

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

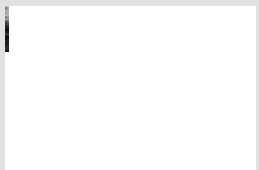


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www.workersliberty.org

For a workers' government

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

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Tory bigot under pressure

By Jack Saffery-Rowe

On 25 January over 60 people took part in an LGBTQ rights protest at Royal Holloway University against Tory Minister for Defence, Philip Hammond, who is also the local MP (Runnymede and Weybridge).

Hammond was giving a talk at the university. He is opposed to same-sex marriage and has voted against gay rights, including the repeal of Section 28.

When the planned protest gained momentum, the minister's aides agreed to meet two students to hear our grievances. I was one, the other was Student Union Chair Joe Rayment.

We questioned Hammond about his opposition to the Same-Sex Marriage Bill, and he responded that the bill would "redefine marriage" and appealed to its "tradition".

We responded that marriage, like many civil institutions, had not remained static, and that, regardless, equal rights should trump tradition.

Hammond objected to re-

ligious groups being forced to marry same-sex couples, ignoring that the bill does not do this. In any case, religious opinion about same-sex marriage ranges from conservative opposition to support (e.g. the Quakers).

He claimed that Maria Miller's "quadruple lock" of exemptions is not "robust enough".

Hammond suggested that civil partnerships were sufficient.

We stated that for many people, marriage was an important religious or cultural event, and that civil partnerships represented an "equal but separate" divide in the law.

As he wormed through his incoherent excuses, his homophobia surfaced.

When questioned why I shouldn't have the same rights as a heterosexual couple, he brushed the question aside as a "silly game" of talking about human rights.

When asked why the state should be allowed to say who can and who cannot have their relationship recognised by the law, he retorted that you wouldn't allow "two siblings who loved each other to get married". He equated the love of a same-sex couple with incest.*

This is the bile that the right-wing of the Tory party are pushing: the Victorian maxim that anything other than love between a man and a woman is as invalid as incest. He then abruptly left our meeting pausing only to call us juvenile as we refused to shake his hand.

We plan to continue the campaign, with a variety of talks, film showing and action-planning meetings arranged for LGBTQ History month (February), and will visit Hammond's surgery to continue protesting.

The LGBTQ caucus of the National Campaign

Against Fees and Cuts will publicise and support actions confronting homophobic politicians, and urge you to organise them too.

* This article was written directly after the meeting with Philip Hammond. We were not allowed recording equipment in the meeting itself and so had to jot down what he said afterwards.

This was complicated further by the mindset I was in after Mr Hammond refused to tell me that I shouldn't be allowed to marry whom I love. When originally writing this I omitted the details concerning Hammond's comparison of same-sex marriage with incest. Though he didn't use the word "incest" but strongly implied that you wouldn't let siblings married.

Joe asked "What right does the state have to tell two people who love each other that can't get married?" he replied, "Well, you we don't allow siblings to get married either".

No to super prisons!

By Stephen Wood

Closure of prisons will mean the opening of gigantic, brutal, inhumane institutions run for private profit

The Government has confirmed that closure of five more prisons and the partial closures of two more. In their place a proposed "super prison" in London, Wales, or the north west will keep 2,000 people locked up, with over 3,000 staff working there.

The closure of the old prisons will not mean increased funding for rehabilitation and non-custodial sentences. It will mean a huge new prison, shuffling inmates away from their family and friends to spend their sentences with a shortage of many of the meagre facilities current prisons have.

There will be a greater demand for discipline and a "one size fits all" policy as the Government looks to lock up more people and ignore the consequences.

83,913 people are currently in UK prisons (80,008 men, 3,905 women). Over 70% of prisoners have mental health issues and the suicide rate is 15% higher than in the general population. Many will leave prison with little or no skills to prevent them from returning to often acquisitive crimes. 58% of prisoners on short term sentences go on to commit further crimes within 12 months of their release. Short term sentences are for non-violent crime; starting with one of those, many people are conditioned by jail to spend

their whole lives in and out of prisons.

The super prisons in countries like the USA are violent institutions not just because they lock up potentially violent offenders, but because guards are armed. Attacks and assaults by other prisoners are common. There is little or no support for vulnerable inmates. The larger the prison the more unstable it becomes.

Private companies can profit by locking people up. Despite the increased drug dependency and lack of staff training found in the

privately run HMP Wolds in East Yorkshire, bidding for other contracts continues. G4S ran HMP Wolds; Serco ran HMP Ashfield, a young offenders' institution.

A huge increase in the use of "restraint" against young people in Ashfield has now seen the Government commit to ending its status as a young offenders institution.

Ultimately we don't want the prison system. Locking more people up for increasing numbers of acquisitive crimes is one of the consequences of this crisis. Crime blights working class communities, but it is members of the working class who languish the longest in prison.

Our movement needs to argue for education, support and increased opportunities for working-class kids, make crime unattractive and fight for a democratic society where people have a say in their lives and equal access to resources.

Police break Greek subway strike

By Theodora Polenta

On 17 January Athens subway workers began a nine-day strike. They were eventually forced back to work when the government used emergency laws to intimidate strikers and sent the riot police into an occupied subway depot.

The subway strike was directed at the government's 2013 budget, which includes a 25% cut in public sector wages (on top of other wage cuts in the last two years) and other austerity measures. This was the biggest labour unrest the current government has faced.

December 2012 was marked by occupations, demonstrations and sits ins by council, university and other public sector workers against a plan to sack at least 15,000, to abolish collective agreements, to cut wages and reduce the minimum wage.

The 2013 government budget also includes a €3.8 billion reduction in pensions, an increase in the retirement age (to 67), a €1 billion reduction in health and education finances, a €347 million reduction in benefits and €3 billion extra in taxes.

At the same time the government is selling off public assets for pennies.

Subway workers are to be incorporated in the public sector salary scheme, scrapping existing contracts. As all public sector salaries have been levelled down to the "lowest common denominator", this has big implications.

The government also plans to privatise public transport; ticket prices will increase, services will be reduced.

On Monday 22 January a court ruling declared the strike illegal. But the workers defied the ruling.

On Thursday 25th, the government invoked emergency legislation which

bans strikes and threatens imprisonment (of three months to five years) for any worker defying the ban. It seems the legislation is being used illegally — it should only be used for defence needs, when there is a natural disaster, or on grounds of public health.

Immediate solidarity strike action paralysed all transport.

Just before 4 am on Friday 25th, 300 Greek riot police stormed Sepolia subway depot in west Athens. The depot was occupied by 90 striking workers. While rows of police blocked off surrounding roads to keep hundreds of supporters away, other police removed the strikers. At least ten were arrested and one female worker was injured. The police allowed only strike-breakers to enter the depot.

These emergency powers have been used nine times since the 1974 collapse of the military dictatorship — three times in the past two years in strikes.

SOLIDARITY

On Friday morning hundreds of people gathered at the depot gates in solidarity. All other transport workers declared immediate strikes and the government had to extend its emergency powers to rail and train workers. A bus strike continues.

Train workers have declared a 24 hour strike on Thursday 31 January. On the same day other nationwide strikes will begin — by the Panhellenic Seamen's Federation (48 hours), health workers (24 hour), GENOP-DEH (24 hour) and ADEDH (four hours). Other public and private sector workers are preparing to join the battle.

Eleysina Shipyard workers have started an indefinite strike. Peasants and farmers are blocking several roads in protest against excessive taxation and the increasing cost of production.

Media workers have also struck. A new round of workers' struggle has begun.

The brutal repression of the government against subway workers followed their refusal to accept the defeatism of their unions, the GSEE and ADEDY.

Those unions organised just a few scattered work stoppages and 24 hour strikes to defuse anger.

Once the strike went beyond a week it began to give hope to the other sections of the working class, to demonstrate a way to fight austerity measures, and even overthrow the government.

The coalition government is determined to crush all workers' struggles.

The cries of the government about how privileged transportation workers are is a far cry from the reality of a €1,000 monthly wage. But it highlights the fact that the government wants to install a norm of a minimum wage of less than €600 a month.

The government consciously chose to escalate the confrontation believing that it would win. The government reasonably believed transport workers were not organisationally ready for an indefinite confrontation. They also believe the anti-memorandum opposition, the left parties and Syriza, are unable to mobilise protesters against the austerity measures.

Pasok's stance is revealing. On Tuesday 22nd Pasok reminded the government of their proposal to exempt transport workers from the public sector "levelled down" salary scheme. One day later the president of Pasok, Evangelos Venizelos, made a remarkable u-turn stating: "The unions that place their workers against society do not support workers' rights" and declaring himself in the government crusade against transport workers. On Thursday Venizelos declared martial law was the "gentle solution".

Strikes on 31 January and beyond, if properly planned and co-ordinated, should be instrumental in building a unified social front. Such a front could defeat emergency laws and strike bans.

But full support from the left and especially from Syriza, for every working class struggle is essential. Syriza as the opposition

and potential future government of the left has a duty to speak clearly in the name of the workers, to call on them to refuse to return to their jobs and to take political responsibility for this. They should state boldly and unequivocally that a government of the left will protect and guarantee the rights of every worker.

Trade union struggle alone, even the most combative, is not enough to bring victory. Any outbreak of strikes should be immediately taken up by Syriza and put into a context of a radical political change linked to a government of the left.

INTERESTS

Syriza and the left generally need to represent the interests of the working class and the popular strata, to be the political voices of labour and social struggles.

Such a programme would include restoration of salaries and pensions, the recovery of collective bargaining agreements, the right to challenge the employer, the fight against precarious employment, the protection of the unemployed. And those measures would be linked to broader radical policies to raise resources through the nationalization of banks, utilities and strategic sectors of the economy, heavy taxation of wealth, the abolition of the memoranda and debt and workers control.

At the same time Greek workers need a revitalisation of the trade union rank and file and the creation of new unions in the private sector. Only with fighting rank and file unions will tomorrow's government of the left be defended against the attacks of the capitalist class.

It is the duty of the revolutionary left to speed up this process by not only participating in the industrial struggles but organising and being the vanguard of these struggles.

It is our duty to organise every battle small and big, and to win to our ranks the most militant workers and youth; every workers' victory is a step closer to the emergence of the working class as the decision-maker of history, a step closer to winning the final battle and to opening the doors to socialism

French car workers fight job losses

Hundreds of car workers at the Aulnay plant, north of Paris, are striking against the proposed closure of the factory, which would lead to the loss of 8,000 jobs.

The strike began on 16 January, when over 450 workers struck. Although the strikers represent only a minority of the plant's total workforce, they have succeeded in stopping production for at least part of the day on almost every day since the strike began. On 28 January, an action by 200 workers shut down production entirely.

The French revolutionary socialist group L'Etincelle has been sending us daily reports on the dispute's progress. See workersliberty.org/aulnay

8,000 strike in Riyadh

By Ruben Lomas

8,000 contract construction workers struck in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, on Sunday 27 January.

The workers, contracted by the Ministry of Finance and working on building projects including the King Abdullah Financial Centre in Al Aqeeq, were demanding backpay. Some workers said that they were owed wages up to five months in arrears.

Strikers held a four-

hour sit-down in the Al-Aqeeq district of Riyadh. They were also angry at rumours that their contractors planned to deduct the SAR2,400 (\$639) "expatriate fee", which contractors are obliged to pay for every foreign worker they employ over the number of Saudi workers, from workers' wages.

According to Asia Business, 90% of private-sector workers in Saudi Arabia are foreign nationals.

Workers of the world

More news on working-class struggle from around the world, on www.workersliberty.org now:

● **New year, new struggles for China's workers: bit.ly/14pD1jf**

● **South Korean union leader on hunger strike: bit.ly/111C0KR**

● **Public sector strikes in Palestine: bit.ly/Ydh3MR**

● **New York bus drivers strike: bit.ly/113H32T**

Help us raise £15,000

This week, we raised £141 towards our fund appeal.

This includes £41 in donations from our dayschool on Antonio Gramsci in Manchester, £25 from a film showing of Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* organised by AWL North East London branch, and £75 in extra literature on the Save Lewisham Hospital demonstration (most AWL members pay for literature together with membership dues and recoup the money

through sales, so the £75 is on top of that).

These are modest amounts, but positive nevertheless. AWL North East London's film-showing was a relatively easy-to-organise event that provided for political discussion and socialising as well as fundraising. And our sales on the Lewisham demonstration show that people are keen to read and discuss socialist ideas.

Taking copies of *Solidarity*, and other AWL literature, to sell, is just one of the ways you can support our fund appeal.

With three months to go until our May Day target, we're now passed the halfway mark, but it'll still take a lot of work and support to get us over the line.

You can contribute in the following ways:

- Taking out a monthly standing order using the form below or at www.workersliberty.org/resources. Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.
- Making a donation by cheque, payable to "AWL", or donating online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.
- Organising a fundraising event.
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.
- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL. More information: 07796 690874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

Total raised so far: £7,097

Thanks to AWL North East London comrades, and well done to Duncan M from South London AWL (amongst many others) for the vast quantities of literature sold on the Lewisham demonstration!



Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

Account name:

Account no:

Sort code:

Please make payments to the debit of my account: Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20 (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

Assad clique cannot be part of "bourgeois peace"

Letter



In the closing weeks of 2012 residents of Bostan al-Qasr, a neighborhood in the Syrian city of Aleppo, were attacked by fighters from the Islamist Jubhat al-Nusra faction of the opposition.

As the attack took place, members of the Free Syrian Army stood by watching. Accounts claim that live rounds were fired into the air and that a member of Jubhat al-Nusra attempted to arrest one of the locals. Why were the residents attacked in this way? They had been on the streets of their community chanting the following slogan: "kull jaysh harami, nizami, hurr wa islami". Translated into English, the chant means "all armies are thieves: regime, FSA and Islamists".

This chant and the forces unified by it have drawn the only possible conclusion from the current state of play in Syria: neither the Islamists, the forces ranged behind the banner of the FSA or — most obviously — the Assad regime truly represent the wishes of the mass of the Syrian people.

The Syrian revolt began as a series of peaceful, mass demonstrations demanding the end of the Assad regime and the institution of democracy. These demonstrations were met with massive, violent reaction from the police, armed forces and special units of Assad's notorious secret service, the Mukhabarat. Unlike the other movements that constitute the Arab Spring, the Syrian protestors were bombed by their own state into quiescence.

Now demobilised and demoralised, the unified secular democratic opposition has largely fallen from prominence. But, as the events in Bostan al-Qasr indicate, the individuals who demonstrated against Assad and the sentiments they once carried onto the streets en masse are still very much alive.

What circumstances will bring them out onto the streets once more? How can these currently atomised forces, which surely represent the best of those ranged against the Assad regime, possibly gain a footing? These are key questions for socialists and democrats looking for a way out of the rapidly deteriorating quagmire of Syria.

In January the National Committee of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty passed a resolution which goes some way to addressing this question (see bit.ly/119BC1p for article summarising resolution and text of resolution).

However, the resolution has one major fault. Implicit in its logical flow is the idea that Assad could play a positive role

in establishing a form of "bourgeois peace" or a "political agreement" in the words of the resolution, that would in effect give secular, democratic and leftist forces room to regroup and coalesce once more.

Point 4 of the resolution says: "while maintaining our right to criticise and our political independence, we will not necessarily denounce a political agreement between the Ba'athists and the rebels that avoids the collapse of Syrian society into warlordism."

Against the prospect of full-blown sectarian civil war, warlordism, further gains for reactionary Islamist groupings and the death and destruction that cannot but come with them, a "political settlement" would indeed be preferable — with or without the prospect of democratic forces reassembling in any peaceful window.

CLIQUE

However, the idea that Assad and his close political clique — as differentiated from the mass of the Ba'athists — would either agree to participate in such an agreement, could be trusted to honestly participate or could participate with the consent of the mass of the Syrian people is, to be frank, fanciful.

The resolution as a whole says nothing about Assad being part of such a settlement. In fact, Assad and his clique are not mentioned at all. This is where the problem resides.

In August 2011 *Solidarity* carried an article titled "Assad must go now". In February 2012 the paper carried an article titled "Down with Assad! For liberty and democracy in Syria". Various other articles have carried the demand that Assad should play no part in the future of Syria.

The resolution and the minutes from the national committee meeting indicate a re-assessment of the situation in Syria. Clearly, the rise in prominence of Islamist reactionaries is a problem for both Syria and the wider region. When facts change, our political analysis must change. However, the one thing that has not changed is the political character of Assad and his inner circle. Dropping mention of Assad and the call for his removal is a mistake.

Just one day after our National Committee meeting, Assad gave a rare public speech re-affirming his commitment to wage war against the Syrian people.

In bending the stick to highlight the risks posed by growing Islamist influence in Syria at the expense of maintaining a clear political view of Assad, the National Committee has passed a resolution with unacceptable implications.

They should re-discuss and re-think the issues.

Tom Unterrainer, Nottingham AWL

* See article from *Open Democracy*: <http://bit.ly/TqIKjV>

Their Europe and ours

A Workers' Liberty dayschool

Saturday 16 February, 12-6pm, ULU, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY (near Euston)

Workshops and discussions include:

- What is a revolutionary situation? Is there now one in Greece?
- Who are Syriza?
- The economics of the Euro-crisis
- Class struggle in France, with a speaker from the NPA
- Ninety years ago: revolution across Europe
- How Leon Trotsky's ideas can help us understand the crisis
- Should we want the EU to break up?
- Facing and beating the threat from Golden Dawn
- Solidarity without borders: migrants' struggles
- Women across Europe fight back

Unite the workers, unite Europe

David Cameron has committed to calling a referendum after 2015 on British membership of the European Union.

Right-wing pressure, both from within the Tory party and from groups like Ukip, is mounting against British membership, as a conservative, national-chauvinist section of the ruling class seeks to rewind history to an age of nationally walled-off, competing capitalist blocs (rather than the integration the era of relative European unity has meant).

Unfortunately, many on the left and in the labour movement chime in with right-wing propaganda against Europe, giving it a “left-wing” veneer by implying that the EU is somehow *more* capitalist, or representative of a worse form of capitalism, than the British state itself.

What are the real issues?

What has British membership of the EU meant for working-class people's lives?

Short answer: a string of mild, full-of-loopholes social reforms. The Equality Act 2010, mandating equal pay for women, and restraining discrimination on grounds of sex, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion, or age. The Agency Worker Regulations and the Working Time Regulations. The Tupe regulations which give some little protection when your work is contracted out. The Human Rights Act.

Freedom to travel or work across the EU. And, conversely, freedom for people from continental Europe to come to live and work in Britain. BNP and Ukip types don't like that freedom, but it enriches Britain both economically and culturally.

But many non-EU countries have social reforms like that. Norway, which is not in the EU, is in the Schengen open-borders area, while Britain is not. The EU has meant privatisations, marketisations, neo-liberalism, more so than those feeble social reforms.

Yes, similar social reforms might have been won outside the EU. But David Cameron's aim in “renegotiating” Britain's EU membership, and the aim of right-wing Tories, Ukip, and BNP in wanting Britain out of the EU, is to trash some of those mild reforms, pushed by big EU states where the labour movement is stronger in order to restrain social cost-cutting across the EU marketplace. Cameron explicitly targets the Agency Worker Regulations and the Working Time Regulations.

The Tory anti-EUers want *even more* privatisation, marketisation, and neo-liberalism than the EU. The neo-liberalism we've had was not imposed by the EU. Thatcher pioneered it.

What would British withdrawal from the EU mean?

In basic economics, probably quite little, because Britain would probably follow Norway (which is in the “European Economic Area”, meaning essentially that Norway agrees to implement all the EU's basic economic regulations, but has no say in their design; doesn't pay into the EU budget, but doesn't receive EU funds) or Switzerland (which does similar to Norway, except that it implements basic EU economic regulations case-by-case rather than through a general agreement).

It would mean something more dramatic only if it were part of a general collapse of international capitalist integration, and a regression to the high economic barriers between countries of the 1930s.

In a way, asking what British membership of the EU has meant is like asking what would have happened if Britain could have stepped outside the broad international trends of capitalist development of the last 60 or 70 years, notably the erosion of Britain's old Empire, and increasing capitalist integration in Europe.

Britain's membership of the EU means that Britain is the foremost home for US, Japanese, and other capitalist investment in Europe. On the latest figures (2011), Britain's stock of inward foreign direct investment, at \$1100 billion, exceeds other EU countries' (France \$950 bn, Germany \$900 billion, Belgium \$1000 billion, the rest far behind). What would have

happened if British capital had stepped outside those international flows of capital? It could not and would not have done so.

To ask what would have happened if Britain had stood entirely outside that process of capitalist integration in Europe is a bit like asking what would have happened if Britain had for decades been under a government of the Amish sect who dominate some small areas of the USA and reject high-voltage electricity, post-primary education, petrol-driven cars, etc. It's like asking what capitalism would be like if it stopped developing.

But don't socialists want capitalism to stop developing?

Socialists combat capital at every step of its development, but we do not try to stop or reverse capitalist development. That stopping or reversing is impossible, or possible only as part of general social catastrophe.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, many left-minded people wanted to stop the growth of “trusts” — big capitalist corporations or cartels, as distinct from smaller capitalist firms. In the USA, they won laws like the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890, and some big corporations were broken up into smaller units, like Standard Oil in 1911.

Marxists argued that these laws could not essentially deflect capital's trend to concentration and centralisation. Lenin wrote: “The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts... We do not ‘demand’ such development, we do not ‘support’ it. We fight it. But how do we fight? We explain that trusts [i.e. production becoming increasing a large-scale, social affair]... are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc., and beyond them to socialism!”

Our attitude to the EU is similar. We do not want a return to the old high barriers between countries. Forward through the capitalist integration of Europe, and beyond it to socialism!

So British withdrawal from the EU would make no differ-

ence?

In basic economics. But it would embolden and strengthen the Tories to trash some of those mild social reforms. Swiss business organisations claim Swiss superiority over the EU because, they say: “Swiss labour laws are very liberal [from the bosses' point of view] and are similar to US labour law. Strikes are almost unknown... social costs for employers are much lower in Switzerland... the Swiss average number of annual work hours comes to 1,832, which ranks first in Europe”. That is what the Tories want.

But there are left organisations which want Britain out of the EU to make opposite changes, for better labour laws and so on.

The labour movement could and would still fight for reforms and protection. Being outside the EU would not help us. The Tories (and Ukip and BNP) would get the boost from British exit.

Doesn't the EU pose a threat to the national sovereignty of the UK? Doesn't greater European integration threaten national self-determination?

No capitalist government can do other than adjust to the international flows and production chains of capital. Arguably by being in the EU, Britain can get more “sovereignty” (since the EU, as such a large unit, has more economic autonomy) than in isolation.

That is under capitalism. But what about socialism?

Socialism in one country was an impossibility even when Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto in 1848, and ten times more so today. Workers in one European country should not wait for workers in others; but in highly-integrated Europe a workers' government in one country would either quickly stimulate workers' victories in other countries (and it would have a good chance of doing so), or be crushed by isolation.

Is it possible to reform EU institutions?

As much or as little as it is possible to reform capitalist institutions generally. Maybe a little more than national capitalist institutions, since the EU's greater wealth gives it greater elasticity and greater ability to make concessions. But there will be no concessions without struggle. The lack of reform of EU institutions is due to the lack of united workers' mobilisations across Europe.

Even if we're in favour of European unity as a principle, surely we oppose the EU as an institution? Shouldn't we vote in any referendums for outcomes that will break up and undermine it?

That would be like always defending small capitalist firms against takeovers by big capitalists, on the grounds that we oppose big capitalist firms as institutions.

What would workers' unity across Europe mean in practice?

In the 1970s the capitalist governments of Europe had a plan, organised through the EU, for a concerted rundown of the steel industry. Workers' unity across Europe would have meant the steelworkers across Europe organising together with a commonly-agreed alternative plan, instead of what happened — workers fighting to defend “French” steel as against “German”, or even “Scottish” as against “Welsh”.

Today, it would mean a common workers' plan in defence of social and workers' rights across Europe, and for levelling-up across Europe to the best conditions won in any one country.

It would mean a commitment by workers' organisations across Europe to rally to the defence of the Greek workers if they win a left government in their country which rejects the imposed cuts, and to follow the Greek workers' example.

● Further reading — www.workersliberty.org/world/international/europe

150 years of working on London Underground

By Blujah (a tubeworker)

Traverse these airless edges.
London Underground,
5am to final lamp.
A litany of tunnels punched out memory of light.
Station upon station, footfall crumbled.
Waterloo: Sainsbury's.

Dance wire, via headwall and auto-phone.
Replicated ghosts.
Fire extinguishers idle and fat with chemical entropy.
Sidling at platform precipice,
Heart at fingers
Trains smooth and wreathed in souls.
Swiss Cottage: Spar, Iceland & Sainsbury's.

Detritus: lives pared like gossamer bark.
Someone says: 'They brought her legs back in a separate bag.'
Brake dust, myriad lines.
Faith fallen in suicide pit.
Curves drenched in soot, and saved blood.
Oxford Circus: Sainsbury's, Waitrose & Tesco Metro.

These night-days, gate-line scenarios squeal grey,
Like pigeons strutting canopies at St James' Park,
And someone says a hundred years ago:
'Did you ever notice the apostrophe is missing?'
Something misplaced. He mutters:
'I left it somewhere between Notting Hill and Camden Town.'
St James's Park: Sainsbury's.

A special Lambeth Walk, platform 1.
Bakerloo, curvy wicked for those with inclinations
And no stomach for narrow treachery,
Telephones behind human thicket,
Wall of heartbeats parched in tweed.
Why do they keep the help in gut squeeze terror?
Elephant and Castle: Tesco Metro.

At Paddington, sink to rat corridors crooked as Fagin
Beneath pipes clothed in Victorian vest,
Door pressed ajar.
Smothered in mess room.
Kettle steam,
Tupperware pops, fresh bread and lettuce breathe until.
A sigh and a dive for soft, white sleep.
Paddington Main: Marks & Spencers & Waitrose.

An echo battered by discourse from LU veteran of only 28.
Tracks riven in a face.
Predict a point failure.
Onward, stretched down to Wembley
Baker Street.
On and on.
Shift. Sing at iron vaulting, lit by brick.
Sand and sky. Edwardian supper.
Air.
Marylebone: Costcutter & Waitrose.

Liverpool Street: Yellow, red and iron respectively.
As if it matters.
Holborn.
Silver cages.
Humming stairs,
Soft, pockets the end of day
Torn poster's curling orbit ceased.
She calls: 'The station is closed.'
He doesn't turn.
We eat black porridge on the London Underground.
Strand Station: Clare Market & Covent Garden.

Occupy to defend j

After the banking crisis hit fully in late 2008, throughout 2009 there was a spate of occupations as working-class people resisted job losses and threats to services. Though this flurry did not reach anything like the levels of the 1970s and soon died down, it was not a flash in the pan. Occupying as a tactic has re-appeared again recently, and, of course, in the meantime, the "Occupy" movement has given the word wide currency, even if it has diluted its meaning. Vicki Morris looks at some recent examples of occupation to draw out some lessons.

Workplace sit-ins for pay and other benefits or to save jobs

Visteon: Workers in Basildon, Belfast, and Enfield occupied their factories for several days when car-parts company Visteon unexpectedly went bust in 2009, making 565 redundant at short notice with statutory minimum redundancy pay.

The Enfield workers consented to be "led out" of their occupation by their union Unite, but then picketed and blockaded the factories 24/7. Ultimately, Visteon and former parent company Ford agreed to better redundancy pay and to negotiate over pensions. Part of the workers' leverage in this case was the threat to Ford of sympathetic action by other Ford workers.

Vestas: Twelve workers occupied part of the Vestas wind turbine blade factory on the Isle of Wight for 18 days in July-August 2008. They were protesting against the closure of the plant, with the loss of 500 jobs. At the time the Labour government was promoting investment in "green jobs" as part of the solution to climate change.

The occupation was partly inspired by the occupation at Visteon. Patrick Rolfe, one of the young socialists who went to campaign on the Isle of Wight, explained:

"We persuaded the former convenor of the Enfield Visteon plant, Ron Clark, to speak at a public meeting. Ron spoke about the experience and the tactics of occupation, telling the gathered crowds that physical control of the factory was the

Be prepared!

Sometimes occupations are spontaneous, as was the case at Visteon, but it is easier to make the decision to occupy and to carry one out by preparing in advance: thinking about who will occupy, where, how to keep supplied, how to inform the press, and what to say. Preparations also have to be kept from the boss.

If a company suddenly announces it is about to close, that won't be possible, but, even then, if people are aware of examples from history, they are more likely to consider taking that option when the situation arises. Cases such as Visteon and Vestas can provide inspiration to wider forces than those directly involved in them, if socialists share their story.

only way to bargain with the bosses. The experience gained by the Visteon workers, and their success provided an example of what can be achieved if workers take action and stick together."

The Vestas occupiers were evicted but they joined a picket of the factory to stop the company moving out valuable equipment or the blades that still remained in the factory. Vestas managed to move the blades at the end of September, but only with the help of a major police operation. As in the case of Visteon, the workers sought to use their ability to control what the bosses could do with their property as a bargaining chip.

In the case of private businesses, occupations raise the question of who the workplace and the equipment in it actually and rightfully belong to. Is it to the bosses whose aim is to make profits, or to the workers who use — occupy — the workplace day in and day out, and whose livelihoods depend on it?

Occupations also teach us lessons about the state and who

Recent workers' occupations

Cork, May 2012

"Irish workers who occupied their factory after being laid off have won the redundancy payments their millionaire boss initially refused to give them.

"The former employees of the Vita Cortex foam manufacturing plant in Cork have ended a 150-day occupation of the plant after their union, Siptu, helped negotiate a substantial redundancy package."

● www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/05/16/factory-occupation-wins

Coventry, November 2012

"Coventry car workers staged a brief sit-in strike after their bosses announced 156 redundancies.

"The workers at the Manganese Bronze factory, which manufactures the famous London 'black cabs', began the sit-in after administrator PriceWaterhouseCooper was called in because of a failure to find new funding for the company."

● www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/11/01/coventry-car-workers-factory-occupation

Ireland, January 2013

Workers in several HMV stores in Ireland occupied when the company went into receivership owing them back pay. As a result they won a guarantee from the receivers that they would get everything they were owed, and agreed to end their sit-in.

Ron Clark (right) at Visteon, Enfield

Jobs and services!

OCCUPYING TO SAVE NHS SERVICES

From 1976 to 1984 there were around 32 occupations or work-ins at hospitals and wards around the country, and there was a brief occupation at UCL in 1993. A successful two-year “work-in” during 1976-8 saved the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Women’s Hospital from closure.

Campaign to Save Friern Barnet Library

Vestas factory occupation

it serves. Ultimately, the bosses are often forced to deploy the forces of the capitalist state — the courts, the bailiffs and the police — acting on their behalf in order to exercise their ownership rights.

● www.workersliberty.org/vestas

Community sit-ins to save services

There are many successful examples of service users occupying a building in order to protest against — and sometimes prevent — a service being shut down. These include:

● In 1993-4 a seven-month occupation by parents at Springdale Nursery in Islington, north London forced the council to reopen it (see “Saving a nursery” box).

● In 2009 parents successfully occupied Lewisham Bridge School, south London, against its planned closure.

As with any occupation — workplace or community — or political protest, people will have different views on what they are fighting for, what tactics to use, and whether they are prepared to compromise on their demands in order to win part of what they want if they believe they cannot win everything.

This is perhaps particularly the case with campaigns to save community services in the current political climate.

BIG SOCIETY TRAP?

The government is promoting the semi- or complete privatisation of public services, often by encouraging “community groups” to take over running services, with little financial or logistical support.

This can be a trap for those who want to save, for example, a library as a building for the use of the community, but who do not have the resources to run a proper library service out

of it.

Lewisham libraries: New Cross Library was occupied briefly in February 2011 as part of a campaign of protest against Lewisham Council’s plan to close five libraries. Lewisham has largely succeeded in getting non-statutory bodies to take over the libraries, as part of its own cost-cutting. The nett effect has been lower quality services.

Friern Barnet Library: Barnet Council closed Friern Barnet Library in April 2012 with a plan to sell off the building. They did this in spite of a strong community campaign to save the library. Campaigners hastily organised a sit-in on the day of closure, which lasted five hours and achieved considerable publicity. Had the occupiers been better prepared, they might have undertaken a longer occupation. Instead, they left the building but set up weekly open-air “Friern Barnet People’s Libraries” each Saturday on the green in front, and began a political campaign to re-open the library.

In September, some activists connected to the “Occupy” movement squatted the building. Although there was no connection between this action and the existing campaign, they quickly made contact with each other.

Before long, the occupiers and local campaigners together had re-opened the library, restocked it from donations, and have been running an impressive programme of classes and events in the building ever since.

There are debates about how to save the library, whether to accept to run it as volunteers, and under what conditions, or

whether to insist that the council return to running the library service there.

Barnet Council now has a possession order against the occupation but the political campaign to save the library continues.

● Save Friern Barnet Library group:

<https://sites.google.com/site/savefriernbarnetlibrary/>

● Friern Barnet People’s Library:

<http://fbpeopleslibrary.co.uk/>

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Occupying takes courage. It is easier to take the decision to occupy and to sustain an occupation if you know your community supports you.

The community can help in practical ways — supplying food, etc; mobilising wider forces when necessary, for example, to keep bailiffs at bay. Community support also helps to give an occupation political legitimacy.

Sometimes occupations involve people from outside the community; this should not be a problem so long as those defending the service feel they have political ownership of their protest — albeit taking the advice of “outsiders”, if they want to.

Sometimes occupations succeed in saving a service. Almost always, occupying is rewarding, giving those taking part and those supporting them a sense of power; people almost always are glad that they fought, even when they don’t appear, to their enemies, to win much!

Saving a nursery

In March 1994, the Labour council in Islington, North London, voted to reopen Springdale nursery after a seventh-month long occupation.

It was a small victory: the money involved was only about 0.1% of the council’s budget. But small fights offer a chance to build up experience in the kind of direct action and campaigning needed for bigger fights.

The occupation began in May 1993 with two nurseries — Springdale and Harvist — threatened with closure. Fearing for their jobs, Springdale workers accepted redeployment within a few weeks. But the occupation, run by workers at

Harvist and parents at Springdale, continued.

The nursery workers’ union Unison, at national level, initially repudiated the occupation, but was forced to swing round after a vote at its national conference.

The campaign sent speakers to meetings in the area, collected signatures on a petition, and distributed leaflets. They contacted other local nurseries.

In August 1993 Harvist workers ended their occupation with an agreement to keep the nursery open on a voluntary-sector basis. The parents at Springdale decided to stay in.

Eventually, by winning votes in Labour Party ward branches, one by one, the parents’ campaign forced an agreement from Islington Council Labour group to re-open Springdale.

BATTERSEA PARK PLAYGROUND, JANUARY 2013

“Occupy” activists helped Wandsworth Against Cuts to protest against the planned closure of a children’s adventure playground in Battersea Park in January 2013.

Wandsworth Council say they will spend money on refurbishing the playground, but they want to cut the staff who supervise activities there.

The local community fears it will lose a valuable recreational resource for children. The campaigners occupied the playground, but the Council had them evicted.

● Wandsworth Against Cuts:

www.wandsworthagainstcuts.co.uk

The Tuaregs in the Malian conflict

By Jonny Keyworth

The Tuareg people, a nomadic Berber people living in Saharan north Africa, have had five rebellions in the last century — 1916-1917, 1962-1964, 1990-1995, 2007-2009 and in 2012.

These rebellions have not often been featured in the far-left press. The most recent, in 2012, involved the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) declaring an independent state of Azawad.

It is only since France's intervention into the conflict in Mali that the left has discovered an interest in the region.

Many on the left have been quick to apply to Mali the same analysis of imperialism they used during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Here, there is the involvement of the Movement of Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) in the uprising, and the intervention of a western state against the growth of an Islamist movement.

An understanding of the conflict in Mali as simply one between Islamism and imperialism ignores the history of the struggle for an independent Tuareg state and reduces the Tuaregs and their history to a footnote.

The Islamic strain of the Azawadi uprising is strong (and no doubt the French intervention will strengthen this strand, even in the face of defeat). But it is by no means the most crucial strand — the issues that sparked the initial uprising were the aims of Tuareg independence and autonomy, and the disjuncture of nationalism and statehood in the 21st century.

PARTICIPATION

Crucially, ignoring the Tuareg strand of the uprising writes them out of participation in making peace in the region, and pits Islamic fundamentalism versus imperialism, with no third camp of consistent democracy between them.

The left has struggled to balance opposition to western intervention with a nuanced understanding of the politics of Mali (and the Sahel region) since independence. On a wider level it has failed to analyse and pick up on the political implications of the increasingly uncomfortable relationship of Northern "Arab" Africa with "Black" sub-saharan Africa.

The so-called "age of independence" in Africa — the 1960s — split the traditional Tuareg territory between the states of Mali, Nigeria, Morocco, Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Libya. This drew the Tuareg community into new formations in the midst of the clamour for centralised statehood in the initial post-colonial period.

Tuareg groups have thus been drawn into various conflicts surrounding resources in the Sahel region, often as "hired hands" for other forces' conflicts. This gave great currency to not only the Tuareg identity in the region, but a wider Berber identity, in opposition to the perceived cultural Arabisation in the region and the imposition of the pan-Arabist political ideology, which has grown since the early 1990s.

On 6 April 2012, the MNLA declared independence of Northern Mali under the Tuareg historic name of "Azawad",

MNLA fighters with a Berber flag

covering the whole of Northern Mali all the way down to the Niger River.

The Tuareg rebellion of 2007-2009 had ended in defeat and peace deals that granted the Tuaregs amnesty but none of their aims. So when armed Tuareg mercenaries returned to northern Mali after the fall of Gaddafi and rejoined the MNLA, the Tuareg cause was empowered once again.

Yet there were other forces competing with the MNLA for sway in the Northern area of Mali — namely the Islamist groups Ansar Dine and the MUJWA, who have come to dominate the movement for Azawadi independence, and by September last year these two groups had driven the MNLA out of its stronghold in Douentza.

Whilst the MNLA's victory turned out to be short-lived, we should not see this as the overall victory of the Islamist forces in taking the torch of Northern Malian independence. The MNLA has made strong alliances across borders, such as their continuing council with the President of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaore, as well as links with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This means that the MNLA is in a strong position when talks start on the reconstruction of the Malian state, if we presume that the Malian/French forces win the battle with the Islamists.

Preempting this situation, the MNLA has begun meeting with other northern community leaders to solidify its support base and begin plans to reassert Tuareg authority in Mali. The battle against Islamism may be coming to an end, but northern Mali still faces an uncertain future, one that Tuaregs must be part of so that this conflict is not repeated again and again in the future — as Marx noted, first as tragedy, then as farce.

With more than 200,000, mostly Tuareg, Malians estimated to have fled the country and 300,000 being internally displaced, the question of the future make-up of the Malian state is paramount, and this debate is being lost in the coverage of the battle against the Islamists.

are reports of atrocities by the Malian army against light-skinned people suspected of being Tuareg or Arab.

In Timbuktu, after the reconquest, local people have pilaged shops which they say belong to "Arabs", "Algerians", or "Mauretians".

French casualties have been small, or maybe zero. And most reports suggest wide support in Mali for the French intervention.

However, the prospect of France now quickly withdrawing and handing over to a stable, widely-supported Malian government is quite another matter.

Al Qaeda and its allies have disappeared into the desert vastnesses, rather than standing and fighting. They can return.

French troops have also been sent to neighbouring Niger, to guard uranium mines there owned by a French multinational. The US is negotiating a deal with Niger to post 300 troops there, in order to operate surveillance drones over Mali.

Better troops out now than an African Afghanistan.

It seems that there is little chance that the French and Malian forces will fail to drive out the Islamist forces, as they recently took Gao and look set to take Timbuktu, but this does not end the question of Northern Mali and the Tuaregs.

The re-integrating of northern Mali into Greater Mali by the politicians of the South and their French allies will not solve the issues at hand, and the disjuncture of borders and nationalism.

Rather than seeing the uprising in Mali as a rerun of Iraq or Afghanistan, we should see it in light of the Kurdish and Basque struggles — a complex issue of nationalism, self-determination, and statehood in the 21st century.

The questions it poses will not be answered by "Islamism vs imperialism" demagoguery, but by a nuanced understanding of modern African politics.

Solidarity with South African farm workers

By Damien Chapel

For the last few months, thousands of farm workers in South Africa's Western Cape region have been on strike.

Western Cape is one of the most profitable agricultural regions in the world, with its wines, grapes, and apples filling supermarket shelves in Britain and around the world as part of £850 million export industry.

Around 500,000, mainly black, agricultural workers work in dreadful conditions and for very low pay. The minimum wage is the equivalent of under £5 a day. Workers often are poorly housed as tenants on the farms themselves. Workers suffer exposure to pesticides and lack of access to clean water. Sick pay is often not paid, and farm managers have moved against union organisation.

Since November, a rolling wave of strikes has spread demanding a minimum wage of the equivalent of £10.65 a day. The strikers are also fighting the multinational retailers that have benefited massively from the poor wages in Western Cape to maximise profits on wine and fruit.

During the course of the strikes, roads have been blocked, hundreds of strikers have been arrested, and three strikers have died. In the latest move hundreds of strikers have been sacked and evicted from their tenancies on the big estates.

Nosey Pieterse, an activist with the Black Workers' Agricultural Sector Union (Bawusa), said: "I do not know how many have been sacked but in one instance, truckloads of workers were dismissed. In Wolseley, trucks drove into townships and dumped the clothes of farmworkers that had been left behind on the farm."

The strikers are not only fighting the estate owners, they are fighting the African National Congress (ANC)-led government that has refused to raise the minimum wage or even properly enforce existing minimum wage and tenancy rights. This should once again show those on the left in Britain who believe South African government is in some way progressive that the leadership of the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) are brutal agents of capital.

Unions have put out a general call for a boycott of South African wine and fruit to put pressure on this largely export-led industry.

Pieterse says: "The government should be forcing the farmers to the table, but it is not. Our only weapon left is for the foreign retailers to pledge that unless the conditions are addressed, they will no longer import South African products."

To support the striking South African workers we can and should picket the big supermarkets in solidarity with South African workers and to help ensure strikers' demands are met and sacked strikers reinstated.

French troops take Timbuktu

By Martin Thomas

As *Solidarity* goes to press, French troops have taken Timbuktu, the biggest city of the north-west (desert and semi-desert) part of Mali previously controlled by Al Qaeda and allies.

There remains one sizeable city unreclaimed in the north-west: Kidal. The secular Tuareg militia MNLA claims to have taken it in alliance with a dissident fraction of the Islamist militias, and to be keen to do a deal with the French, but not with the Malian army.

From Sévaré, a crossroads town on the border between the north-west and south of Mali, reconquered early, there

The SWP and “Leninism”

By Martin Thomas

The Central Committee (CC) of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has changed its line. For the first while after the SWP’s unhappy conference on 4-6 January, the CC said that the conference had decided the controversial issues. The case was closed, SWP members were instructed to think and talk about other things, and, as for non-SWPers, it was none of their business.

Now it has felt obliged to open a public polemic. Alex Callinicos published a blast against the SWP opposition online on 28 January. It will appear in print in the SWP magazine *Socialist Review*.

Callinicos closes his article by declaring that he thinks the SWP will not collapse. The CC is rattled: it’s as if someone, asked about an ailment, replies that she or he thinks it won’t be fatal.

Far from resolving the SWP’s problems, Callinicos’s article epitomises them. Entitled “Is Leninism finished?”, it uses the old polemical method of the “amalgam”, a favourite of Stalinists. Callinicos tries to discredit his SWP opponents by lumping them in with others.

The writer Owen Jones, so Callinicos claims, looks to the Labour Party as an answer; the SWP splinter group Counterfire looks to the broad “movements”; both fail to see the need for coherent revolutionary-socialist organisation. Whether he’s right about Jones or Counterfire is debatable; but in any case they are in the article only so as to smear the SWP opposition as similar.

Callinicos suggests that the SWP opposition is saying that “Leninism” is “finished”, and he and the CC are defending “Leninism”. Sliding from formulation to formulation, he describes the issues at stake successively as:

- “the model of democratic centralism... that the SWP has developed”
- “the revolutionary Marxist tradition”
- the “Leninist model of organisation”
- “acting as... a ‘vanguard party’”
- coherent revolutionary-socialist organisation as against reliance on Labour or on broad movements
- failing to recognise the historic “centrality of workers’ struggles”, and thus, in a time of “absence of a sustained revival of working-class militancy”, accepting miscellaneous broad movements, or a Labour Party which you hope to push left, as a substitute for revolutionary socialist organisation.
- and again, to round off, as “our [the SWP’s] version of democratic centralism”.

As if all these are the same, and anyone questioning Callinicos’s version of democratic centralism rejects Marxism and the working class...

The term “Leninism” was coined in the period when Lenin himself was taken out of activity by illness and then death, in

Callinicos articulates a “commandist” model of democratic centralism

1923-4, by the people in the Bolshevik Party leadership in Russia, Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, and others, who were accommodating to the conservatism and inertia of a state machine permeated by inheritances from Tsarism. It meant them using snippets and phrases from Lenin’s writings to impose their control.

Trotsky, reckoning Lenin’s basic ideas to have been right, and knowing that Lenin himself had urged him in 1922 to take the offensive against Stalin, decided not to provoke an easily-misunderstood debate by rejecting the term “Leninism”, but rather to define it in his own terms (see box).

He defined “Leninism” as the unremitting struggle for ideological clarity, revolutionary honesty, and active political initiative based on the logic of the class struggle.

“DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM”

Lenin used the term “democratic centralism”, but as a commonplace of effective organisation, not as a special new form he had invented.

In a letter during World War One to left-wingers in the USA, Lenin wrote: “We defend always in our press democracy in the party. But we never speak against the centralisation of the party. We are for democratic centralism. We say that the centralisation of the German labour movement is not

a feeble but a strong and good feature of it. The vice of the present Social-Democratic Party of Germany consists not in centralisation but in the preponderance of the opportunists...”

Democratic centralism was and is a common-sense description of any organisation which is to act cohesively but on the basis of discussion. A choir which discusses democratically what it will sing, and then has all the different singers sing their parts in unison, is democratic centralist.

Revolutionary socialist politics needs a special sort of democracy and a special sort of centralism. It needs a democracy which comprises not just the formalities of voting, but well-informed debate on all the big political questions, driven by a truly revolutionary ardour for truth, and by a membership seriously educated in the whole heritage of socialist theory; and a rigorous accounting for mistakes.

It needs centralism, obviously, in the sense of the organisation acting cohesively to carry out majority-decided policies — to run campaigns, to circulate publications, to throw its influence one way or another on disputed issues in the labour movement.

It needs it more specifically in three senses. The organisation must collectively control its members who get positions in trade unions, or in parliaments and municipalities, rather than let them succumb to the pressures and influences of their positions.

The organisation must ensure that all its members are active, educated, and involved in the organisation’s inner life. It must not, like social-democratic parties, have a big swathe of members who do little or whose political focus is elsewhere, in trade-union routine for example. If there are members who don’t really know the issues in the organisation’s debates, or don’t have the necessary background education, or feel little commitment to carry out the eventual decisions, then the organisation’s debates cannot be sharp and will often (as in social-democratic parties) be fudged, or swayed by demagogy or inertia.

Since the class struggle has sharp twists, the organisation must be able to reorient quickly and decisively. As Lenin put it in that same letter: “If in any given crisis the small group (for instance our Central Committee is a small group) can act for directing the mighty mass in a revolutionary direction, it would be very good”. That capacity is established not by rules, but by the leading committees leading debates in the organisation with insight and honesty, so that they earn political authority.

Within those general guidelines, detailed forms of a revolutionary socialist organisation vary widely. In an intense and rapidly-changing political crisis, the organisation will

Lenin stood for revolutionary honesty

Revolutionary sense cannot be confused with demagogical flair. The latter may yield ephemeral successes, sometimes even sensational ones. But it is a political instinct of an inferior type.

It always leans toward the line of least resistance. Leninism, on the other hand, seeks to pose and resolve the fundamental revolutionary problems.

Leninism is, first of all, realism, the highest qualitative and quantitative appreciation of reality, from the standpoint of revolutionary action. Precisely because of this it is irreconcilable with the flight from reality behind the screen of hollow agitationism, with the passive loss of time, with the haughty justification of yesterday’s mistakes on the pretext of saving the tradition of the party.

Leninism is genuine freedom from formalistic prejudices, from moralising doctrinalism, from all forms of intellectual conservatism attempting to bind the will to revolutionary action. But to believe that Leninism signifies that “anything goes” would be an irremediable mistake. Leninism includes the morality, not formal but genuinely revolutionary, of

mass action and the mass party. Nothing is so alien to it as functionary-arrogance and bureaucratic cynicism.

A mass party has its own morality, which is the bond of fighters in and for action. Demagogy is irreconcilable with the spirit of a revolutionary party because it is deceitful: by presenting one or another simplified solution of the difficulties of the hour it inevitably undermines the next future, weakens the party’s self-confidence.

Swept by the wind and gripped by a serious danger, demagogy easily dissolves into panic. It is hard to juxtapose, even on paper, panic and Leninism.

Leninism is warlike from head to foot. War is impossible without cunning, without subterfuge, without deception of the enemy. Victorious war cunning is a constituent element of Leninist politics.

But, at the same time, Leninism is supreme revolutionary honesty toward the party and the working class. It admits of no fiction, no bubble-blowing, no pseudo-grandeur.

Leon Trotsky, *The New Course*

Continued on page 10

need to be more brusquely “centralist” than in quieter times. One plague of revolutionary socialist organisations has been to take makeshifts which the Bolsheviks adopted in the Russian civil war — or in its aftermath when they faced problems of economic calamity, mass peasant discontent, and dispersal of working-class cadres — as the norm for all times.

The SWP adopts a model more “commandist” than the Bolsheviks even in the civil war, and more so than any of the Communist Parties in the days before Stalinism.

- A rule requiring all CC members, and all SWP full-timers, always to pretend unanimous agreement with CC decisions. No information to SWP members outside the CC about debates within the CC.

- No space for any articulated challenge to the CC line from the ordinary membership, outside a brief pre-conference period each year. No debate in the SWP’s press, beyond a very occasional dissenting article in its quarterly journal, or even in an internal bulletin or internet forum outside a few pre-conference weeks. SWP members can grumble in their branch meetings, but it is impossible, outside a period of acute crisis like the present, for any group of members to articulate SWP-wide an alternative or amendment to the CC policy. The SWP calls this a ban on “permanent factions” (factions are allowed only in the weeks before each annual conference); but in fact it establishes a regime of *one* permanent faction in the SWP, namely the CC and its corps of full-time organisers.

- A rule requiring SWP members in public always to pretend unanimous agreement with the CC line.

- Each new CC is elected by a for-or-against vote on a slate presented by the outgoing CC, thus making it almost impossible for the membership to correct or amend the CC.

Callinicos does not defend those rules honestly, but hints at a defence by upholding “two things” which “our version of democratic centralism comes down to”.

“Decisions must be debated fully, but once they have been taken, by majority vote, they are binding on all members... A strong political leadership, directly accountable to the annual conference, campaigns within the organisation to give a clear direction”.

BINDING

What does “binding” mean? Lenin proposed (as he put it in a 1906 article) “full freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action”. The minority is “bound” to unity in action, but should be free to explain publicly that they disagree.

AWL tells our members that when they disagree with the majority line, they should argue inside the AWL to change it. If they remain in the minority, then they should not pretend to hold opinions they don’t really have. They should explain publicly what the AWL majority policy is, and the arguments for it as best they can; but they should also explain their own views.

SWP, by contrast with AWL and with Lenin, means, by “binding on all members”, a rule that its members should, in public, pretend to be unanimous. In the long term this is corrupting: to train yourself to argue ideas you don’t really believe is to erode the revolutionary drive to know and explain the truth about class society which is the motor force of socialist effort.

Callinicos’s formulation blurs another, more specific, issue.

In the SWP today the CC is saying that the 4-6 January SWP conference vote to endorse the SWP Disputes Committee report closes that issue, and those who object are breaching democratic centralism.

A 50.4% vote to endorse, after a hurried debate, chaired by a member of the Disputes Committee whose report was up for debate, allowing only a scant few minutes for a critic to argue against endorsement, coming after two years of CC mishandling and the CC expelling vocal critics for no greater crime than a conversation on Facebook — that counts as “discussing fully” only in terms of administrative box-ticking. The discussion cannot be made “full” just by the CC declaring it such.

The pious clause about “directly accountable to annual conference” is as much whitewash as the one about all “decisions debated fully”. In any revolutionary socialist organisation, active every day on a dozen fronts, many decisions are taken by committees, by organisers, or by individual members in their workplaces or unions: the organisation is made democratic not by being in permanent conference session, but by full debate on the framing ideas which shape day-to-day reactions, and by constant feedback and discussion on the day-to-day.

The SWP is different not at all in debating more things “fully”, but in a greater number of decisions being taken by the CC and handed down as slogans, by means of browbeating rather than debate.

The CC is “accountable to annual conference” in the sense that the conference has the formal possibility of voting out the CC. But that can only happen if the conference confronts the CC and overturns it in a straight yes/ no vote. There is no possibility of the conference modifying the CC by piecemeal amendment.

Callinicos defines the alternative advocated by the SWP opposition as: “a much looser and weaker leadership, internal debate that continually reopens decisions already made, and permanent factions (currently factions are only allowed in the discussion period leading up to the annual party conference)”.

His presentation is dishonest. As we have seen, in fact the SWP does not really ban permanent factions: it only establishes a rule of *one* permanent faction, the CC and its corps of full-time organisers.

The SWP frequently reverses “decisions already made”, and usually without explanation or accounting. But... the right to revise decisions is reserved to the CC. The rule against “reopening” kicks in only when someone outside the CC questions a policy.

Political leaderships are not made “strong”, *politically*, by rules saying that they are strong. The background to the current SWP crisis is a decline in the real strength — that is, the political self-assuredness and authority — of the CC; the inevitable result of it, even if the CC manages to see off the opposition, is a further decline in that real strength.

As Lenin put it: “How is the discipline of the proletariat’s revolutionary party maintained? ... By the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard... By its ability to link up... with the broadest masses of the working people... By the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct... Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning... These conditions... are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience”.

SWP members’ “hard-won experiences” have eroded the political authority of the CC, not enhanced it.

Take the Respect fiasco and the “Left List” debacle which followed it. Take the example of the SWP’s slogan “all out, stay out” for 30 November 2011, suggesting that the one-day strike could be made to grow into an indefinite one. It appeared from time to time in speeches or in *Socialist Worker* articles, but was never agitated for or explained. Presumably there was disagreement in the CC about it. Instead of debate, SWP members were presented with a flickering sloganistic half-thought.

Take the succession of SWP “united fronts” — Organise for Fighting Unions, Right to Work, Unite the Resistance. Each has been a formula for the SWP to organise occasional conferences with a few trade-union leaders on the platform, and a few stunts. The SWP CC hails each as a great advance, then drops it without explanation and goes on to the next one.

SIZE

Callinicos’s backstop argument is that the current SWP model “works”, to build a big SWP and allow it to make itself central in bigger operations like Stop The War and Unite Against Fascism. “If they [the SWP opposition] succeeded, the SWP would become a much smaller and less effective organisation, unable to help build broader movements”.

On that level of argument, the biggest would-be revolutionary organisation in each country in the world could claim that life has confirmed its specific ideas: the Maoist PTB/PvdA in Belgium, for example. Or the organisation which got itself central in organising the big demonstrations against the Iraq war could: the Stalinistic Workers’ World Party in the USA, for example.

It proves nothing; and even on its own level Callinicos’s argument is increasingly hollow.

The SWP still claims 7,000 members. In the late 1990s it used to claim 10,000. Most of the nominal 7,000 do no activity with the SWP, and many have no contact with it at all.

The SWP opposition reports that the SWP has 93 branches. When the forerunners of AWL were expelled from IS (forerunner of the SWP) in 1971, it had 115.

The notional count of 7,000 would mean an average of 75 members per SWP branch. In fact, SWP branches today are generally smaller than they were in 1971, when 20 active members was quite usual. The SWP has declined.

Contrary to all Callinicos’s talk about strong leadership and discipline, the SWP does very badly at ensuring all its members are active and informed. Both CC loyalists and opposition complain about finding meetings suddenly full of “members” not seen for years, drummed up to support the other side.

It also does very badly at another important “centralist” bit of democratic centralism: collective control over its members in trade-union posts. In 2010 its most prominent trade-unionist, CWU president Jane Loftus, resigned after a string of episodes in which she had voted on the CWU Executive against SWP policy. Similar has happened in other unions.

The SWP’s version of “democratic centralism” lacks both the best bits of “centralism” and the special sort of democracy needed by revolutionary socialists.

In all this, what does Callinicos say about the issue which generated the SWP opposition, namely the botched handling of charges by women SWPers of rape or sexual harassment against leading SWP organiser Martin Smith?

SWPers, and not just SWPers, are angry that the CC tried to sweep the charges aside for two years; organised a standing ovation for Smith at the 2011 conference after they first emerged; and declared the “case closed” after an investigation by a Disputes Committee which included two members of that same CC and all of whose members knew Smith well.

Callinicos describes it all as... “a difficult disciplinary case”. Indiscipline, in a choir, is not turning up to rehearsals on time, or singing your part unsynchronised with the other singers. Sexually harassing, or raping, another choir member — that is a different matter.

Smith is innocent until proven guilty. The Disputes Committee may well have made a sincere effort. But if Callinicos sees the rape charge as just “a difficult disciplinary case”, that tells you why so many SWPers are angry.

• www.workersliberty.org/swp

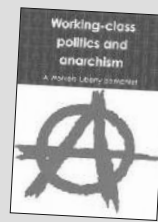
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Yorkshire teachers say: strike in March!

By Patrick Murphy, Leeds NUT and NUT Executive (pc)

A meeting of National Union of Teachers (NUT) reps and activists in Yorkshire has called on the union's Executive to reverse its decision not to strike in March against Michael Gove's plans to attack teachers' pay.

The Executive voted by a margin of 22-20 on 24 January not to name a strike date. The Executive decided instead to prioritise discussions with the NASUWT, another teaching union, with the aim of getting NASUWT on board for a strike in June.

The move will come as a surprise to some teachers,

especially following a large and militant "pay briefing" in London at which NUT reps and activists expressed overwhelming support for a strike as soon as possible (realistically in March).

London is, however, more militant and better organised than other NUT regions, and some Executive members may have been worried about the strength of an NUT-only strike, without NASUWT support, in other areas of the country.

There is a rational kernel to that worry, but recent experience shows that the best way for the NUT to bring NASUWT on board with its industrial actions is to take some. The NUT (and, surprisingly, the

more right-wing ATL) struck on 30 June 2011, without NASUWT support, but as the campaign continued NASUWT were brought on board and did participate in the 30 November strike. Striking will increase in the pressure on NASUWT members to act. Accommodating to their cautious approach will re-

duce the campaign against Gove's plans to a pace teachers cannot afford.

The pay reforms, which will effectively abolish national pay scales, are due for introduction in September. A strike in June, if it even takes place, will be far too late. The prospect of the NUT

striking alone in March may be daunting but the stakes are too high to wait. NUT members' confidence could also be bolstered if a March strike is announced explicitly as part of an ongoing campaign, including other protests and actions as well as further strikes, that NUT members can get involved in and take ownership of through regular workplace and regional meetings. The NUT's pay briefing meetings for reps and activists are continuing to take place. The only one to have occurred since the Executive took its decision, in Yorkshire, voted unanimously to call on the Executive to reverse its decision and name a March strike date at its next meetings.

This is a good start.

Pay meetings are due in Birmingham, Manchester, and Newcastle on 2 February, in Brighton on 9 February, and in Norwich on 13 February. Activists attending should demand that these meetings follow Yorkshire's lead. Lewisham, Greenwich, Hackney, and Southwark NUT have also called a lobby of the Executive's next meeting, on Wednesday 27 February.

For more information, see the website of the Local Associations National Action Campaign — www.nutlan.org.uk

Twelfth strike day in cleaners' fight

By Ira Berkovic

Cleaners on the Tyne and Wear Metro have struck for the twelfth time in their battle against poverty wages.

The strike took place on 24 January. Strikers lobbied a meeting of the Labour-led Integrated Transport Authority to demand that it forces the pri-

vate company which runs the Tyne and Wear Metro (and which contracts its cleaning work out to another private firm, Churchills) to pay living wages.

Workers currently earn just £6.19, and also used the strike day to set up a soup kitchen in Newcastle city centre to highlight the poverty conditions into which low pay is forcing

them.

Cleaners from across the transport industry will gather in Doncaster on 11 February for the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT)'s National Cleaners Forum.

The gathering will discuss ongoing coordination between cleaners' struggles in different sectors and regions.

PCS national strike ballot

By Clarke Benitez

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) will launch a nationwide strike ballot on Friday 8 February. The ballot will close on 4 March.

PCS members will be balloted for strikes over a range of issues, including job cuts and attacks on pay. A union statement said: "Because of massive job cuts civil and public servants are working harder than ever to provide the public services that we all rely on. But instead of rewarding them, the government is cutting their pay, raiding their pensions and trying to rip up their contracts by cutting terms and conditions.

"A plan announced in the autumn to review all civil service working conditions could lead to longer

working hours and fewer family-friendly policies. The four-year pay freeze and cap, and increased pension contributions, would cut pay by 16% on average by 2014."

STRATEGY

That PCS is balloting its members for strikes is positive, but its current strategy needs a radical overhaul if it is to beat the Tories.

Its insistence on balloting over a variety of issues at once may appear radical — "linking the struggles" — but in reality has the effect of reducing the strike to an expression of opposition to everything management is doing rather than an offensive action taken to win specific demands. PCS's recent record also suggests that any strike resulting from this ballot is likely to

be only one day — simply not long enough to have any serious impact on the employer. A one-day strike is not going to force the employer into a complete u-turn on all of its proposed cuts (which the union claims is its aim), especially when many of the attacks the strike is set to oppose have already taken place.

To force the employer to back down, sustained action and constant pressure are required.

Workers' Liberty members in Independent Left, a rank-and-file caucus within the union, are pushing for a strategy based on rolling, selective, and escalating action, funded by strike pay.

The union must use strategic and creative action to maintain constant pressure on the employer while mobilising groups of workers around spe-

Brighton Greens bloc with Tories to attack workers

By Darren Bedford

The Green Party leadership of Brighton and Hove Council has allied with the Tories to force through changes to council workers' allowances that will lead to massive pay cuts for many low-paid staff.

The changes, which will primarily affect refuse workers, care workers, security guards, and lower-paid school workers, involve a complete overhaul of the allowance system. Council workers' pay currently includes allowances for overtime and working outside of normal hours, which could be abolished under the new proposals.

Union representatives

say that up to £4,000 of the £17,000 basic salary of a refuse worker is made up of allowance payments, and accuse the council of using the rationalisation of the allowance scheme to cut pay.

ACTION

Union and GMB members took direct action at a meeting of the council's Policy and Resources Committee on Thursday 24 January.

The committee was considering proposals to grant the council's Chief Executive and Finance Director the power to impose the cuts unilaterally if talks with the unions fail. This could lead to mass redundancies and reengagement on worse terms, a tactic public sector employers

have used before to short-cut around negotiations with unions. Although Labour councillors opposed the measures, the Greens pushed them through with Tory support.

Council unions are considering strikes in response to the cuts threat. The changes would affect up to 6,000 of the council's 8,000 staff.

Councils ban construction blacklists: bit.ly/WcS91v

Mid Yorks health workers begin strike

Health workers at Mid Yorkshire NHS Trust began a five-day strike against pay cuts and job losses on Monday 28 January. 120 workers picketed hospitals.

Trust bosses are seeking to make £24 million cuts, and their proposed changes could cost some workers £2,800.

Since the workers' last strike, in November 2012, 300 staff have been issued with dismissal and reengagement notices.

Management has already begun to budge, with an offer to extend the period workers could remain on their current salary from a year to 18 months. But the workers want to beat back the cuts altogether.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

25,000 march in Lewisham

**By Jill Mountford,
Save Lewisham
Hospital campaign
organising committee
(personal capacity)**

With as many as 25,000 people marching, the Saturday 26 January demonstration in Lewisham was the biggest local demonstration in defence of the NHS and against hospital closures in British history.

As Trusts across the country face massive unaffordable loan repayments through PFI agreements, Lewisham Hospital and the South London Health Trust (SLHT) has become a test case for the government. Each year, SLHT (of which Lewisham Hospital is not a part) pays out £69 million in PFI repayments and slips a further £65 million into debt. Matthew Kershaw, The Trust Special Administrator, recommends Lewisham Hospital close its A & E and Maternity Unit and sell off 60% of its land to help resolve SLHT's financial crisis.

The far more simple and just solution would be to cancel all PFI debts. Take all hospitals and health trusts saddled with these outrageously unjust debts out of hock to the rich.

25,000 people marching in Lewisham is a signal to the government that this kind of opposition could be

mobilised across the country to save the NHS. It's a signal that NHS could well be the issue that turns the tide, that breaks the resignation and passivity, that builds the confidence of workers everywhere to say stop the cuts, stop the closures, stop the job losses. Make the rich pay!

But 25,000 people have not gathered and marched spontaneously.

To mobilise them, 130,000 leaflets were produced and distributed in an organised way mainly across the borough, but also in neighbouring boroughs and beyond around other parts of London.

Saturday's magnificent march was built through other actions the campaign has organised — the march back in November 2012 with more than 10,000 people; the vigil outside the hospital on the coldest night of the year with 300 people protesting; the 300 strong protest outside Goldsmiths College earlier in January when the BBC filmed Question Time; the double decker bus that travelled around neighbouring boroughs of the South London Health Trust mobilising support and showing solidarity; the flash mob of mums and children born in Lewisham Hospital protesting outside the Ministry of Health; all of this, and other actions too, are what built the

25,000 strong demonstration last week. We have to continue to do this if we are to fight and win.

Jeremy Hunt will announce his decision either on Thursday 31 January or Tuesday 5 February. The campaign is calling for people to converge on Lewisham Hospital at 6pm on the day of the announcement. We want as many people as possible outside the hospital regardless of what Hunt decides.

RUMOUR

The rumour is Hunt will put off making the decision in favour of a London-wide NHS consultation that will recommend reconfiguring services across the capital.

If the Kershaw's "consultation report" cost £5–6 million, a London-wide consultation is set to cost the taxpayer tens of millions of pounds and will no doubt come up with a longer list of hospitals that should close and services that should be cut.

The mood in the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign is one for continuing the fight regardless of whether Hunt gives us some kind of reprieve or not.

So far the Lewisham campaign is very much community-based. Where it is weak is amongst the hospital workers them-

selves. However, last week there was a significant step forward when more than 40 hospital workers attended a meeting and discussed, amongst other things, the positions of the hospital workers' unions and building the campaign within the hospital.

The next stage of the fight to save the hospital will need to involve hospital workers in much greater numbers. Industrial action of some kind will be essential. Winning the arguments for a work-in — i.e. running the hospital in the interests of the patients, community, and staff — is not only a real possibility but a necessity if we are to turn the tide and push back the government's agenda for the NHS.

The national trade unions and the TUC should take confidence from the 25,000 strong local demonstration in Lewisham. They should call, and throw their might behind building, a national demonstration in defence of the NHS and for the cancellation of all PFI debts.

This, as part of a national campaign of action, could be the spark that starts a fire to win back what we've had robbed from us and more besides, and to make the rich pay to save our health service as we have paid to bail out the banks so far.

Manchester councillors' anti-cuts pledge

By Karen Broady

Manchester Labour councillors Julie Reid and Aftab Ahmed have said they will vote against the City Council's cuts budget. Other councillors may also vote against, and some will abstain.

The spending cuts in Manchester mean not only a further 900 council jobs to go — 2,000 had been cut last year — but also the closure of five swimming pools, six libraries, and a Council Tax rise of 3.7%.

Our city had already been hit with a £170m government funding cut. we now face a further £80m of government funding cuts for 2013. Top all this off with the changes to the benefits system, Bedroom Taxes, housing benefit being cut for under 35 year olds and a massive shortage of public housing; Manchester has taken a severe kicking!

The people of Manchester, like other towns and cities across the North West, are struggling to come to terms with the harsh reality these cuts mean. People can no longer turn to DWP for help as Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans have been abolished. Only extreme cases will get occasional Hardship Allowances.

People will struggle to get any financial help, with the only place to turn being one of the ever many food banks opening

up. Manchester's council Leader Richard Leese warned Mancunians that the people of Manchester are about to get poorer and that the council will no longer be able to protect us, yet he continues to defend implementing the cuts with no resistance, just a "make do and mend" attitude.

During one of his sessions on Twitter, when asked if Manchester councillors would fight back against the Tory cuts and not vote through the budget cuts he replied "you want us to piss in the wind?"

Manchester has though begun to see signs of resistance. Within the Labour Party, members and councillors are making contact and discussing how to organise ourselves to put pressure on the Labour Leaders to fight these destructive policies.

Local anti-cuts campaigns have popped up all over the city. We want our council leaders to head a fight back. We want them to head a campaign that sends out a message to the Tories that is loud and clear, we are angry, we are fighting back, are not pissing in the wind!

Councillors of Manchester stand by us, let the Tories do their own dirty work, and we will stand by you!



Rally to defend Bob Carnegie

Supporters of victimised Australian trade unionist Bob Carnegie will rally outside the Federal Magistrates Court in Brisbane on Monday 11 February, as the first of the cases against Bob begins.

Bob appears accused on 54 criminal charges relating to his role in the nine-week-long community protest at the Queensland Children's Hospital in August-October 2012. For

more information on the rally, see on.fb.me/14qgQtg

The campaign is asking supporters to email messages of support to be read out at the rally to defendbobcarnegie@gmail.com.

Labour movement support for Bob continues to grow, with Maritime Union of Australia members at the Patrick container terminal in Sydney's Port Botany passing a resolution backing the campaign, and agreeing a \$20-per-member levy to raise funds.

Visit the campaign website at bobcarnegie.wordpress.com