.

Thanks to the far left, we have three or more rival "anti-cuts campaigns", each promising to coalesce or unite the resistance but in fact each playing their part in dividing it. Nor have the blinkered localists and libertarians done any better. They have run grassroots campaigns or striking propaganda direct actions like Occupy or UK Uncut, but unity was precisely what eluded them.

Another "super conference", the People's Assembly, once more presents the opportunity for unity and action, for a real united front at local and national level. Will it hammer out a plan of action rather than an empty declaration? Will it dare challenge the union leaders and their bankrupt strategies, will it confront the splits and divisions in the anti-austerity movement at national and local level?

In building for the Assembly, we have to debate and discuss the problems, the contentious issues we face. If we do not, it will be just another talkfest – and we have had quite enough of them.

# Postal workers plan boycott of privatised mail



The fire last time – CWU postal worker militants launched wildcat strikes in 2007 to overcome their leaders' timidity and bosses' bullying, and very nearly won

Andy Yorke

This year may not be the year the world ends but it certainly could prove a bad one for anyone who relies on Royal Mail, once again threatened with privatisation. Now plans by the postal Communication Workers Union (CWU) to boycott privatised mail in the coming months could kickstart the struggle against a sell-off. It will take an all-out national strike against privatisation, demanding solidarity from the TUC unions and wider public, to defeat this historic attack.

## The rigged 'free market'

Since 2006 Royal Mail has been thrown into a profits crisis by government-rigged competition, where private operators like TNT and UK Mail cherry pick the profitable bulk mail accounts, collecting and processing mail from banks and big business, but then using Royal Mail to deliver the mail at below cost prices dictated by the regulator, a system known as "Downstream Access" (DSA). Royal Mail must still shoulder the heavy costs of fulfilling the Universal Service Obligation (USO), delivering to every address, every day across Britain.

Over half of mail is now collected and sorted by private companies under the DSA. Now TNT has gone one step further and set up a delivery operation in West London, with its workers on low-wage, zero-hour contracts – the casualised face of the future if postal workers don't fight back. They intend to expand to all major city centres.

The regulator Ofcom has rejected the CWU's demands that TNT be obliged to deliver

to the same standards as Royal Mail and for a living wage minimum for the sector. The aim is to let privatisation rip.

Add in the rumours of future cuts to USO requirements (for instance, less than the current six day delivery) and the new TNT operation represents the biggest material threat so far to the USO.

The government's plans to start the sell-off of Royal Mail this autumn will accelerate attacks on postal workers' jobs and wages, and mean higher prices and worse service for customers.

## Boycott the privatisers

In response the CWU has launched a campaign against privatisation, and in relation to the TNT delivery threat, is pushing the idea of a boycott of rival companies' mail in defence of the USO and the union. A national meeting of local officials and area reps in March voted unanimously for the proposal, and the union's annual conference in late April will almost certainly endorse the plan too.

The call to boycott could get a good response. While workers outside of London don't yet realise the scale of the danger with TNT delivery, everyone's sick and tired of delivering competitors' mail. But many will be confused since the CWU Postal Executive Committee (PEC) hasn't explained that it means an illegal strike.

Some activists are confident a boycott will succeed, pointing to the fact that if Royal Mail suspended individuals for refusing to handle competitors' mail, it would see a wave of wildcats like in 2003 and 2007. Others argue that defeats in 2007 and 2010 especially,

where mass wildcats against victimisation were not enough to win, and the unopposed closures of the most militant mail centres since mean we should not be complacent.

## Build from below

To ensure success we need to build up an active campaign to prepare members for the struggle ahead – just what the PEC isn't doing.

The CWU postal leadership around Dave Ward and Billy Hayes won't call a national strike against privatisation – also illegal under the anti-union laws. Instead they are throwing the initiative on the members to break the law, trying to spark a guerrilla war against the changes to the USO. And a militant union with an illegal strike victory under its belt would make Royal Mail privatisation a dead duck – who would buy it?

Then, if Labour is elected in 2015 it will all be ok... such is the thinking of Ward, Hayes and co. The danger is they are playing with a risky tactic without being serious about it, and willing to settle for concessions on the USO from the Tories – which would be temporary, aimed at getting the strike called off – but stop short of defeating privatisation completely. Ultimately with the USO in place, the CWU leaders can live with privatisation.

If the leadership don't mobilise the membership, touring the branches with mass meetings to explain the issues and discuss how to make a boycott work, then it has little chance of success.

## All-out to win

Activists and reps against privatisation should network directly to make it work and turn it into an open all-out strike against privatisation, coordinating with other workers such as Post Office strikers. Let's demand the TUC calls a general strike, as the quickest way to completely repel these Tory attacks or in defence of our union if the government tries to repress us.

That the current CWU leadership won't do what it takes to defeat privatisation is a fact we must face. If activists can get together to form a rank and file movement to hold the leaders to account and take control of the action when they shrink back, like Ward and Hayes did in 2007 and 2010, then it could see a strike against privatisation through to the end.

# 'More votes than can fill Wembley'

Jerry Hicks has delivered a blow to Len McCluskey, scoring a massive 36 per cent of the vote in the election for the General Secretary of Unite, Britain's biggest union, writes **Jeremy Dewar**

ALTHOUGH JERRY HICKS did not win, the 50 per cent increase in the avowedly rank and file candidate's poll will have sent shivers down the spine of not only Len McCluskey and the Unite officials, but also the TUC leaders. If Jerry and his supporters can transform this vote into a sizable, functioning and militant grassroots organisation, then McCluskey's comfortable – though smaller than anticipated – victory could be short-lived.

## David, Goliath and the gutter

"We spent about £4,000 (from donations), produced some 75,000 leaflets, relied upon public transport, and the generosity of often complete strangers to offer a bed/couch for the night," said Jerry.

"The union establishment spent up to 100 times the amount of money we did, produced maybe one million leaflets, sent out letters to close on 500,000 members and had hundreds of paid officials promoting and supporting their boss, McCluskey."

But this doesn't tell the half of it. McCluskey and his supporters were quick prepared to descend into the gutter to gain a few votes. Unsolicited letters and text messages to members, where previously there had been silence; McCluskey suddenly became a media magnet, making left-sounding speeches designed to make Unite look like it was heading the anti-Tory charge.

But any branch (and there were



many) which asked McCluskey to appear for a hustings – i.e. a head-to-head debate in front of the members – received no reply or a curt refusal from his campaign team. Why? Because he knew he would have to attack Jerry's policies and defend his own, something he tried to do in 2010 and failed. This says a million words about the type of union and disregard for democracy that McCluskey really stands for.

There were hundreds of messages about Jerry "destroying" or "bankrupting" the union, but McCluskey's team hit rock bottom when a branch secretary from Plymouth tweeted: "I have voted for @Unite4Len for GS. I want a GS who doesn't condone sex crimes against women."

## ELECTION RESULT

- Len McCluskey  
144,570
- Jerry Hicks  
79,819
- Turnout 15.2%

Steve Turner, Director of Executive Policy at Unite and McCluskey's campaign manager, then disgracefully retweeted the message.

The reference was to the Socialist Workers Party's crisis, caused by its terrible mishandling of a rape accusation against one of its leading members. But it was pure slur and innuendo. All three of the leading SWP opponents in the campaign were known opponents of the leadership's cover-up and Jerry of course has never "condoned" violence against women.

McCluskey and any of his supporters who have a shred of decency about them ought to join with Jerry in seeking an inquiry into these libelous accusations and the seeming misuse of union resources to support the general secretary's re-election.

## Officials and members

Workers Power supporters learned a lot from the short but lively campaign. Wherever we went, we got a positive response.

For example, when we visited the Nestlé factories in Halifax, we stopped at the union office, only for the rep to tell us to get lost because

the workers were all voting for McCluskey. Undeterred, we paid two or three more visits and got talking to the workers. Many knew nothing of the election, but when we told them what Jerry stood for, they became enthusiastic supporters.

In London, we concentrated on the bus depots. Again, all the reps had been nobbled by the United Left but many of the drivers were either unaware of what was going on or open to our arguments. Armed with a special leaflet calling for the resurrection of the campaign to raise terms and conditions for all drivers up to the level of the highest paying bus company, we won enthusiastic support.

The only conclusion we can draw is that the fulltime officers, the United Left and McCluskey have deliberately kept members in the dark, run away from open debate and red-baited the opposition. But where we managed to break through the barriers and talk to rank and file members, our message was warmly received.

We always knew this unnecessary snap election was called with the aim of allowing the Labour Party to ignore its working class base during the 2015 general election, and denying Unite members a real choice. We also recognised that unless we could raise the turnout from the abysmally low figure of 15 per cent, we would not win.

We didn't succeed in the election, but we have laid the basis for a new, united rank and file organisation.

## Where next?

ONE OF JERRY Hicks' central demands in his platform was for a rank and file organisation, like the Construction Rank and File Committee, in every one of Unite's 26 sectors. For Workers Power, it was this, along with the election of all officials, which set his campaign apart from the usual broad left election manifestos.

The construction workers, led by the electricians or "sparks", led a magnificent and successful campaign to stop employers slashing wages by 35 per cent and deslashing the industry. They led guerrilla actions against the employers – pickets, walk-outs, even disrupting their annual banquet! – while demanding the officials organise a ballot. When the union leaders spinelessly threw in the towel at the drop of an injunction notice (not even contesting it in the courts), the rank and file demanded a new ballot, while redoubling their protests.

The result was a stunning victory, even before they took a single day's strike action.

This is the kind of organisation we need in manufacturing, health, banking, local government, transport... everywhere. Of course, the sparks' tactics and methods cannot all be trans-

ferred to other sectors, but their principles and their spirit can.

- For a militant fight against the employers where possible, without them where necessary.

- Challenge and, where possible and necessary, defy the anti-union laws.

- For rank and file control of every dispute, from negotiating tactics to deciding when to strike and for how long – officials should serve the members, not lord it over them.

In addition, any new rank and file organisation will have to address the question of the Labour Party. While we should certainly say no funding without political support for union policy, this does not break the link. Nor does it free the union to support a new working class party. With Left Unity beginning to take root, this is now a pressing issue in the unions.

While the SWP talk about a "network of supporters", it is encouraging that they are not slipping back into their front, Unite the Resistance. We will encourage them to go further, build on their positive experience of working with other forces, like Unite Grassroots Left, and help launch a real initiative for a lasting rank and file organisation.

## Left divided

The Socialist Workers Party, Workers Power and Socialist Resistance all supported Jerry Hicks.

For many independents too, it was a "no-brainer": Jerry, a rank and file candidate and victimised aerospace convenor, who had come second two years ago; or Len McCluskey, who had failed to lead Britain's largest union in coordinated strike action against the government and bosses' offensive, kept intact the rule of unlected officials and ran roughshod over union democracy simply to satisfy Labour's right wing leadership.

But for the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), this counted for nothing. They supported McCluskey, claiming Jerry was not a "credible" candidate and neither did his campaign present a "meaningful opportunity to develop [a] rank-and-file network".

How many votes does Jerry need to convince this sect he has support? Fifty-one per cent?

What do the comrades think Grassroots Left was or our openly declared plans to use the election as a stepping stone to build something much bigger? The AWL's credibility has been blown out of the water by Jerry's huge vote.

## Jerry Hicks speaks out

*After the Unite general secretary election, Workers Power spoke to Jerry about the campaign, Unite's official left and what his next steps might be*

**Workers Power: Congratulations, Jerry. What impressed you most about the campaign?**

**Jerry Hicks (JH):** What impressed me most was the vitality, enthusiasm and inventiveness of our supporters. They fell into three categories.

The solid support from activists we worked with during the last election campaign [in 2010]; they held up extremely well. There was a layer of newly politicised supporters, who never shirked the difficult questions, such as: How do we hold Labour to account? What do we mean by the election of all officials by those they're supposed to represent? And the third category was those that were first time voters, who hadn't heard of us before but came over to our side during the campaign.

**WP: What did you learn about the "official" left, the United Left?**

**JH:** The main lesson confirmed what we already knew about them. Despite the cacophony of sound, on the ground workers didn't understand what they were on about – whereas we spoke their language.

[Len] McCluskey and the United Left got 1,000 branch nominations, representing a million people, but could only get a fifth of that in votes – it's a top-down movement. We're a bottom-up movement – the exact opposite of them. You see, their rhetoric never matched the reality.

**WP: Finally – and most importantly – where do we go from here, Jerry?**

**JH:** Well, we're holding a series of regional meetings, like we promised we would – Birmingham, London, Cambridge and Manchester are already sorted. Then a national meeting to pull it all together. At these meetings, we can discuss, debate and make decisions.

I know what I'd like. I'd like a rank and file group in every sector, however small or large they may be to start off with, because that's how we're going to bring changes.

## MEETINGS:

**London**  
Saturday 27 April, 12-3pm, Room B104, SOAS, Russell Square WC1H 0XJ  
**Manchester**  
Saturday 11 May, details TBC  
**Cambridge**  
Saturday 18 May, 6pm, venue TBC  
**National meeting – London**  
Saturday 25 May, TBC

**FOR MORE INFO**  
<http://www.jerryhicks4gs.org>

## Spotlight on communist policy Democratic centralism

IN THE PAST year or two a major debate has been taking place over Lenin's model of the revolutionary party. Given that over a century has elapsed since it was developed, why has it returned with a vengeance?

Quite simply because the Bolsheviks alone managed to lead a real workers' revolution, based on the democracy of workers' councils (soviets), something which the international workers' movement has been unable to replicate since. However different the conditions of Russia a century ago were, the way the Bolshevik party functioned is still relevant today.

Nevertheless the experience of the 20th century has certainly sullied the image of the Leninist party. Under the pressure of the Russian Civil War and invasion by 14 foreign armies, and then of the need to re-introduce large elements of market economy in the countryside, the Bolsheviks – temporarily as they thought – abolished the right to form factions.

Some claim this as the decisive moment of Bolshevism's degeneration. Certainly this was a serious mistake and helped the rise to power of a bureaucracy within the party and the Soviet state.

But this was not the moment of the crushing of internal democracy. Internal debates of all sorts continued, though after Lenin's death his immediate successors, basing themselves on the party bureaucracy, began to clamp down on and violate internal democracy.

The years 1923-26 saw a fierce factional struggle between the Left Opposition and the forces leading a bureaucratisation of the party. Eventually Stalin established his absolute control over the party by expelling both his erstwhile allies, Zinoviev, Kamenev and later Bukharin, as well as the Left Opposition led by Trotsky.

Following the bureaucratisation of the Soviet Union, Stalin via the Communist International oversaw the total erosion of internal democracy and plurality within the world's communist parties. The parties became rigid hyper-centralised bodies, unquestioning tools of Moscow, their militants forced to be uncritical and passive inside the party. The genuine communist tradition of critical thinking was stifled.

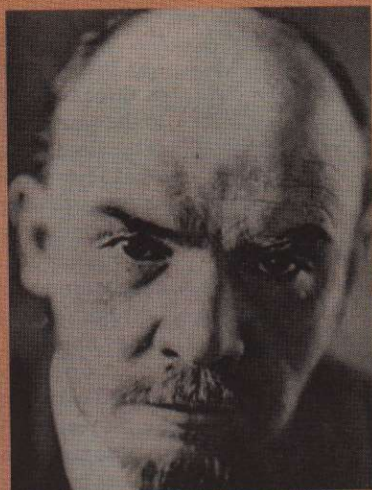
### Don't blame centralism

Why have Trotskyist organisations like the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) under Gerry Healy or the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) today crushed internal democracy, forbidden or expelled opponents of their leadership? We have to ask if this is something inherent in Leninism or if it's a rejection of Leninism. In fact this is bureaucratic not democratic centralism, its trampling on internal democracy is the exact opposite of Lenin's theory and practice. In this there was freedom of debate and discussion before decisions on action were taken.

Then everyone carried out the decisions in a disciplined fashion. Later when the struggle had been concluded, a democratic discussion as to its results took place. Discipline in action did not preclude democracy; the two complemented one another. This allowed a leadership to make decisions, to develop ideas and to command the party's full forces in the heat of the battle. But at the same time the leadership must and can be made to be accountable to the party as a whole. This is done both by regular sovereign conferences and by the right of critics of the leadership to combine their forces and fight for a change of policy and a change of leadership.

### Leaders against members?

A vital element of the revolutionary party, even in its earliest stages, is the training of its members as cadres – people able to offer leadership in the workers' movement and to critically assess their own



Lenin: his ideas on party centralism have been distorted

leadership. Playing leadership roles in the workplace, in the party branch and at district and national levels, not relying on paid party functionaries, creates a culture of democracy in the party.

In addition an educated cadre membership can judge its leaderships actions, by measuring them against the party's programme. This embodies an overall strategy for the conquest of power by the working class – and includes the method for applying its tactics (e.g. on the united front).

Since this programme is itself developed through democratic debate and voting at conferences and congresses of the party it makes it more likely that the membership is not easily deceived.

This process itself trains up party members to understand the political method behind the programme – and to assess whether party leaders are breaking with this method and whether they need to explain their actions or be replaced.

In Britain – especially in the IS/SWP tradition – Tony Cliff engendered a profound suspicion of political programmes, believing that they stifle innovation, do not take account of developments in the real world and create wooden orthodoxies for which every change is heretical.

But this has little or nothing to do with the tradition of classical Marxism, which recognises that since reality is constantly changing and the ultimate test of a theory's truth is practice, a programme has to be re-elaborated to account for important new developments.

### The politics of bureaucratism

So why have parties that were fiercely anti-Stalinist undergone a bureaucratic degeneration? Critics of the WRP and SWP have pointed to the growth of a bureaucracy of fulltime workers who replaced the democratic structures and system of accountability explained above.

A material basis for bureaucracy is a necessary but not a sufficient explanation. The reason for bureaucratic degeneration must be sought in political degeneration.

When a leadership veers away from a revolutionary Marxist policy, or makes gross mistakes it cannot account for, this creates an inner party crisis which if the leadership entrenches itself by suppressing its critics will start a spiral of bureaucratisation. Factional struggles and even splits may be necessary means of overcoming this.

Bolshevism between 1903 and 1923 saw plenty of such struggles, yet at the same time managed to grow into a powerful and democratic party that was able to lead the working class to power and to hold onto it in very adverse conditions.

Its later degeneration does not invalidate this experience and we can all learn a massive amount from this. So it's very timely to discuss democratic centralism when the issue of a new party and revolutionary unity are once more taking centre stage.

# Building Le

The response to Ken Loach's Appeal "to discuss the formation of a new political party of the Left to bring together those who wish to defend the welfare state and present an economic alternative to austerity" indicates that this is an idea whose time has come. KD Tait looks at what steps we need to achieve this potential and the pitfalls we need to avoid

THE NEED for such a party is clear enough. The economic crisis of the capitalist system has thrown millions out of their jobs, increasing poverty and insecurity for those still in work while the party of the billionaires and their Liberal-Democrat partners demolish the welfare state, decimate jobs in the public sector and freeze the wages of those who remain.

The central idea raised in Ken Loach's inspiring film 'The Spirit of '45', and his appeal – that we need a new party to defend the welfare state, created by the Clement Attlee's post-war Labour government, but abandoned by his recent successors, has found an echo well beyond the organised left.

As we go to press, more than 8,000 people have signed up to support Ken's call and 85 local groups have already been formed. It is true that the numbers grow daily.

Millions are waking up to the realisation that the NHS, state education, welfare for the sick, disabled and jobless, face destruction in the last two years of the Coalition's life and that "waiting for Labour" would allow this to happen.

The desire for a serious political force willing and able to stop the cuts is also prompted by the feeble opposition of Labour to this onslaught and the failure of the post-Gordon Brown leadership to really break with "New Labour". Indeed Ed Miliband's launch of "Blue Labour" shows that the policy of aping the Tories and Lib Dems to attract the voters of 'Middle England' still grips the party's leaders in parliament.

They have refused to oppose outright the destruction of the welfare state or even to sound the alarm bells that it is happening and Miliband has repeatedly criticised workers who strike to defend their jobs, pay and pensions. Labour councils have too easily done the Tories' dirty work by closing local services and cutting jobs.

The positive response to Ken Loach's appeal also reflects a growing realisation that the current piecemeal character of union resistance to the cuts and the existence of several rival national anticuts campaigns is a totally inadequate response to the onslaught.

The crisis in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the stagnation of the Socialist Party (SP) at such a time

underlines the fact that neither of the large or small far left organisations is offering an effective strategy.

A new fighting political party, with thousands of members rooted in the communities, is what is needed. But if it must not be a sect neither must it be a repetition of Old Labour, let alone of New or Blue Labour. It must be a party capable of democratically working out a strategy and then implementing it by unleashing a tidal wave of popular resistance.

### A party to unite the struggle against government austerity

Opposition to austerity has seen millions strike, walk out and protest. The will to fight back clearly exists but the Labour Party, the leaders of the big unions and the far left groups have all failed to develop a united resistance able to deploy the huge collective power of the working class.

Labour has absolutely no will to summon working people to revolt but neither do the right-wing union leaders. They are hoping that the Coalition's unpopularity will lead to a shoo-in for a Labour government, despite the fact that the party won't even promise to stop – let alone reverse – the cuts.

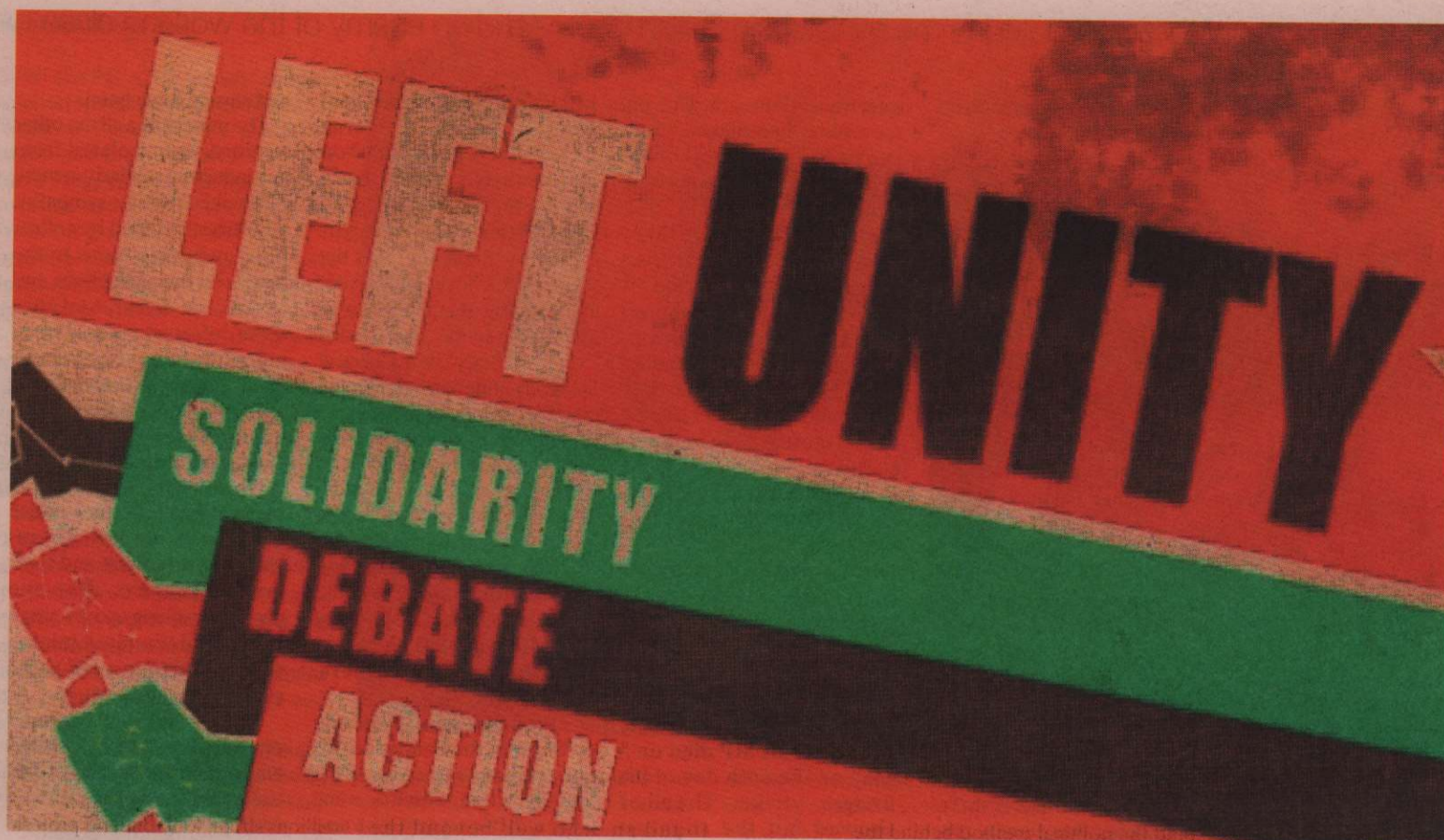
The left union leaders continually promise coordinated action – some even talk of a general strike – yet somehow nothing effective comes of all this. The far left on the other hand continues to compete with each other in rival anti-cuts campaigns.

Amongst the youth the movements of 2010-11 – the student revolt and the UK Occupy Movement, after initial successes failed to generate or sustain the mass movement needed to get real results. This has led to a certain disenchantment with the idea of "leaderless" struggles.

This frustrating impasse has led people to realise that only a political organisation – a party – can resolve this paralysis. This idea has been reinforced by the emergence in Greece of Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left), which in 2012 nearly blocked the imposition of the Troika's savage austerity programme.

Its vote shot up from 4.6 per cent in the elections of October 2009 to 26.89 in June 2012, becoming the second party in parliament. For many this re-raised the question of taking

# Left Unity: where to begin?



power and the importance of parties as weapons of resistance.

A new working class party in Britain must set itself the task of building a united working class resistance to Cameron and Clegg. This is not just a matter of passively listening to radical speeches – whether in a People's Assembly in Central Hall Westminster or even at the end of a monster demonstration in Hyde Park – if one is called.

It will come from the direct involvement of thousands of today's anticuts, student and union activists in working out a strategy to unite every local, regional and national struggle.

It means bringing them together to discuss concrete policies and how to put them into practice. It means taking this debate into the workplaces; the communities, the pubs and clubs; everywhere people meet and discuss politics.

## Avoiding the pitfalls of Labourism

But we should not forget the lessons of the rightward turn of the Labour Party under Blair and Brown, its policies shadowing those of the Tories, nor of the crushing of the left and the remnants of party democracy under Kinnock in the 1980s and 1990s.

The fixation of the party on the mirage of winning a majority by chasing the “floating voter” or the “squeezed middle” meant sacrificing pro-working class policies to this goal. Likewise the old system of union block votes in the hands of a few general secretaries was usually

a force to crush the left. And in office a Labour prime minister and cabinet were always free of any serious control even by their MPs, let alone by the party membership or annual conference.

These sources of disappointment and betrayal were always in the genetic code of Old Labour and they only came to full fruition under Blair and Brown. Any new party we build must avoid them by a creating a powerful rank and file democracy and adopting a bold socialist programme developed and understood by its membership – one whose road to power is not based on parliament but on mass direct action.

The real power in society is not found in parliament or in the town halls – it is in the hands of the capitalists who pay poverty wages, sack workers to protect profit, dodge taxes – and the bankers who trousered the £trillion taxpayer bailout in the forms of bonuses and golden handshakes.

The “right” of these people to plunder us is defended by unelected judges who ban strikes, the unaccountable police who harass and murder, the sexist justice system which refuses to challenge rape and sexual violence, the millionaires’ media which promotes the rulers’ ideology of racist and sexist division between ordinary people who have in common their common exploitation by a system which works to the profit of a few not the needs of the many.

Elections do however play a role in communicating what the programme of a working class government would be – it shows the exist-

tence of an alternative. But an electoral replacement of the Coalition by Labour will not by itself end the attacks on living standards. If we say that standing and electing MPs and councillors is the only or the prime measure of an organisation’s effectiveness, then this will inevitably lead to trimming our programme and policies to win elections.

## What sort of party?

It must be able to mobilise real, active, mass forces not create a passive membership turned out for only for election campaigns, but a party of the working people, a party for every campaign, a party of resistance to every injustice. A party that is built from deep within every struggle – built from the inside out not brought from the outside in.

To do this effectively it must be a mass party whose base units are rooted in workplaces, housing estates and become bodies to which people will bring their problems. But unlike Labour it will be a party that offers a solution in which they will play an integral role.

Our principal aim must be to build a campaigning and fighting organisation – to struggle to overcome our divisions and unite the maximum forces around a democratically agreed strategy to resist the vicious measures that are raining down on us. Ultimately it must develop a perspective for turning the defensive struggle into the struggle for power.

Democracy in the party is key to achieving all this; it is informed both by periods of thorough discussion and free and open dissent lead-

ing to a decision and then determined action in pursuit of the agreed aim.

A party without policies or a programme is no party. The party will have to develop its own programme. This requires a serious process of democratic debate culminating in a truly representative conference, where all trends of opinion can freely express their views. From early on the new party should adopt as its project developing a full strategic programme – a programme for political power.

This should be democratically discussed and developed by the whole party, in branches, city or regional conferences, specific drafting commissions, before its final adoption by a delegate conference. This is a process similar to that adopted (but not completed) by the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France. It has been used by Syriza in Greece.

Undoubtedly if we succeed in attracting large numbers of working class people, former Labour supporters, rank and file trade unionists, then many will retain a reformist or old left Labour perspective. Others will believe a revolutionary programme is necessary. All should express their opinions openly and these should be discussed and debated in a fraternal way – avoiding the disruption of agreed common action and campaigning.

No one – be it reformist or revolutionary – should seek to pre-empt or predetermine the outcome of such a programmatic discussion.

## A Programme for Action

But in the short term the embryonic party needs an action programme or

platform limited to the burning issues we need to fight for in 2013-14.

This limitation reflects the fact that the proto-party in its formative months or even years will have something of the character of a united front between different left tendencies that currently operate separately.

What might this initial platform contain? In the view of Workers Power it should at least be a party that fights to:

1. Halt the privatisation and destruction of the welfare state – the NHS, public education, social services and pensions, culture – by all means necessary including direct action, strikes and occupations, up to and including a general strike to bring down the coalition government.

2. Unite the rival national anticuts campaigns at the People's Assembly – drawing in the many local anticuts committees and campaigns. Together we must formulate a national plan of action. We support the call for a huge demonstration of 15 February 2003 proportions to launch mass action.

It must be a party that:

3. Supports the building of anti-bureaucratic rank and file movements in every union to deliver action with the union leaders if possible but without them where necessary.

4. Supports the creation of autonomous movements of working class women, the unemployed, precarious workers, migrants and youth.

5. Opposes all imperialist wars and occupations abroad and state repression of civil rights at home in the name of the ‘war on terror’ or of delivering ‘humanitarian aid’.

6. Supports the Arab revolutions and the fight of the Palestinians to return to their homeland.

7. Opposes the savage austerity imposed by the rulers of the EU on Greece, Cyprus and other countries and calls for Europe-wide actions in solidarity with all those fighting the cuts.

8. Fights against racism, sexism, Islamophobia homophobia and all forms of social oppression.

9. Fights against the capitalist destruction of the environment.

The New Left Party should campaign to unite workers, students, welfare claimants and youth around the replacement of crisis-wracked capitalism with a democratically planned, ecologically sustainable, socialist system.

The means needed to achieve this goal – whether by a social revolution or by a process of social reform – will have to be democratically debated and discussed by the members of the new party before this is finally established in a programme.

# Margaret Thatcher dies: let us celebrate, agitate and organise!

Dave Stockton writes an obituary for one of the most hated prime ministers in British history and an enemy of the working class

MARGARET THATCHER was a bitter and unrelenting foe of the working class. Yet Labour leader Ed Miliband expressed his deep “respect [for] her extraordinary achievements and extraordinary personal strengths”, whilst his predecessor but one, Tony Blair, said, “she was a towering global figure” and would be “sadly missed”.

The fawning of the Labour leaders contrasts sharply with the celebrations that broke out in town centres on the evening of her death and young people sending Ding Dong the Witch Is Dead! soaring in UK downloads charts. In all the former coalfields they marked her £10 million funeral with firework parties and burning her in effigy – a genuine class attitude. Hatred for her and her party: respect and sympathy for her victims.

Margaret Roberts, the grocer’s daughter from Grantham who graduated from Oxford and married a millionaire, combined the narrow-minded class hatred, characteristic of the petty bourgeoisie, with the resolute pursuit of the new strategy adopted by the millionaire class she married into – aptly named Monetarism.

After the humiliations the bosses and the Tories were forced to endure in the early 1970s at the hands of militant trade unionists, especially the miners, a faction coalesced around Thatcher and her creepy intellectual mentor, Sir Keith Joseph. Certainly it was hell bent on revenge, but even more importantly, on driving up the dangerously fallen rate of exploitation and profits sucked from Britain’s workers. They also wanted to overthrow the post-war gains in terms of social reforms. Thatcher saw the spectre of socialism in council housing, nationalised industries, British Rail and the entire welfare state. She famously said: “There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families.”

It was our great misfortune that after 1975 the militant shop stewards’ movement and the 12-13 million strong union movement had at its head not a hardened class warrior like Thatcher, but the most softheaded, craven leaders you could imagine. They repeatedly let the ruling class off the hook after 1975, and dis-



Thousands gathered to celebrate Thatcher's death

armed and demobilised the workers’ movement. Alas the so-called far left let them get away with it by not doing all they could to build a powerful rank and file movement or anything approaching a revolutionary party, able to offer an alternative leadership at the critical moments of betrayal by the union tops and the Labour Party front bench.

## Slump politician

The Tories’ new class war strategy, carefully prepared in opposition between 1975 and 1979 under Thatcher’s leadership, set as its objectives the breaking of the strength of the trade unions by a deliberately induced sharp deflation, an increase in indirect taxation, which together created mass unemployment – some 3.5 million by the end of her first term.

Faced with the terrible social consequences of her policy, she positively exulted; her one-line reply to all critics was: “The Lady’s not for turning!” After all this was exactly what she wanted – she was, like Osborne today, a slump politician.

At the same time she introduced year-on-year an incremental series of anti-trade union laws, which stripped away the legal immunities that do poor duty for positive rights in Britain. Unemployment, fines and prosecutions weakened and divided the unions, whose general secretaries had no stomach for a fight, and who actively wished to weaken and break up rank and file organisation, which had caused them sleepless nights in the 1970s.

The Thatcher cabinet set about engineering the closure or dramatic downsizing of

entire staple industries, especially those in the public sector or with a record of militancy; the steel mills, the car plants, the mines, the print and the docks all saw bitter strikes.

Thatcher was equally reactionary in her foreign as in her domestic policy. When Ronald Reagan was elected US President she ardently supported his launching the Second Cold War and welcomed US cruise missiles to Britain, leading to the Greenham Common protests. But she would qualify for the leading ranks of war criminals on account of her atrocities in Ireland and in the South Atlantic alone.

## The Irish War

Thatcher inherited the Irish war from her Tory and Labour predecessors, including the large number of Republican detainees in the British concentration camps in the North – the infamous H-Blocks. The 1970-74 government had accorded those originally detained without trial Special Category status – effectively recognising them as political prisoners. In 1976 the Labour government, to its everlasting shame, withdrew this concession and imposed prison unionism. Republican prisoners went on “blanket protests”, i.e. refusing to wear the uniforms meant to proclaim them as common criminals. In 1978 this turned into a refusal to “slop out” their cells – the so-called “dirty protest”.

After Thatcher was elected the first hunger strike took place from October to December 1980 when, with one hunger striker on the verge of death, she appeared to con-

cede their demands. But no sooner was the strike called off she perfidiously withdrew the concessions. The second hunger strike began in 1981 during which, despite huge protest in the North, the Irish Republic and in Britain too, 10 Irish Republican prisoners were allowed to fast to death. During the strike their leading figure Bobby Sands stated: “I am a political prisoner, a freedom fighter. I have been stripped of my clothes and locked in a dirty empty cell where I have been starved, beaten and tortured ... but I have the spirit of freedom that cannot be quenched.”

From his prison cell on 9 April 1981 he was elected to the British House of Commons with 30,492 votes to the Unionist candidate’s 29,046. Bobby Sands MP died on 5 May on the 66th day of his hunger strike. Thatcher showed not the slightest

remorse, telling the House of Commons that, “Mr. Sands was a convicted criminal. He chose to take his own life.”

Over 100,000 people lined the route of his funeral. Bobby Sands, and all the other hunger strikers, indeed all the victims of British imperialism will live forever in the history of the Irish freedom struggle. Thatcher’s deeds in Ireland will forever head the list of her infamies.

Michael Foot, a traditional Bevanite left and a veteran of the CND Aldermaston marches, but for all that a fierce patriot, thought it was a good idea to taunt Thatcher in parliament with having “lost the Queen’s territory” and surrendered 2,000 of her subjects to the “fascist Junta”. This goaded “the Iron Lady” into a farcical if bloody imitation of Churchill and the “war against fascism”.

With the covert aid of Reagan and Chilean dictator Pinochet – a lifelong friend – the Task Force succeeded in conquering the islands. The British victory helped her win a landslide victory in 1983 (she increased her majority by 100 MPs) and left her ready to take on the miners, famously saying:

“We had to fight the enemy without in the Falklands. We always have to be aware of the enemy within, which is much more difficult to fight and

Cameron and Osborne are attempting to complete the job Thatcher left undone – destroying the NHS, the public education system, and the welfare state. Fighting them is fighting everything she stood for

more dangerous to liberty.”

And nobody will forget her demand that people “Rejoice! Rejoice!” over the sinking of the Argentine cruiser Belgrano in international waters, when it was outside and in fact steaming away from the illegally imposed “exclusion zone”; an atrocity in which 323 sailors lost their lives.

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## The Great Miners’ Strike

The most historic act of resistance to Thatcher and the one that presented the greatest opportunity to bring her down was the Miners’ Strike of 1984-85. A dock strike in the summer of ’84 looked as if it might cut off coal supplies from abroad and trigger a general strike. Thatcher, according to her cabinet colleagues, wept (tears of rage and despair, doubtless) at the thought of having to surrender. But the TGWU (predecessor to Unite) officials saved her bacon by accepting a short-term concession on their dispute. They acted like the hidebound trade union officials they were, not like the tribunes of the working class they could

## Rejoice! Rejoice!

When Argentina occupied Las Malvinas in April 1982, Thatcher’s government was already massively behind in the opinion polls with an election due the next year. Had Labour opposed the idea of sending a task force 8,000 miles to recover a tiny piece of territory with just over 2,000 inhabitants only 350 miles from Argentina, it is likely there would have been no war. Thatcher’s humiliation in front of her own right wing electoral base would have further undermined her.

Instead Labour, under the leadership of the hapless

and should have been.

The miners, like all the other sections, were isolated from any industrial solidarity action. All evoked massive sympathy, all were supported by collections and delegations to the battles on the picket lines, and all suffered defeat. And after these defeats the whole trade union movement suffered a loss of numbers (halved) and a loss of strength. In addition it assumed the shackles of the anti-union laws it wears today.

No wonder Thatcher is receiving such fulsome praise from the entire class of parasites and exploiters and their media flunkies. But she deserves nothing except curses from the devastated mining villages and former industrial centres she laid waste to.

Still the working class scored one important victory over her and one that drove her – but unfortunately not the Tories – from power. The poll tax was her act of overweening pride. The mass anti-poll tax movement was her nemesis. Everyone alive then will remember with pleasure her tearful departure from Downing Street. Would that all her poisonous legacy had been loaded into the removal vans too.

## Thatcher’s legacy and our tasks

But Thatcher’s legacy is still with us. They are with us in the anti-union laws that still cramp and restrain the class-wide solidarity action we need to win. The unions remain reduced in numbers and in shop floor strength. The merger mania by the general secretaries is no replacement for that.

Unfortunately her heritage still inspires those attacking us. Cameron and Osborne are attempting to complete the job she left undone – destroying the National Health Service, the public education system, and the welfare state. Fighting them is fighting everything she stood for.

But the year of her death could be a year of rebirth for a fighting labour movement. That would be the best testimonial and tribute to those who fell in the battle against her and her ilk.

So it was good to “dance on her grave.” But the job is not finished till we have put Cameron and Osborne in there alongside her. What a dance we will have then!



# Rape and the labour movement - the "enemy within" exposed

Rebecca Anderson

THE RAPE AND assault charges against members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the RMT union and the Socialist Party (SP) have dragged into the light a long overdue issue. Such actions are far from only existing "out there" – outside the labour movement. Indeed, to our shame, they represent an "enemy within".

We need to ask ourselves why cover-ups and investigations that are just charades are a default response in unions with formally excellent policies and in far left organisations that proclaim their goal as women's liberation.

Perhaps the exposés have had such electrifying effect because they are far from isolated exceptions but are symptomatic of women's role in society. The fact is that these unions and parties that exist in a sexist society can never be immune to the influence of reactionary sexist attitudes and practices.

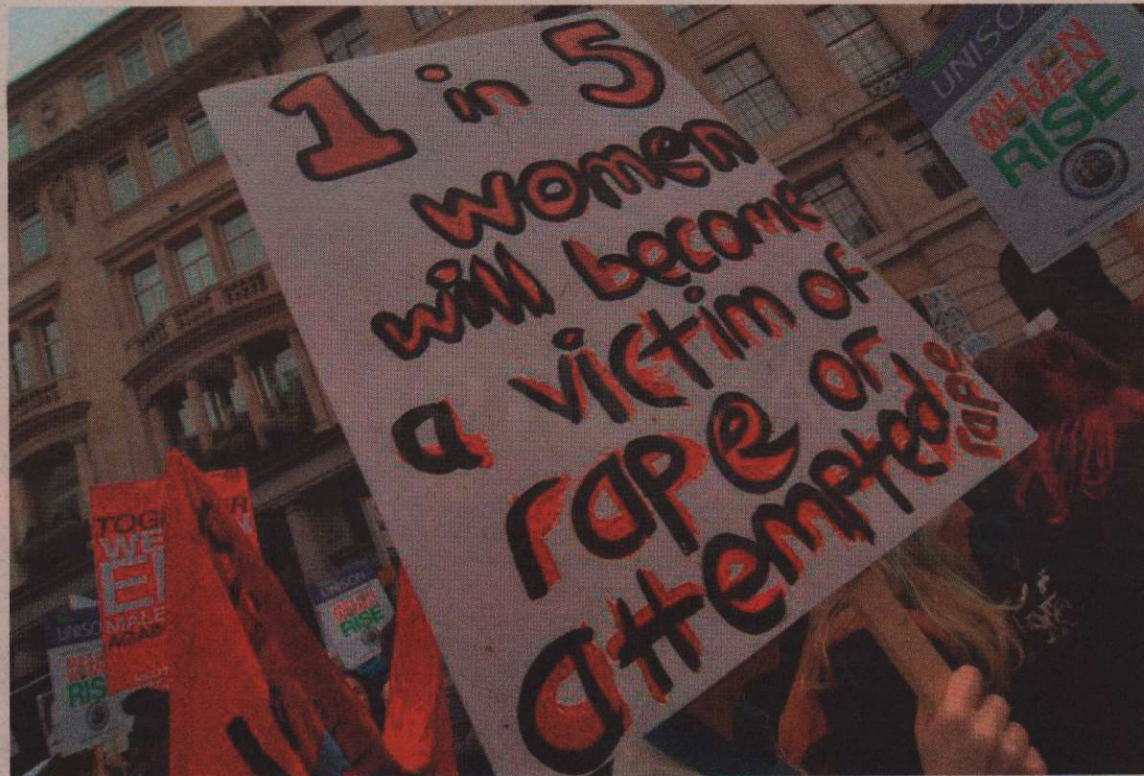
And unless the labour movement recognises this and takes serious steps to deal with sexist behaviour then it will continue to blight the lives of female activists and drive many away.

## The right to caucus

Proposals have been raised – by some of the women directly involved – for better internal procedures for organisations investigating accusations of rape, abuse and oppressive behaviour. One of the key proposals is the right of women to caucus and discuss issues and cases of oppression.

This right should be rolled out across every union and working class organisation including parties and left groups. Some organisations, like the SWP, have argued that caucusing is divisive.

Wrong! It is sexist behaviour, its toleration and covering up, that divides the working class and the struggle for a better society. So too does the SWP's denial that men in general, including working class men,



are the immediate agencies or enforcers of women's oppression, benefiting from it in short term.

Of course the working class (both men and women) also suffer from sexism in that it divides and weakens the fight for our class interests and emancipation. This is the objective basis for class unity – the struggle against oppression. You can't effectively fight something if you are wilfully blind to it.

Caucusing, by empowering women to expose and challenge their abusers with the support of other women, seeking the support from their anti-sexist male comrades, helps overcome the divisions that sexism and other oppressive behaviour and attitudes promote.

However, on their own, women's caucuses are not sufficient. First, they are still only available to a small minority of working class women, who are already in a union or party and able to become active. Second, they can become bureaucratised, providing a power base for parts of the

officialdom in return for privileges to leading members of the caucus.

## Call a conference!

We need to get together across unions, in the working class parties and socialist groups, to discuss our experiences, to develop ideas on what can be done to eradicate sexism and violence. We need to develop a charter on the rights of women and on best practice inside the workers' movement.

A conference of women activists and delegates from across the unions would be a great start. This collective voice of working class women would set the standards that we should expect of our organisations and empower women to challenge the behaviour and barriers they face. Such a conference could seek to involve women from beyond activists in the trade unions and socialist organisations and reach out to unorganised women, female colleagues and unemployed women.

Even if such a conference at first only commanded the support of a minority of unions and socialist groups, it would act as a deterrent, putting pressure on other unions and groups to take the issues on board. And of course, we would not try to limit such a conference to the issue of oppression within the workers' movement, no matter how important it is today, but urge it to go further and found a working class women's movement that could take up issues of women's oppression and liberation in wider society.

We need a movement that fights fearlessly for women's liberation and against women's oppression in whatever form and wherever it manifests itself. To achieve this it will need to produce its own literature and mate-

rials, initiate and join campaigns for women's rights and equality, and offer practical support for victims of women's oppression. We want a movement that is avowedly for working class women, one which develops an agenda that centres on their needs rather than the more privileged middle and upper class women who dominate much of the media coverage of women's issues.

## For a working class women's movement

We need a movement that is organically linked to the working class movement through cooperation and coordination of campaigns and action, affiliations, political and financial support.

Women now make up their highest ever proportion of the workforce and the trade unions. The historic crisis of capitalism we are living through has impacted upon working class women very severely, both as workers, especially in the public sector, where they are often the majority, who have seen their jobs, wages and pensions cut and their workload increased, and as service users and carers, who have had to take up the slack caused by the cuts.

On rape and assault against women, faith in the capacity and political will of the police or the courts to tackle these crimes and bring the culprits to justice is at a low ebb, thanks to the obvious flaws in their systems.

For example, the police's specialist sex crime unit Sapphire is under investigation over allegations that its officers routinely pressure women to drop rape claims. There is also evidence to suggest that violence against women may be on the rise, or at the least that it may be being



**85,000**

women are raped on average in England and Wales every year.

**>400,000**

women are sexually assaulted each year.

**1 in 5**

women (aged 16 - 59) has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16.

Just

**15%**

are reported.

Around

**20%**

of these go to trial.

Of these, just

**6%**

result in conviction.

reported more. The Home Office has recently included for the first time 16-17 year olds in its guidelines on domestic violence.

## Get in touch

We ask anyone who agrees that women in the labour movement need to raise their collective voice to tackle the practices that caused or exacerbated the recent scandals.

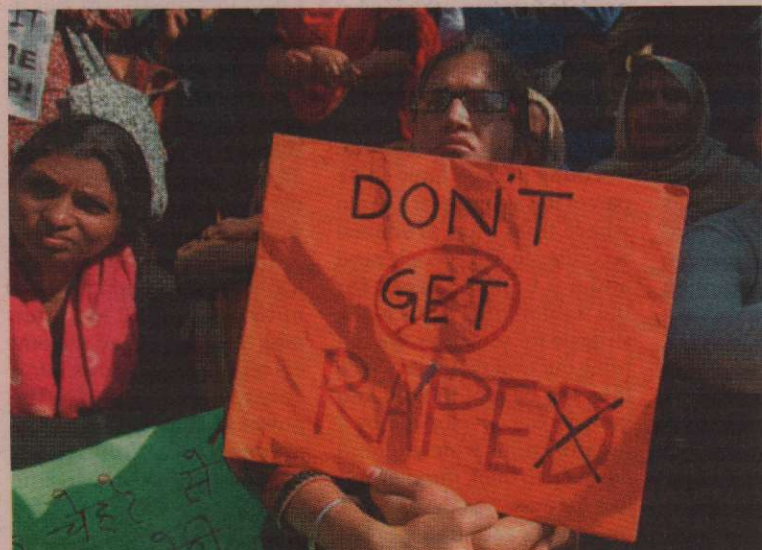
Any one who believes a conference could usefully be called to discuss these issues or who wants to build a working class women's movement that can fight for our liberation to raise these ideas within their own organisation should contact women in Workers Power to discuss how we can take this forward.

Contact us on

[info@workerspower.co.uk](mailto:info@workerspower.co.uk)

or on our facebook group

[facebook.com/workerspowerbritain](https://www.facebook.com/workerspowerbritain)



# The future's ours – if we want it

“The middle aged and the aged often do not know how to approach the youth, for the youth must of necessity advance to socialism in a different way, by other paths, in other forms, in other circumstances than their fathers.” Lenin

**KD Tait**

ACROSS THE WORLD young people are in the forefront of mass movements for democracy and human rights and against the exploitation and oppression of a system which enriches the 1% at the expense of the 99%.

From the young women stitching Nike shoes for poverty wages in China to the radical school students in Chile fighting the cops, demanding free education, young people are in the vanguard of struggle. The Arab Spring has been a movement of young people. This disproves the lie that ours is an apathetic ‘iPod generation’. But the fate of the revolutions in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia also proves young people can't rely on established parties to look after our interests.

When we fight and even die for freedom the result all too often is that the fruits of our struggle are picked up by old established parties. Revolution gives way to counter-revolution; our networks that mobilised hundreds of thousands are unable to seize the power to really change the world. Repeated mobilisations without fundamental change in our daily lives eventually lead to despondency and disillusion.

We need to organise ourselves to make change permanent. We don't need to reject politics – we need to reject every attempt to patronise and manipulate us. We need to find our own way – our own political strategy and way of organising – that can bring about a radically liberating, equal and revolutionary society.

The surge of support for Left Unity – the appeal for a new working class party to fight the cuts – has the potential to make a real difference for millions looking for a party that finally puts their interests first.

Everyone's talking about uniting the left – uniting revolutionary groups, uniting independent activists, uniting disillusioned Labour party members. This is a welcome step forward.

## No one's talking about youth

It was young people who first stood up to the millionaire Tory rulers. We smashed up Tory HQ – a symbolic statement of intent: if you wreck our future, we'll wreck your system.



Thousands of students and youth demonstrate against ditching the EMA and hiking up tuition fees on 24 November 2010

Nine days later more than one hundred thousand young people walked out of schools and colleges against the Tories' attempts to make young people pay for the capitalist crisis.

But fast forward to 2013. Many of those young people are among the one million 16-24 year olds without work, education or training. Many are working in compulsory workfare schemes. The minimum wage has been frozen for the youngest workers.

In Britain young people can be exploited fulltime at 16 but can't vote till two years later, we aren't allowed to create their own democratic organisations at school. And at work bosses pay us lower wages and we have little or no union representation. In the classrooms, the factories and the home, young people are bullied and exploited.

But despite – and also because – of this, young people are often the first to say enough is enough and fight to change things for the better.

It was the young people in the Socialist Worker Student Societies who stood up to the bullying Socialist Workers Party (SWP) Central Committee, over the outrageous way the latter treated the complaints of rape and sexual harassment levelled by young women members, who faced expulsion but whose rebellion has shaken the bureaucratic centralism of the

party to its foundations in a way not seen for decades. It is these young SWSS members who are setting out to build an autonomous revolutionary socialist youth organisation in Britain.

## Why so radical?

In the first place it's because young people haven't been ground down and demoralised by defeat. We haven't yet been forced to buy into the system – although families often rely on income from their children, young people don't yet have their own families and children to provide for.

Neither are we so quick to look to the existing leaders for answers. Without unions and without the right to vote we aren't bound by a hundred social and political ties to the reformist sell-outs in parliament and trade union leaderships.

Capitalism and democracy promise a lot but perform little. A good education leading to a decent job is a fast receding prospect for most of us. And governments and the millionaires who own and control the media manipulate its hollowed out democracy. Young people have shown they are not afraid to say so.

It's this relative independence from the dead hand of capitalist socialisation which is our greatest strength. Defending and extending this

**Face  
the Facts**

**2.56m**  
total unemployed

**979,000**  
16-24 year old  
unemployed

independence to our forms of political organisation is the key to making sure that we can campaign in joint struggles without being manipulated as a stage army.

## What is to be done?

In wealthy countries youth unemployment is rocketing under the economic crisis. Fifty per cent without jobs is common and 20 per cent plus is now the norm. In the exploited countries outside of Europe and North America, young people are used to drive down wages and denied freedom of thought and action.

Young people see an environment being devastated by capitalism that threatens a future of epidemics, floods, droughts and famines, which the system is unable and

unwilling to do anything about. They see “humanitarian” invasions and occupations that leave hundreds of thousands dead or homeless. They see the racism – from the police or from fascist gangs that persecute people because of the colour of their skin, their religion or their culture.

## How can we change this?

Most young people are part of the working class. It's the working class that collectively produces all the wealth in society – but has no say over what is produced or how the wealth is shared out. Because working class people own no means of producing what they need to live, but at the same time must work together to produce all the things which society needs to function – this is what makes the working class the only social force with both the capability and the necessity to struggle for a world organised in a completely different way.

Young people have to be part of this struggle for a world where things are produced according to what people need and not to make profit for the millionaires – this is the struggle for socialism. We can bring our own methods, which take the best of the old and new; we can develop our own organisations which defend our right to think through politics for ourselves, develop our own tactics and strategies but

fighting every step of the way with our older brothers and sisters and our parents in the working class.

We can have solidarity without subordination. We can build a movement based in the schools and colleges, in the workplaces and amongst the unemployed young families across the world.

We can campaign for a world without racism, war and exploitation, without sexism, inequality, cultural deprivation and the destruction of our environment.

To do this today we will be most effective if we build our own organisations, prepared to work alongside every progressive ally, but reserving to ourselves alone the right to decide for ourselves, by ourselves how we can win socialist liberation for our generation and those to come.

We can do this by building an organisation with revolutionary politics that is created and run by the young people in the schools, colleges and workplaces.

This will transform our radical actions from spontaneous uprisings that all too often miss their target and see others reap all the rewards, into a conscious struggle for the power to change the world – alongside a revolutionary party which spearheads the working class's struggle for self-emancipation.

# The Palestinian struggle in Syria

A member of the League for the Fifth International's German section interviewed Thær, a resident of Yarmouk, Syria's largest Palestinian refugee camp, in Damascus. He escaped the camp, currently besieged by Assad's forces, in December 2012

**LFI: How is life in Yarmouk going now?**

**Thær:** There are 125,000 residents in Yarmouk, and it is under siege. The Syrian forces and the PFLP-GC [Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command] put Yarmouk under siege. They don't let people get food, medicines, etc.

Every day, they try to invade Yarmouk. The camp is under shelling every day. They set up checkpoints at the gates of the camp and arrest every activist passing them. The camp is in urgent need of food, medicines and doctors. We are talking about more than 100,000 people, and there are only two doctors inside.

**LFI: How are Palestinian leftist organisations engaging in the Syrian revolution?**

**Thær:** The left doesn't want to take either side, but the Palestinian population is different. The Palestinians [in Syria] are connected to Syrians through family, economy and culture. The leftist parties are led by Jordanians, Lebanese, Iraqis and West Bank Palestinians. It's not in their interest to make a bridge between the Syrian and the Palestinian populations. They have their own interests, they have offices, cars and other facilities provided by the regime. Individual Palestinian leftists engage as individuals, without their organisations.

It's a shame. When the regime's airplanes are bombing Yarmouk, they do not say anything. But they accuse the Free Syrian Army (FSA) of bringing in Afghans and Chechens, which is a lie. It was Syrian and Palestinian rebels who entered Yarmouk. There were Palestinians in the FSA from the beginning. They are participating there, because they think it's their own struggle to support the Syrian rebels. Then Jibril's forces put the camp under siege, and their "excuse" to do nothing was the foreign fighters.

On 16 December, the PFLP [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, not to be confused with Jibril's PFLP-GC], Fatah and the FSA had a meeting. They asked the FSA not to enter Yarmouk. The FSA said "Okay, we won't go into Yarmouk, but you should control Jibril's forces, because they are attacking us and taking the dead bodies of our fighters to Yarmouk."

So they agreed to keep Yarmouk as a neutral zone, but PFLP and Fatah said that they couldn't control the PFLP-GC. The FSA answered "So what do you want from us?"

Most Palestinians – even before the revolution – considered the PFLP-GC to be a branch of Syrian security rather than a Palestinian faction. Ahmed Jibril himself was an officer in the Syrian Army until 1965. In 1968, he left the PFLP to establish the PFLP-GC. Since then, everybody sees them as a Syrian government branch. Even Yasser Arafat and George Habash treated them as one. They are

based only in Syria and Lebanon, not in Palestine.

Most of the Palestinian militant groups in Yarmouk are not with Fatah or Hamas or anyone else, they are sons and daughters of the camp. They refused to start fighting in Yarmouk from the beginning of the revolution. But the regime wants to enter the camp, and it will make a massacre. All the places they invaded, they made a massacre. So the Palestinians and the Syrians have the right to defend themselves.

**LFI: How will the situation for Palestinians be changed after Assad?**

**Thær:** We have historic relationship, we have been one family for hundreds of years. Before the Sykes-Picot agreement we were one country, and after this we are still one country. And after Assad, we will still be one country. We did our duty for the Syrians, because they hosted us like their brothers. We have the same rights, we are facing the same situation, and we will continue like this. The only thing we are afraid of is that the regime will remain in power and punish all the Palestinians. I am not afraid of the Syrian people.

**LFI: One myth about Bashar al-Assad is that he is the only Arab leader protecting the Palestinians.**

**Thær:** The Syrian parliament gave us equal rights in 1956, before the Ba'ath party came to power, and before Assad. Right now I can name 10 massacres Hafez and Bashar al-Assad did to the Palestinians. In Tel al-Zaatar in Lebanon, the Syrian regime destroyed this camp in Beirut. They destroyed two or three camps between 1985 and 1988 in the "War of the Camps".

This was done by the [Shi'a Lebanese] Amal movement and Jibril's forces alongside the [Syrian] regime; they attacked those camps to remove pro-Arafat activists from there. In 1983, they put Tripoli under siege, and threw Yasser Arafat out of Tripoli. In the 1990s, the Assad regime arrested around 8,000 pro-Arafat Palestinians. Many of them died in prison.

So it's a lie that Assad supports Palestinians. The Syrian-Israeli armistice line on the Golan Heights is the quietest border Israel has. When Israel invaded Beirut in 1982, nobody resisted them except for the Palestinians.

**LFI: Syria has many minorities; as well as the Palestinians there are for example the Kurds and the Alawites. While the Kurds have been oppressed under Assad, Alawites have been recruited to his security forces. Both of them face the threat of reactionaries who want a civil war to continue after Assad. So it seems we need a post-Assad Syria to secure rights for all of them.**

**Thær:** I believe the Kurdish people have the right to a homeland. For 500



Will Yarmouk end up like Homs?

or 600 years, somebody has stolen this right from them. They didn't allow the Kurds to speak their language. But if you talk about Syria, I don't think it will face a sectarian war.

Why? Syria is among the first countries to establish civilisation, including all minorities. They have lived together in relative harmony for hundreds of years; they are open to everybody.

After Assad is defeated, there will be a move to punish those inside

the regime forces who committed crimes. But it won't be sectarian, and we will all come together after this. "Sectarian war" is an argument to do nothing for the Syrian people.

There are 500,000 Palestinians in Syria, yet the official Palestinian factions have left us alone since the Oslo accords. After the revolution, we will remove all those factions, because they leave us alone with this criminal regime, while Yarmouk has been

under siege for four months.

Nobody gets bread or gasoline for us, but they [secularist Palestinian factions] are using the presence of Chechen and Afghan fighters as an excuse to do nothing. They are Islamophobic.

In reality they save the Orientalist consciousness more than the Orientalist "thinkers" did. They say we cannot get our freedom because our community is Muslim.

## Supporting Syria's revolution at the Tunis World Social Forum

Marcus Halaby

CAUSES THAT you are on record as supporting sometimes have a habit of following you around. And so it proved to be with the Syrian revolution in Tunisia. I didn't, I might add, go to the World Social Forum (WSF) in Tunis with the sole intention of attending events on Syria; probably like most people, I had unrealistic ambitions of attending meetings on a range of topics. But all the same, Syria kept coming up.

As well it might. Syria's revolution, like Libya's, is as much a fault-line on the Arab left as it is internationally. Tunisia's government – led by an Islamist party, Ennahda, that played little role in the overthrow of dictator Ben Ali – has broken relations with Bashar al-Assad's regime, and professes its sympathy with the revolution. This on its own is enough to make some Tunisian leftists and secularists suspicious of a struggle for democratic freedoms little different to their own, except in its intensity and prolonged duration.

To this might be added the baleful influence of Arab nationalism, in whose name Assad's Ba'athist regime still claims to be defending "secularism" and "resistance"

against US-backed "jihadists".

There were pro-Assad marchers in evidence on the opening demonstration of the WSF on Tuesday 26 March, waving Syrian regime and Palestinian flags, and praising Assad for his "support" for the Palestinian cause. We would later learn that these were Tunisians, members of a nationalist youth organisation of Ba'athist and Nasserist orientation.

After attending a meeting the following day, at which the Syrian-based Palestinian Marxist Professor Salameh Kaileh called for a global campaign of solidarity to combat the lies and slanders against the Syrian people and their revolution, I was invited to an event on women's rights and LGBT rights in the Arab world on the second day of the WSF.

But Syria came up there as well. One of the speakers was Razan Ghazzawi, a Syrian activist detained twice by the regime for her work in support of media freedom, and the Tunisian Ba'athists turned up to heckle, accuse her of being an "agent" (for who exactly was left unstated), and claim that Syrian women were supporting Assad against the "jihadists". They even criticised her for making her con-

tribution in English, prompting them to ask her if she was "really" Syrian – a question that she turned right back at them.

The final day, however, would see Tunisian Ba'athists at their most provocative, physically assaulting Syrian and Brazilian activists at a pro-Syrian revolution stall, trying to seize and burn their flags and blocking off the exits from the venue, while they tried to break out of the cordon placed around them by the official WSF volunteers.

A complaint made by Professor Kaileh, amongst others, to the WSF organising committee was met with an announcement that there would be no more events on Syria for the remainder of the WSF – purely symbolic, given that there were only a few hours of it left, but still shamefully giving Assad's shabbeeha international what they wanted.

We decided not to let this pass. Marching with a contingent of members of the (New Anticapitalist Party-aligned) French trade union Solidaires, and supported by Kurdish, Moroccan and European activists, we decided to hold a peaceful protest in support of the Syrian revolution on the WSF's closing demonstration.

# Axe the Tax!

• No evictions • Build homes • Fair rents

## Where we stand

THE CAPITALISTS' property must be expropriated, with not a penny paid in compensation.

Capitalism must be abolished across the globe and a world without class division, state repression or the oppression of women, subject races and nations, must be created. That is what revolutionary socialists call communism.

All power must pass from the capitalist elite into the hands of democratic councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry and the poor directly elected by the masses and subject to instant recall. These councils must be supported by the armed working class and its allies.

The resistance of the exploiters must be broken by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution. Armed workers must forcibly break up the police and army that exist to support the rule of private property.

All production and distribution must be organised democratically and sustainably, without private ownership and the blind and brutal dictatorship of market forces.

Social inequality and the underdevelopment of whole continents must be overcome through the planned allocation of humanity's resources: raw materials, means of transportation, communication, technology and labour.

Imperialism, the highest and most violent stage of capitalism, means the exploitation of billions in all countries, it means blockades, invasions and occupations. We support all resistance to imperialism and its agents and demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. We demand the withdrawal of all British troops from abroad including from Northern Ireland. We demand the dissolution of Nato and all imperialist pacts.

We support the Palestinians' struggle to free their homeland from Zionist occupation and to create a single country "from the river to the sea", in which Arabic and Hebrew speaking citizens can live in freedom and equality.

The 21st century must become the century of human freedom!

There is only one road to this freedom. It is the road of class struggle and revolution, the fight against all forms of exploitation and oppression.

We demand equal rights for minorities, an end to all racist discrimination and an end to the lies of the racists in the mass media, which whip up violence against black people and other oppressed communities and ethnic groups. We fight against all immigration controls: they are inherently racist.

We fight for women's libera-

tion: from the burden of child-care and domestic labour, which must be socialised; from rape, physical and mental abuse, from unequal pay and discrimination at work. Women alone must control when and whether they have children, not the state or the churches. This includes defending and extending the right to free abortion and contraception on demand.

Lesbians, gay men and transgender people must be defended against harassment on the streets, at work and in the schools. They must have equal legal rights to marry and bring up children.

We fight the oppression of young people and demand an end to their harassment by the police, the government and the press. Young workers should have equal pay and equal rights with other workers. We fight for free, universal education, under the control of students, teachers and other education workers themselves. We fight for an autonomous, revolutionary socialist youth movement.

We fight the catastrophe of climate change, resisting corporations which pollute the earth, governments that refuse to take action against the emission of greenhouse gases, and policies which put the profits of big oil, the auto industry and the power generators before the very survival of our species.

We oppose reformism and the pro-capitalist policies of the Labour Party. Capitalism cannot be reformed via elections and peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by the masses through force.

We oppose the control of the trade unions by unaccountable bureaucrats. Union members should have full democratic control. All officials must be regularly elected, and subject to instant recall; they must earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. A rank and file movement to carry out this transformation.

In the fight against austerity, we call for a united anti-austerity movement pledged to oppose every cut, for local councils of action, and for mass industrial and direct action, up to and including a general strike to halt the assault on the NHS, the welfare state and education and to kick out the coalition. We fight for a workers' government based on the fighting organisations of the working class and the socially oppressed.

We propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in Britain to build a new working class revolutionary party. Workers Power is the British section of the League for a Fifth International. It fights for a world party organised across national boundaries on a programme for world revolution.

Paul Silson

1 APRIL - BLACK Monday - saw a barrage of laws imposed which will unleash a social catastrophe on Britain's poorest and most vulnerable people. The millionaire cabinet call it welfare 'reform'. At least 6,700,000 families will be driven deeper into poverty as a result of cuts to benefits, which were already set at breadline rates.

More than £10 million was spent burying Britain's most hated politician; Cameron and co. are mounting a fair challenge for that title by driving through cuts which even milk-snatcher Maggie would not have dared to attempt.

### The benefit cap

There will now be a cap on benefits. This will mainly affect housing benefit. Any claimant in social housing who has a "spare bedroom" will lose 14% of their entitlement to housing benefit - an average cut of £16.00 per week. Those who have two or more "spare bedrooms" will have their benefit slashed by 25%.

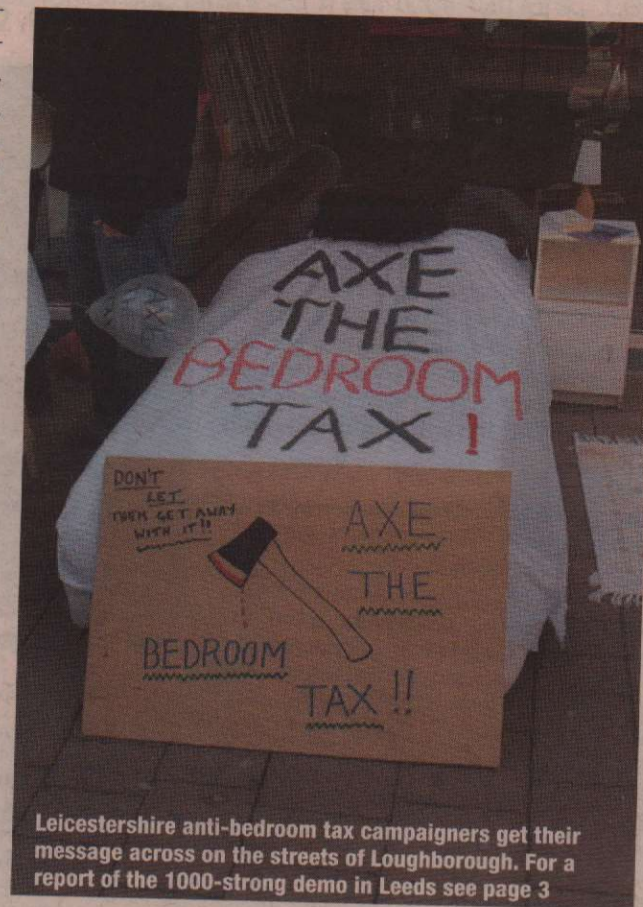
In the new legislation there is no definition of what a bedroom actually is. This is going to affect separated parents, couples who use a spare room for health reasons, parents whose children visit but are not deemed to be part of the household and, most cruelly, disabled people living in adapted or specially designed properties.

The truth is that the single-bed properties they want to put people in don't exist. In Hull, for example, over 5,000 people have applied for single bedroom properties to escape the Tax - only 70 are available. Meanwhile Iain Duncan Smith - worth £1 million - lives rent-free in a £2 million eight-bed mansion.

### Where are the houses?

The Tories claim housing benefit must be brought under control - but because governments have built almost no council houses, there is nowhere for those affected to go. They will be driven into the private sector, and forced to claim Housing Benefit which will be pocketed by parasite landlords.

Far from saving money, the Bedroom Tax will enrich profit-hungry speculators at



Leicestershire anti-bedroom tax campaigners get their message across on the streets of Loughborough. For a report of the 1000-strong demo in Leeds see page 3

the taxpayers' expense. Dozens of Tory MPs are landlords who stand to make a fortune from this tax.

### All in it together?

ATOS the private company that decides who is "fit for work" have taken million of taxpayers' cash to do the Tories' dirty work - stripping vital welfare from thousands of terminally ill people.

As if this wasn't bad enough the Cameron and Clegg double-act have just gifted the super-rich a five per cent tax cut. This means an extra £100,000 a year for Britain's wealthy.

The cuts won't affect landlords, bankers, media barons or MPs - only ordinary people whose wages are being devoured by inflation, their children priced out of education, and their workplace rights exchanged for worthless 'shares' in companies they don't control.

Welfare reform is based on the lie that too many people are claiming money they're not entitled to. The truth is that just three per cent of the total welfare budget is spent on JSA and Housing Benefit.

A massive 24 per cent goes to families in work - working for bosses who pay poverty

wages. The government taxes workers then spends this money topping up on behalf of greedy bosses. This subsidy to the rich is a damning indictment of a system which permits big business to aggres-



Two-thirds of the cuts will affect people with disabilities.

This is after the Tories shut down most of the Remploy factories across the country. Remploy was set up to enable people with disabilities to earn a living, give carers a break from their duties and give all a sense of value and self worth.

Now they join the thousands of people too ill to work who are demonised as "skivers".

sively avoid tax, while insisting the state subsidise their wage bills.

In fact it's the millionaire owners of industry who are to blame for Britain's welfare spending - not working class people who have no choice but to claim or starve.

### They can't evict us all

Resistance is growing by the day. Demonstrations of hundreds are common; now thousands are taking to the streets.

The Bedroom Tax has focussed people's anger, but it's only one reform amongst many. So many people now rely on some form of state assistance to keep their heads above the water that the relentless demonising of welfare claimants by the country's wealthy elite could well backfire.

But we can't wait for some kind of Poll Tax re-enactment society to come along and overthrow the Tories.

### National movement

We need to build on the tireless work done by campaigners, Tenants' Associations and communities. The main strength these have is their roots in the streets and estates where they've lived, worked and socialised.

Yet at a national level the movement is far from united. Labour refuses to pledge to repeal the Tax - effectively saying it supports it. The union leaders wouldn't dream of strike action against it - although their members who will have to deal with the fall out in the job centres, courts and social services could be much more easily won to the need for a massive display of collective strength.

The Bedroom Tax could well be the Tories' second Poll Tax - but only if it's part of a militant campaign from grassroots to nationwide in defence of our jobs, homes and services.

We must stand together AGAINST the Bedroom Tax, and we must fight together FOR:

- A massive house-building project to employ people and solve the housing crisis
- A ban on evictions from private and council houses, we all have the right to a home
- A cap on rents, to be democratically decided by tenants' associations.

[www.workerspower.co.uk](http://www.workerspower.co.uk)