

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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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:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

The editor (Cathy Nugent), 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

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Sectarian impasse in Northern Ireland "flags" crisis

By William O'Leary

Although the Belfast protests, and clashes with the police over limitations on the flying of the Union Flag have continued into the new year, they reveal an undercurrent of desperation amongst sections of Northern Ireland's loyalist community.

The flag protests, which began in early December with a decision by nationalists and the liberal Alliance Party on Belfast City Council to end the flying of the flag on every day of the year, have already been extremely disruptive.

Yet, for all this, the protests, numbering just a few thousand, have involved relatively few people. They are a far cry from past instances of loyalist discontent in the 1970s and 1980s, which saw rallies of hundreds of thousands protest the prorogation of the Stormont parliament and the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Jackie McDonald of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), detecting a shift in the way the wind is blowing, has changed his line, and is now telling the protestors to halt the disruption because they will be unable to win their demand for the reinstatement of the flag all year round.

McDonald's comments echo the continuing disintegration of the loyalist paramilitaries. He suffered a very public put-down from the West Belfast, Londonderry and north Antrim "brigades" over the summer for comments perceived to be critical of loyalists' conduct during the marching season. He will be concerned about his position, as dissident units of the UDA are continuing to operate independently of the leadership.

It is in this context that other tendencies are seeking to move in. One such group involved in the protests, "United Protestant Voice" (UPV), is organised largely via Facebook and an online forum, and expresses hostility to the existing political parties.

On its "Executive Committee" is Johnny Harvey, a former RAF sergeant from east Belfast. Two other

members of the committee, Alison Smallwood and Mark Barnes, have expressed fascist sympathies online.

Whether UPV this is part of a wider fascist attempt to gain a foothold is unclear. What is known is that Paul Golding, the former BNP councillor who split from Nick Griffin to found "Britain First", arrived in Belfast in mid-December to take part in the protests. He was joined by Britain First's Northern Ireland representative, Jim Dowson, who previously fund-raised in Belfast for the BNP.

POVERTY

Meanwhile, a recent report has highlighted levels of enduring poverty, unemployment and social exclusion in Northern Ireland.

There is no "mechanical" connection between immiseration and the recent unrest and the primary trigger remains a political one. Yet, continuing high levels of unemployment and poverty have seen sections of the population alienated from the political system, and undoubtedly sharpen loyalists' self-perception as "losers" in the "peace process".

Some of this is warranted; some is not. It is true that Northern Ireland as a whole has had consistently higher levels of people not in paid work than the rest of the United Kingdom. Moreover, as of January 2012, 5.4% of the working-age population in NI was claiming Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA), compared with 4% on average. This is a long-lasting trend: in 1996 the level was 8.4% as compared to 6.2%, and in 2000 the figures were 4.2% and 3.3% respectively.

Northern Ireland also has a high level of households without work (21%), households with only one

adult working (31%) and a growth of part-time work as a proportion of the total number of jobs. This is one of the factors behind high levels of in-work poverty and child poverty.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that Catholics are more likely to be in poverty than Protestants. The poverty rate for Protestants is 19%, compared to 26% for Catholics. In the three years up to 2000, 28% of working-age Protestants were not in paid work compared to 35%.

The perception held by loyalists of Protestants being left behind by Catholics is wrong.

Yet this is beside the point. Absolute levels of poverty and unemployment in Northern Ireland are high amongst both communities.

GAP

In Belfast, where much of the unrest has taken place, the employment gap between Catholics and Protestants is only 3% (37% to 34%).

The salient fact here is not the slightly lower levels for Protestants but that over a third of the Belfast working-age population, regardless of religious identity, is not in paid work.

To explain the protests, one must understand that working-class Protestants are clinging to the one thing that, in their minds, does separate them from their fellow Catholics workers: that is, the vestigial privilege of their Protes-

tant British national identity. And as James Connolly wrote, when the "working class is obsessed with visions of glory, patriotism, war, loyalty or political or religious bigotry, it can find no room in its mind for considerations of its own interests as a class."

The idea of uniformly impoverished Catholic community, too, must be jettisoned. The overall differentiation within the Catholic community is wider than that between the communities. Part of the lower average work rates for Catholics is down to the geographical discrepancy between the west and east of Northern Ireland. Some of this can be explained by sectarianism, such as the historic concentration of civil service employment in Greater Belfast by the old Stormont regime, with only limited attempts at de-centralisation thereafter. Other factors, such as distance to major ports and other transport hubs, cannot.

What is clear, however, is that, when geography, age, disability and other factors are taken into considerations, the remaining gap in work rates between Catholics and Protestants which cannot be explained — that is down to religion itself — is falling.

Yet the power-sharing institutions and the main sectarian political parties are incapable of tackling any of the deep-rooted social problems afflicting working-class people in Northern Ireland.

Rail fares rise again

By Darren Bedford

Rail fares have risen at above-inflation rates for the tenth consecutive year — nearly three times faster than average wages since 2008.

Research shows that rail transport costs workers up to 8% of their entire annual salary.

Commuters in London and south east England face some of the sharpest increases. Campaign for Better Transport figures show the average season ticket cost has increased by £1,300 since 2003.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "At a time when real wages are falling and household budgets are being squeezed, rail travellers are being forced to endure yet another year of inflation-busting fare increases. "As well as having to shell out record amounts of money for their tickets, passengers also face the prospect of travelling on trains with fewer staff and having less access to ticket offices.

"They are being asked to pay much more for less."

Gove moves against teaching unions

**By Patrick Murphy,
National Union of
Teachers Executive
(pc)**

In December, the government announced proposals for changing teachers' pay arrangements.

The plan is to tear up national pay scales and move to a system of individualised pay. The current system includes national pay scales, though no right to collectively bargain on pay rates or conditions. The national rates must apply to all state schools, except academies and free schools which can adopt their own models.

This latest attack is partially a response to the fact that the vast majority of academies have agreed to follow the national system and showed no appetite for developing their own

scales.

The overall thrust of the changes is to give immensely more power to individual heads to discriminate between staff.

Whereas new teachers can currently expect to move up a six-point pay scale automatically each year, under the new system this pay progression will be at the whim of the head.

Currently, teachers who move to jobs in other schools have an entitlement to the pay scale point they have reached during their years in the job. In future this entitlement will be abolished and we will be

bargaining against fellow workers in a race to the bottom. More experienced teachers who are on the upper pay scale will be expected to take on extra responsibilities and will only get pay increases "at the school's discretion, reflecting individuals' differential contributions to the school".

The immediate effect would be a huge increase in bullying, victimisation, and management control.

The longer-term effect would be to undermine the very high level of trade union organisation amongst teachers. Ensuring

that there is a basic entitlement to specific pay for the job and minimum conditions for all is a core purpose of a trade union. If teaching unions, with over 90% membership density, cannot defend this entitlement then it won't be clear to members what their purpose is.

PICKED

This ought to be a very bad time for the Coalition to have picked this fight.

The two largest unions (NUT and NASUWT) have live ballots for strike action on pay. The dispute letter sent by the NUT to Michael Gove last year seeks an end to the pay freeze and a commitment to national pay arrangements.

Both unions, representing around 90% of teachers between them, can call national strike action with seven days' notice. The fact that Gove has launched

such a provocative attack on pay against the background of that dispute demonstrates his confidence that the two unions have no appetite for a fight. Unfortunately he appears to be right.

There may well be some industrial action in response to Gove's plans this term but, on present indicators, it is likely to be fairly desultory protest action and even that is far from guaranteed.

However, there are things that school reps and activists can do to turn this situation round.

Throughout January the NUT will be holding meetings and rallies for reps which explain the pay threat and consult members on the level of support for a collective response.

As we go to press not all of the dates are known, but the London and Merseyside rallies are on 19 Janu-

ary, and the Yorkshire rally looks set for 26 January.

The rank-and-file network LANAC will be mobilising for these meetings and arming reps with the arguments for urgent and effective action to defend national pay.

We need a plan of discontinuous rolling action combined with public campaigning which links the attack on pay and teacher unionism with the wider drive to privatise and break up state education.

Every school rep and active NUT member should find out where and when their pay meeting is to take place and ensure that the message to the union leadership is clear: we must defend national pay and we need an urgent plan of rolling strike action to do so.

American endgames in Afghanistan

By Rhodri Evans

Ahmed Rashid, the best-known writer on Afghanistan, thinks a full Taliban takeover of the country "unlikely" after the US and its allies withdraw most of their forces at the end of 2014.

The government can retreat to defending Kabul. Its army is surely more fragile than its large numbers would suggest (200,000), but not zero. Kabul's population has increased from 0.5 million in 2001 to 4.5 million now (out of the country's total population of 30 million).

A large proportion of the increase is refugees returning after the Taliban fell in 2001, so most of the city's population would support resistance to the Taliban.

The Taliban never conquered the northern parts of the country even before 2001, and now the northern warlords who fended off the Taliban then are better-armed and richer.

Many bad things can happen, however, without the Taliban overrunning the whole country, and are likely to. The case for supporting US and NATO military withdrawal — and quicker, and complete — is

that the foreign military do more harm than good, not that some national liberation will follow withdrawal.

On 19 December David Cameron announced that Britain will reduce its troop numbers from 9000 to 5200 over 2013. The US has 68,000 troops there, more than in 2008 before Obama took office, but 23,000 fewer than a year ago.

On 29 November the US Senate voted for an "end to all regular combat operations by US troops not later than 31 December 2014". The US government is expected to produce a detailed plan later this month. Its current talk is of having about 9000 troops in Afghanistan after 2014.

The NATO force in Afghanistan includes soldiers from 50 countries. Most contingents are small. The big contingents are the USA's, the UK's, Germany's (4,300, but stationed in the mostly Taliban-free north of the country), Italy's (4,000, but stationed in the west, where the Taliban are weaker), Australia's, and Romania's.

The Pakistani authorities have recently released several Taliban prisoners and declared themselves keen

to help arrange talks between the US and the Taliban, which the US has been seeking for some time.

The Taliban, however, responded (2 January) to news about withdrawal plans by declaring that Afghanistan repeats Vietnam in 1973, when the US withdrew claiming victory and then the Stalinists swept the country two years later.

SLOW-MOVING Afghanistan, previously a slow-moving, poor, and fragmented society, had a coup by the local Stalinist party, PDPA, in April 1978.

The countryside quickly rose in Islamist-led rebellion. In December 1979 the USSR invaded to try to quell the rebellion and ensure a pro-USSR regime.

Eventually conceding defeat, the USSR withdrew between May 1988 and February 1989. The Stalinists in Kabul held on surprisingly long, until April 1992.

In 1996, the Taliban pushed out from a base in religious schools in Pakistan's border regions, and conquered much of

Afghanistan and Kabul (September 1996). After Al Qaeda, whose bases the Taliban sheltered, bombed the World Trade Centre in New York on 9 September 2001, the USA bombed Afghanistan (from 7 October 2001) and helped an alliance of the northern warlords to take Kabul (9 December 2001) and drive the Taliban out of Afghanistan's cities.

At that point the Taliban

seemed finished. The alienation of large parts of Afghanistan's population from the corrupt new government in Kabul and the heavy US military presence, and the Taliban's intact base in Pakistan, allowed the Taliban to revive. In politico-military terms the Taliban have continued to gain ground, or at least not lost ground, even during the USA's "troop surge" since 2009.

The US intervention has created a lop-sided economy. The US spends about \$7 billion a month — over \$80 billion a year — on its Afghan intervention, while Afghanistan's total economic output is only \$29 billion.

Fortunes are made from the gravy spills of US intervention, while 80% of the population of Kabul lives in "informal" (shanty-town) housing.

Close the detention centres!

Immigrants facing deportation staged protests in late December at the Morton Hall detention centre in Lincolnshire. Some detention centre staff were injured.

Morton Hall is used to detain "illegal" migrants before they are deported. Around 50 were involved in a protest about conditions in the centre on Christmas Day, while 40 were involved in a further incident on 30 December. Initial reports, including from the Prison Officers Association (POA), which represents detention centre staff, spoke of a "riot",

but an independent inquiry has since suggested that the POA's version of events was exaggerated.

The centre holds nearly 400 immigrants awaiting deportation, and in September 2011 saw Afghan asylum seekers go on hunger strike in protest at their deportation back to Afghanistan.

The POA responded by flagging up the dangers to prison staff posed by funding and staffing cuts. They said: "We feel one of our people is going to get killed as staffing levels have been reduced. We will get a member of staff murdered on duty."

Although violence is regrettable, the blame lies with the immigration system which dehumanises and brutalises individuals and subjects them to detention and deportation back to countries which are often unsafe.

If the POA wants to avoid further incidents of this type, it should argue for the closure of immigration detention centres, the retraining of its members who currently work there into other, useful, jobs, and an immigration system based on freedom of movement and open borders.

End the “war on drugs”

By Todd Hamer

A slow revolution is taking place in the realm of drugs legalisation.

In November 2012 Colorado and Washington states decriminalised cannabis for recreational use in popular referenda. 2012 also saw the first ever clinical trials of ecstasy backed by the British government and broadcast on national television. An increasing number of high profile bourgeois politicians have called for an end to the illnamed War on Drugs.

There are many good reasons for the bourgeoisie to want to legalise drugs. In 2003 the UN estimated that the international black market in drugs was worth £321.6 billion US dollars. Legalising this market would yield substantial tax revenues and save billions in drug enforcement activity.

The US alone spent \$30 billion on drug enforcement activity in 2006. Add to this the economic cost of incarcerating 400,000 prisoners for drug offences and the figures are enormous. An American economist has estimated that legalising marijuana alone could save \$7.7 billion per year in government expenditure on enforcement of prohibition. On top of this the US

treasury could yield \$2.4 billion annually if marijuana were taxed like all other goods and \$6.2 billion annually if marijuana were taxed at rates comparable to those on alcohol and tobacco. (prohibition-costs.org/executive-summary).

There is clearly a lot of money to be made from drug legalisation and it is no surprise that opportunist fat cats like Richard Branson are lobbying for change. However, drug prohibition is a tool of oppression and socialists should support moves to greater liberalisation.

OUTLAWING The outlawing of possession, supply and consumption of certain plants, fungi and chemicals dates back to religious authorities in medieval times.

However, the global ban on cannabis, cocaine, opiates and psychoactive chemicals is a peculiar feature of 20th century capitalism. Most of the modern drug laws that span the globe were introduced in America and imposed on other states as conditions for doing trade with the world's superpower. In the US as elsewhere, drug prohibition came about as a result of three social forces: organised religion, oppres-

sion of certain social groups and the public health lobby.

The most ancient lobby for drug prohibition, organised religion, formed a popular movement for drug prohibition in the temperance movement. The Protestant work ethic combined with a reactionary horror at the drunkenness of the modern proletariat and the popular movement for abstinence formed in Europe and America in the early 19th century. In the aftermath of the First World War they managed to impose their abstinence through force of state power in America, Canada and Finland. But popular support for alcohol soon overwhelmed them, the laws were overturned and the temperance movement turned its attention to other drugs.

The other drugs were an easier target because they were the drugs of choice of marginalised sections of society. Drug laws often target oppressed groups in society and are a mechanism of social control. In England in the 19th century, there was a period when gin was criminalized and whiskey wasn't, because gin was the drink of the poor. Similarly the US, maintains a difference in sentencing for possession of crack and powder versions of cocaine, as crack cocaine is cheaper and used by poor people.

The first drugs laws in the US were imposed against racial minorities. In 1875 the state of California banned the smoking of opium specifically to curb the number of young Chinese-run opium dens. Injesting

opium in other ways was not criminalised and white American doctors maintained hundreds of thousands of opium eaters for several decades after this law passed.

The Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 had a similar purpose to oppress the Mexican and Latin American immigrants for whom marijuana was a drug of choice. Many veterans of the Civil Rights movement argue that Nixon's announcement of the “War on Drugs” in 1973 was designed to crack down on the energy of the Civil Rights movement by imprisoning black youth.

AFRO-AMERICAN Although Afro-American people represent 13% of the US population and consume similar amounts of drugs as other communities, they constitute 74% of the US prison population for drug offences.

The third and final reason for drug prohibition is on health grounds. It is not clear why people take drugs and clearly not all drug use is pleasurable and harmless. Drugs undoubtedly play a major part in creating and sustaining severe and chronic mental and physical health problems among a small minority of users. However, the evidence that

there is something inherent in drugs that does this has been contested.

In the late 1970s a Canadian psychologist, Bruce Alexander, devised an experiment called Rat Park where he took opiate-addicted lab rats out of their cages and placed them in a colourful, stimulating environment where they were free to socialise with other rats. He gave the addict rats a choice of sweetened morphine water (rats have a naturally sweet tooth) or normal water.

After several weeks in Rat Park all the rat addicts were drinking the normal water and had beaten their addictions. While we cannot make a simplistic extrapolation from rats to humans, Alexander's experiment seems to suggest that there is a large social component to drug dependence.

If we lived in the human equivalent of Rat Park (i.e. socialism) it is likely that we would still use recreational drugs for a whole range of different reasons. However, it is unlikely that the problems associated with drug addiction would still feature to such an extent.

The continued “War on Drugs” is an anachronism. We should support all efforts for greater liberalisation.

Heads we win, tails you lose in Italy's elections

By Hugh Edwards

The prospect of elections in February have dramatically opened up and sharpened the contradictions inherent in Monti's technocratic regime.

Support for its draconian cuts and repressive reforms by the two major parties had seen their fortunes decline significantly. Berlusconi's PDL nearly disintegrated.

There was a wave of abstentionist contempt for the political class in general. The Five Star Movement, a radical anti-Monti, anti-party, anti-austerity populist force achieved significant breakthroughs in some northern cities and in Sicily.

By December the Five Star Movement was polling around 17%, which, if replicated in February, could mean 100-or-so seats and pose profound difficulties for the new government. The threat to stability has also come from the resurgence of Berlusconi. His revival and decision to once more run for office sprang, ironically, from an astonishing resurgence of the Democratic Party.

Its primary elections in November for party leader attracted nearly three million voters in the first round, with Pierluigi Bersani victorious in the second round run-off against Matteo Renzi, the Blairite Mayor of Florence, who finished with 40% of the vote. Berlusconi saw his

chance, identifying Bersani — one of the many relics of the former Stalinist nomenclatura that still defines Democratic Party's internal life and action — as proof of the ever-present “communist” threat.

POISONOUS In the febrile, increasingly poisonous, atmosphere of desperation and illusions of a pre-election period, Berlusconi cannot be discounted.

It is mainly against this possibility that Monti decided to mount a challenge. Monti's “programme” is a cautious, vague reiteration of his determination to continue with the “painful but necessary reforms to modernise and guaranteed long

term prosperity for all”, a prospect he indicated was just around the corner. Apart from the standard pieties of ensuring the protection of the weak, everyone playing their part etc., he laughably declared that notions of “left” and “right” were obsolete.

A victory for the centre-left is about the best the ruling classes can hope for, side by side with a strong showing by Monti's outfit, especially in the Senate where the play of regional weightings dominate the outcome. Despite its bovine loyalty to Monti from the very beginning, and its leaders' proven willingness in the past to ditch all and every promise to its electorate once in office, the centre-left faces problems.

The anger of millions against the scale and depth of what has been inflicted on every working family — in income terms alone, a €2,000 loss! — has so far proved impotent against the calculated and studied cynicism of all the main trade union leaders, including those of FIOM, the radical metalworkers' outfit of CGIL.

BUREAUCRATS The bureaucrats have largely been able to ensure the social peace fundamental to the fortunes of the reformist electoral perspectives of the Democratic Party leaders.

This peace is the vital ingredient of the reformist

leaders' current appeal and relevance to bourgeois rule. Of the three million who voted in the first round of the Democratic primary, 35% were for Renzi, a right-wing “moderniser”. That 10% more voted for the man who has been instrumental in the present débâcle, now offering them vague pieties and empty platitudes framed within a rock-hard commitment to the fundamentals of the “fiscal compact”, describes a grim picture indeed.

It may be evidence that considerable sections of the masses have accepted defeat. February's result and what follows will give the verdict.

• A longer version of this article is online.

Deadlock in Syria?

By Gerry Bates

On 2 January the United Nations reported that the war between the Assad dictatorship and opposition groups in Syria has cost a minimum of 60,000 lives since March 2011.

It is getting worse. Over the last five months, deaths have been running at over 5,000 a month.

Bashar al-Assad, whose family has ruled the country with an iron hand since 1970, responded with a speech on 6 January dismissing all opposition as “enemies” of Syria and “criminals”.

“The conflict is one between the homeland and its enemies, between the people and killers... Western powers [have taken] an opportunity to transfer as many terrorists as possible to Syria...”

“They are the enemies of the people; and the enemies of the people are the enemies of God; and the enemies of God will be burnt by hellfire on the day of judgment...”

In case God is slow off the mark, Assad’s bombers are doing the job now. A current tactic of the regime is to cede territory to the opposition, withdraw its troops from the area, and then bomb the area to make it unliveable.

23 million people used to live in the country. Two million are now internally displaced. About 400,000 have fled the country, mostly to Jordan or Turkey.

The UN estimates that a million people inside the country depend on UN food supplies. Unemployment and inflation have soared. Basic goods are scarce. When a petrol station was bombed early in January, seventy people died — because at every petrol station there is an enormous queue for fuel.

The regime: has lost almost all of its army and air force bases in the north-west of the country. The regime has deliberately withdraw from the Kurdish-populated north-east of Syria, and ceded it to Kurdish militias. Much of the sparsely-populated east of the country has been taken over by Islamist militias.

The regime has mostly

fallen back on the big cities, and even there it is bombing the suburbs.

The state, a heavily militarised one since the Ba’th party first took power in 1963, is evolving towards being just the best armed of the militias in a country dominated by a patchwork of warlords and militias.

The Ba’thists have some strength. They are getting support from Iran and from Russia. Syria’s Alawite [dissident Shia Muslim] minority (about 10%) has rallied to the regime for fear of reprisals from the mostly Sunni Muslim opposition groups. The regime is now arming Christian and Druze militias in Damascus. It seems that many of Syria’s Christians (10% of the population) and Druze (3%) are also rallying to the regime.

OPPOSITION

Things have been going badly on the opposition side too, and it is no longer possible, even with all qualifications and reservations, for socialists to rally to the side of the opposition, and look to an opposition victory as the way out.

The rebellion began in March 2011 with street demonstrations mostly expressing a non-sectarian, secular, and democratic impulse.

But initiative and power in the anti-Assad movement has increasingly passed into the hands of Sunni-Islamist militias funded by Saudi Arabia or Qatar, or led by jihadists from outside the country who have entered Syria to join the conflict.

There are more and more reports, and credible ones, of sectarian violence by the opposition militias, or of them fighting between themselves, not over political principles but over the economic spoils of war.

The opposition’s political front outside Syria used to be the Syrian National Council, effectively a vehicle for the Muslim Brotherhood, which, however, appears still to be relatively weak inside the country relative to the Salafists and the Al Qaeda types. A new external front has now been set up, with the Brotherhood the main force

within it but including more other groups, and it has been recognised by France and other states. But it has little grip on the militias inside the country.

The opposition militias are hostile to the Kurds, whether from Arab nationalism or from Islamist dislike for the relatively secular Kurds.

Syria is moving towards a plight like that of Iraq in 2006-7, with effective power in the hands of a patchwork of competing and sometimes hotly sectarian militias, only without the element of semi-stability and “holding the ring” provided by the US military in Iraq.

Despite agitation on the left about the prospects of a US or NATO armed intervention in Syria, nothing substantial of that sort is likely. On the contrary, the US has so far worked hard to try to stop Turkey, for example, intervening, and to restrict the flow of weapons paid for by Saudi or Qatari money to the Islamist militias inside Syria.

INTERVENE

The US’s stated position is that it will only intervene if Assad uses chemical weapons against his own people.

Actually, that formula is a cover for what the US is really worried about: Islamist militias getting chemical weapons. In that event, the US might bomb, but it is very unlikely to invade.

As the Turkish socialist group Marksist Tutum put it in an article we published in *Solidarity* 259 (3 October 2012), sober assessment of the degeneration of the opposition “surely does not at all mean that the present Ba’th regime is the lesser evil or that it must be supported. Nor is it a call for sympathy for it.

“We know that there is such a mood on a rather wide section of the left, al-

though it is not overtly stated. One should not fall into this trap. The correct attitude is to defend an independent line of struggle against both the reactionary Ba’th regime and other reactionary bourgeois forces that may replace it”.

Socially, there is the basis for such a third camp. Although Syria has a very large layer of artisans, independent handicraft workers, small proprietors, traders, shopkeepers, officials, and so on, it also has an industrial working class. And when the mass of opposition opinion was able to express itself, in the early demonstrations, it was mainly secular, non-sectarian, and democratic.

There may be small groups within the opposition of a democratic and working-class character. They are the people with the key to the future. But Syria’s working class has been atomised and suppressed by the Ba’thist dictatorship for generations. If those democratic and working-class groups exist, we don’t know about them.

A deal in which a section of the Ba’thist apparatus gets rid of Assad and bargains with a section of the opposition, with Turkey as broker and guarantor, is unlikely in any near future. If it should happen, socialists could give no political endorsement or credit-in-advance to such a deal. It would install, at best, a softened dictatorship; and the deal might well have a side-clause for collaboration between the Syrian forces and Turkey in an assault on the Kurds.

At the same time, it would be wrong to denounce such a deal, or call for action to disrupt it, in a way that indicated that outright victory for some alliance of the currently-powerful opposition militias would be preferable.

Even a repressive bourgeois peace would be less inimical for the development of a democratic and working-class third camp in Syria than continued civil war or a sectarian Islamist militia victory.

• The Kurds in Syria’s civil war — see page 12

More support for Bob Carnegie

Dave Quayle, the chair of the Political Committee of Unite, and Tony Woodhouse, the Unite Executive chair, have backed the campaign to defend Bob Carnegie, the Australian trade unionist facing legal charges for his role in a community protest in Brisbane.

The Wirral 9515 branch of Unite also passed a motion of support, and sent a very generous donation of £500 to the UK arm of the campaign. The Leeds branch of the Labour Representation Committee, which pledged its support in November 2012, has also sent a donation. This money was spent on producing a new leaflet explaining Bob’s case, copies of which can be ordered by emailing Daniel Randall at therubykid1@gmail.com.

• Campaign materials have also been translated into Spanish and French, and are available online at bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com/espanol



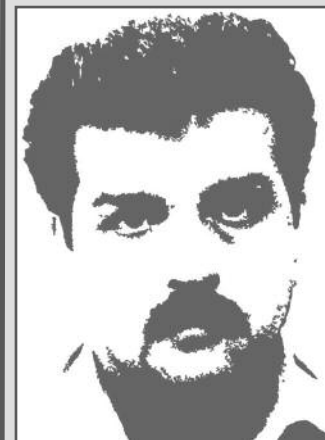
A student protest from June 2012. Turkish socialists saw police repression is common.

Turkish police attack students

Turkish police brutally repressed a demonstration of students at METU University in Ankara on 18 December.

The students were protesting a visit by Prime Minister Erdogan when police attacked them using tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets. Turkish revolutionary socialist group Marksist Tutum (Marxist Attitude) commented: “The heavy police repression of protests, particularly student protests, is an ordinary thing in Turkey. The events in METU, Ankara, are just the last example of it. The AKP [Erdogan’s party] is becoming authoritarian and increasingly intolerant against any political opposition. They do not want any dissenting voice marring their image.”

• For more on the METU protests, see <http://bit.ly/Uq1UZA>



Reza Shahabi released

Iranian trade unionist Reza Shahabi was released on bail from the notorious Evin prison on 7 January.

He had been on hunger strike in protest at his treatment by prison guards and lack of medical attention for his deteriorating health. Reza is a bus worker and Treasurer of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs

Bus Company.
• For more, see the website of the International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran website: workers-iran.org

Organising in 2013

AWL



January and February will be busy months for Workers' Liberty. As well as taking part in many broader movement events and activities, we have a number of important dates of our own coming up.

On the weekend of 12-13 January three of our trade union groups or "fractions" are holding meetings to discuss their plans: school workers (teachers and support staff) in Nottingham and PCS members (civil servants and others) in London on the Saturday, and health workers in London on the Sunday. On both days, a number of student members and supporters will be participating in the first meeting of newly elected National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts national committee, at Newcastle University.

On Saturday 19 January, we are holding an introductory event for new members and people interested in joining.

Before Christmas, Workers' Liberty members in London worked with others to run a weekly Marxist reading group, discussing a series of "classical Marxist" texts. Now we are starting a new reading group, looking at Marx's *Capital*. The course starts on the evening of Monday 21 January, in London, and will again run weekly. We are also running a study course on "Marxism and trade unions", and a reading group discussing Trotsky's writings.

On 15 December, London Workers' Liberty held a dayschool on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci. On Saturday 26 January, northern AWL members will be holding a similar dayschool at Friends Meeting House in Manchester.

The same day, London AWL members will be taking part in the second mass demonstration against the closure of Lewisham A&E in South London.

On Saturday 2 February we are holding a dayschool in London, "Educating the educators", to discuss how socialists can educate themselves and each other, and train our members and those close us in how to do this.

On Sunday 10 February, in Sheffield, our LGBT fraction is holding its first meeting since our conference in October. Both political discussion and plans for activity are on the agenda.

On Saturday 16 February, we are holding a national conference, "Their Europe and ours", on the European crisis and European workers' fightback, with speakers from across Europe, including Greece. The event will take place in University of London Union, 11am-6pm.

Tickets bought in advance are £10 waged, £7 low-waged/university students, £5 unwaged/school or college students.

AWL's annual "Ideas for Freedom" event will take place on 21-23 June, and AWL conference on 26-27 October.

- For more information on all these events see

Marxism and trade unions

A Workers' Liberty study course for working-class activists. Session 1 — "Our Fantasy Union":

- Wednesday 16 January (7pm at the University of London Union, Malet Street, WC1E 7HY, nr. Euston)
- Thursday 17 January (7.30pm at Menard Hall, 14 Galway Street, London, EC1V 3SW, nr. Old Street)
- Sunday 20 January, 3pm nr Kings Cross (ring 07961 040618)

More info, and course reading, at: tinyurl.com/mandtus

Capital reading group

Mondays from 21 January. 6pm at ULU, Malet Street. Ring 07749 330 303 for more.

Starry-eyed about Chinese capitalism

Dave Osler



A review of *Maonomics*, by Loretta Napoleoni (Seven Stories Press, 2012).

Back in the 1930s, a certain breed of starry-eyed European leftist was eager to make the case that the USSR somehow represented "a new civilisation".

Proof of the superiority of Stalin's economic policies, they insisted, was to be found in continued expansion, even at a time when western capitalism was deeply mired in depression. The techniques by which this was achieved could therefore felicitously be overlooked in polite Fabian circles.

Fast forward to now and you find several writers ready to take a parallel stance in the case of China, and Loretta Napoleoni is a prime example. *Maonomics* sits alongside Jenny Clegg's *China's Global Strategy* as a typical representative of the genre.

They provide the intellectual underpinnings of an outlook widespread inside the British labour movement, exemplified by the regular favourable coverage of China carried by the *Morning Star*, and the propensity of some leftwing bloggers to get slightly turned on by pictures of hunky rifle-clutching men in Chinese navy uniforms.

Let's be frank from the outset; Ms Napoleoni's book is a bad one. The writing style is meandering, to put it kindly, and the translation from Italian frequently clunky. She doesn't even deliver on the title, which should surely be "Dengonomics", in honour of the chief architect of China's turn to the market.

But perhaps clarity of exposition would be a tall order, given that the underlying thesis of this book — summarised by the sub-title "Why Chinese Communists Make Better Capitalists Than We Do" — is just plain wrong.

It isn't particularly difficult to generate vast profits from hundreds of millions of people ready to toil for long hours at minimal pay, in sweatshop conditions that drive some to suicide, and without recourse even to independent trade unions.

The double digit GDP growth clocked up in recent years was the product of a specific conjuncture in the world economy, and it would be lazy to assume that it can simply be extrapolated in the decades ahead.

With the majority of the population now living in urban areas, the supply of cheap rural labour will not prove indefinite. The future health of its primary export markets is another factor that could easily derail optimistic scenarios.

Nevertheless, Napoleoni has bought into the official line that in China "the state serves the people" and represents a progressive alternative economic model in which the labour force is somehow happy to suffer super-exploitation in the national interest.

Indeed, she frequently drags Karl Marx into the argument, repeatedly asserting that Beijing has succeeded where Moscow singularly failed in grasping the true meaning of Marxism, and even that it is realising the dictatorship of the proletariat.

But despite the name checks, Napoleoni never buttresses her case by referencing any of his actual works, generating the suspicion that her familiarity with his thinking may not be intimate.

There is no recognition, for example, of the class dynamics at work in one of the most unequal societies in the world, following the arrival of a capitalist class that personifies capital as surely as its counterpart in nineteenth century Britain.

As a result, China is one of the most unequal societies in the world, as measured by Gini coefficient for the distribution of wealth, which runs from zero for perfect equality to one in the hypothetical case of one person owning everything and everything else nothing.

GINI

In Britain, the net effect of Thatcherism followed by New Labourism has seen the Gini coefficient reach 0.36 on the most recently available figures to which I have ready access; in China, it has topped 0.47, making the country fractionally more inegalitarian than the US.*

Yet not only does Napoleoni brush all this under the carpet, but goes to great length to shield the regime from attacks on its human rights record, slamming attempts to uphold basic liberties as hypocritical given the West's own failings in this sphere, without considering the possibility of simultaneously walking and chewing gum.

To top everything, *Maonomics* is littered with elementary errors, sometimes two and three to the page, highlighting a sloppiness so pronounced that it alone would be enough to undermine any confidence in the author's conclusions.

Scottish thinker James Mill have been much of an influence on the first American presidents; that would have been impossibly precocious of him, given that he was only born in 1773.

And while Hull struck me as a pretty run-down place the last time I visited, the description of it as "a desert inhabited by wolves and stray dogs" surely exaggerates the deleterious impact of Thatcherism on the city. However, its residents are likely to be even more offended by the claim that it somehow forms part of the Midlands.

But in the political sense, incidental howlers are neither here nor there. Napoleoni's principal error is this; the legacy of the twentieth century forces the left to make a stand against authoritarianism whatever its guise, and all the more so when it purports to come from our side.

And in this, she simply fails.

[* Editor's note: a Chinese university on 9 December reported a Gini number of 0.61 for China.]

Letters



Misleading on Southampton Unison

During our three months of strike action in 2011 we got used to the local Conservative supporting newspaper using misleading headlines in articles about our dispute.

It was therefore disappointing to see *Solidarity* (266, 28 November) using a completely misleading headline to accompany an extract to a long interview a *Solidarity* reporter did with me.

The headline states, "Why Unison does not oppose budget cuts". This is completely inaccurate. We are actively campaigning with service users and union members to defend services being hit by the Council's budget proposals.

What we do not support is the Council either not setting a budget or setting a deficit budget.

If *Solidarity* is to retain credibility with UNISON activists, you should not use misleading headlines.

Mike Tucker

Branch Secretary, Southampton District Union

Tackle tax havens

I liked the article "Tories Squeeze Poor to Boost Profits" in *Solidarity* 269 (12 December, 2012).

We need to confront and challenge the attack on working people. I strongly support the article's call for a living wage and a state bank under democratic control.

It's also important to tackle another area: tax havens. Nicholas Shaxson, in his book *Treasure Islands*, has explained how businesses and individuals evade paying tax by the use of these tax havens. The book shows how the rich are definitely not making a fair contribution. Bankers, lawyers and accountants deprive us of millions of pounds by operating tax havens.

This is all money that could be used instead to maintain vital public services. It's also cash that could be used to pay off the deficit or invest in manufacturing, creating jobs. It could be employed to kick-start a state-investment bank.

2013 must be the year we continue the fight back against the Tory and Lib Dem menace. And closing tax havens and taxing the rich are two ways to fund a better future for us.

Graeme Kemp, Shropshire

Osborne steals £760 from you

David Cameron and George Osborne. At least they're enjoying themselves.

The coalition government says it will have cut nineteen billion pounds per year, or an average of £760 per year per household, from welfare benefits by 2014-5.

It's only as much as would be got by a 4.5% supertax on the incomes of the top 10% (not touching their wealth), or a 0.4% tax on their wealth (not touching their income).

For the worse-off, whom it mainly hits, the £760 a year cut is a lot. £760 is an average; many households are losing much more.

A lot of those losses will come in 2013. The Government's Mid-Term Review, which gives the £19 billion figure, promises in general terms "more help with the costs of long-term care" for the elderly and "support" for "working families with their childcare costs"; but the Government has no exact plans on those points, and even when it announces exact plans they will probably be promises of measures after 2015.

In April 2013, four cuts kick in:

- Most unemployed and low-waged people who currently get full council tax benefit will have to pay some council tax, probably about £5 a week. The Government has abolished council tax benefit, replaced it by "council tax support" to be administered by local councils, and cut the money available to councils for it to 10% less than they currently pay in council tax benefit. So far 110 out of 326 councils in England have decided how to respond; the big majority will demand a payment even from the unemployed.

- The Government's cap on each household's total benefits kicks in. This will especially hit large households living in areas of high housing costs. Like the child benefit cut-off, the cap threatens to cut deeper and deeper as inflation progresses.

- Disability Living Allowance for working-age people will be replaced by Personal Independence Payments. The Government's own estimate is that harsher criteria will throw 500,000 people off benefit by 2015-6. This will happen in phases. New claimants for DLA will be switched to PIP instead from April this year in some areas, and June in others. People already claiming DLA who report a change in circumstances will be switched to PIP from October 2013. The rest will be switched from 2015.

- The regular annual increase in benefits which comes every April will raise them by much less than inflation. The Government is imposing a cap of one per cent on increases in most working-age benefits and tax credits for three years from 2013-14. If inflation continues at its current rate of about 3% a year, that will mean a real-terms cut of 6% for all claimants by 2016-7.

Immediately, this cap hits seven million households with members in work, half of all working households in the country, by an average of £165 a year.

Already, from January 2013, the Government is cutting child benefit for households where someone has an income over £50,000. The measure incorporates no schedule to increase the £50,000 threshold (or the £60,000 threshold for

complete cut-off of child benefit); so in ten years' time, this cut could affect households where someone has only the average pay rate for workers with over ten years' experience in their job.

The extension of means-testing to more and more benefits makes the system more complicated, and undermines political support for benefits from middle-class and better-off working-class people. If it's considered a problem that wealthy households get benefits, then the answer is to tax them more, not to introduce more means tests.

We also face the rolling-on of the cut in contributory Employment and Support Allowance (what used to be Invalidity Benefit) which results from that allowance being automatically stopped after a year for disabled people who are told that "their condition means they should be preparing for work".

The final transitional protection for housing benefit claimants, against cuts which started in April 2011, expired at the end of 2012.

In October 2013 comes the start of Universal Credit, a compendium replacement for Jobseekers' Allowance, housing benefits, council tax support, child tax credit, and working tax credit. It will be introduced for new out-of-work claimants from October; for new in-work claimants from April 2014.

CLAIMANTS

All claimants who report a change in circumstances after October 2013 will be moved onto it, and all working-age claimants will be moved over to Universal Credit by 2017.

Households will get some transitional protection from cash losses as long as their circumstances do not change.

Universal Credit will be paid monthly and will be based on monthly assessments of income.

In theory, the idea of simplifying benefits and reducing perverse cut-offs (where a wage rise can leave you worse off, or no better off, because you lose benefits) has merit. But Universal Credit is being introduced by a cuts-crazy government. On the Government's own latest figures, 2.8 million households will lose out from the change. 300,000 households will lose out by £300 a month or more.

After much hedging, Labour has come out against the one per cent cap and the child-benefit cut. Doing something to campaign against those cuts is another question again. It is another question even for trade unions which have consistently opposed all the benefit cuts.

The labour movement should be calling mass demonstrations against these cuts — but none of the leaderships, Labour or trade-union, is doing that.

In making their welfare cuts, the Tories and Lib Dems have mostly exempted the elderly. They are increasing the state pension age, but existing pensioners are, on the whole, losing less through the cuts than younger people.

Pensioners will continue to get council tax benefit. The state pension will be increased to keep up with prices while working-age benefits won't. The Government talks of increasing the basic state pension substantially by merging the current means-tested Pension Credit into it. The DLA cuts do not affect those of pension age. The Government promises extra public money towards long-term care for the elderly.

The elderly are coming out better for a good reason: they are numerous, they are often willing to organise and campaign, and they turn out to vote.

Successive setbacks for the labour movement have left younger people less willing to do that. That is a matter of the balance of political influence and will. We need to change it.

Help us raise £15,000



A red 2013?

Welcome to 2013. We'd like to invite you to devote some of the new-year energy with which you are undoubtedly effervescing to help Workers' Liberty hit its fund appeal target of £15,000.

Workers' Liberty has big plans for the New Year. We've expanded our industrial work, setting up new workplace bulletins and increasing the frequency of existing ones. Our educational work is expanding, with reading groups on *Capital* and Trotsky running in London, as well as a study course on Marxism and trade unions. We're publishing several of our existing books in e-reader formats, as well as planning to release new books.

Your support can help us put these plans into action, and expand them.

Help us raise £15,000 by May Day 2013. 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: £6,746

It was a quiet Christmas for the AWL fund appeal. Thanks to Manchester AWL for a donation of £80.

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

The Establishment Blues

Songs of Liberty & Rebellion



Sixto Rodriguez is a Mexican-American singer-songwriter from Detroit. His life story is incredible. A construction worker who drifted around the city's working-class districts writing about poverty, alienation, drug abuse, and class struggle, he was discovered by Detroit-based music producers in the late 60s who hailed his songwriting talent as comparable to that of Bob Dylan's.

When his two albums, released in 1970 and 1971, flopped in America, he went back to construction work and relative anonymity, going on to gain a degree in philosophy and stand as a candidate in local government elections, all the while continuing to work construction.

Unbeknownst to him, his music became phenomenally successful in South Africa, where radical Afrikaner youth involved in the anti-apartheid movement adopted it as the soundtrack to their rebellion, despite government attempts to censor it.

Nothing was known about his life, and wild rumours circulated about him having committed suicide on stage following his commercial failure in America. He was eventually tracked down by a South African music journalist and brought to the country in the late 1990s to play a series of sold-out shows. Despite belatedly benefiting from his enormous popularity, he continues to live in the same working-class neighbourhood of Detroit where he has lived for 40 years.

His songs combine starkly realist urban imagery with surreal and psychedelic visions, and the stories they tell are played out by a cast of characters which are at once fantastical and recognisable as everyday and real.

The incredible story of his superstardom in South Africa and the search to find him is brilliantly recounted in Malik Bendjelloul's 2012 documentary *Searching for Sugar Man*. The film, and Rodriguez's music, both deserve the widest possible audience.

The Ruby Kid

The mayor hides the crime rate
Council woman hesitates
Public gets irate but forget the vote date
Weatherman complaining, predicted sun, it's raining
Everyone's protesting, boyfriend keeps suggesting
You're not like all of the rest.
Garbage ain't collected, women ain't protected
Politicians using people, they've been abusing
The mafia's getting bigger, like pollution in the river
And you tell me that this is where it's at.
Woke up this morning with an ache in my head
Splashed on my clothes as I spilled out of bed
Opened the window to listen to the news
But all I heard was the Establishment's Blues.
Gun sales are soaring, housewives find life boring
Divorce the only answer, smoking causes cancer
This system's gonna fall soon, to an angry young tune
And that's a concrete cold fact.
(For the full lyrics, see <http://bit.ly/J1dNuv>)

Council leaders say huge cuts break up civil society

By Ollie Moore

Entire local services could close in many part of the UK, taking hundreds of jobs with them, as councils seek to make further budget cuts in 2013.

Southampton City Council plans to cut nearly 300 jobs and close their entire youth and play service, as well as the council's only remaining children's care home. Newcastle City Council's cuts plan will see 10 libraries close, its entire arts funding programme abolished, the closure of the youth and play service, and many other cuts, amounting to over 1,000 job losses. North East Lincolnshire Council's cuts average out to a £150 per person reduction in public spending, with central education services facing a £2 million cut. It is seeking a £58 million cut from its budget over five years. Liverpool City Council is seeking a £143 million cut over four years. Options under consideration include the closure of libraries, a reduction in environmental services, and increased charges for waste removal. Sheffield City Council plans to scrap its Early Years Service, amongst other cuts.

England's worst-off councils face an average reduction of 3% in their funding from central government. Of the 50 worst-hit councils, 43 are Labour-controlled. Of the 50 least-hit, 42 are led by the Tories.

In response to announcements on those cuts the leaders of Newcastle, Liverpool and Sheffield councils wrote to the *Observer* (6 January) to warn the cuts will cause "rising crime, increasing community tension and more problems on our streets" [which] "will contribute to the break-up of civil society if we do not turn back".

They themselves however, are not prepared to "turn back" and refuse to implement these cuts, however.

Passing on central government cuts to local people by slashing jobs and services is a choice for councils. They could choose to defy the government. So far, none have done so.

Some Labour councillors claim that Labour councils must make cuts in order to stop the Tories imposing worse ones. But cuts plans made in 2012 were met by the further central government funding cuts announced by the Tories in the Autumn Statement. So in response to Labour councils implementing cuts, the Tories have simply proposed further cuts. In attempting to be reasonable and find ways to pass on central government cuts, Labour councils have simply done the Tories' job for them. Far from backing off, the government has seized the opportunity to go on the offensive to push further cuts.

Former New Labour minister David Blunkett wrote an article in the *Guardian* on 27 December, recalling his own role in the abortive attempt by some councils, led by Labour leftists, to defy Thatcher's cuts. He nostalgically recalls the "revolutionary fervour" of his time at the head of Sheffield City Council, and bizarrely claims that the lack of opposition today stems from the fact that "people do not see the ideological hand behind [Tory] policies".

Self-congratulatory and disingenuous nostalgia from people who postured against cuts but failed to fight (and who went on to become leading figures in a New Labour govern-

ment politically indistinguishable from the Tories) will not get us far. We need local labour movement campaigns to demand that Labour councils defy the government and refuse to pass on cuts. Even a small number of councils taking such a stand could shake up the political situation.

That is why the "Councillors Against Cuts" statement, initiated by the Labour Representation Committee, is so significant. Although it is currently only backed by a small number of councillors, it represents the first concrete expression of dissent by Labour councillors from the line that Labour councils must pass on Tory cuts.

The council cuts are part of the Tory government's plan to systematically dismantle public services and welfare provision. The Tories' ideal is represented by the schemes they are trialling, in various forms, in Barnet, north London, which reduces the council itself to a mere "hub" which tenders out the provision of services to bids from private providers — necessarily less accountable, necessarily driven by profit rather than the needs of service users and council workers.

Cabinet papers from Margaret Thatcher's government, released on 1 January 2013 under the "30-Year Rule", show how the Tories considered a comprehensive assault on public services, including health, in 1981, but backed down. The papers show how Thatcher's cabinet considered a proposal from the Central Policy Review Staff think-tank to end state funding of higher education, effectively abolish the NHS, and freeze benefits.

It is a sad illustration of the deterioration of political culture and the weakness of our movement that they are able to try again now with relative confidence and — so far — little in the way of widespread opposition.

STOP THE CUTS, SAVE OUR SERVICES

March and rally in Newcastle Saturday 16 February noon-3pm

Assemble at Centre for Life and march through Newcastle past some of the services threatened with cuts and closures including: museums, libraries, theatres, galleries; City Hall and city pool.

Supported by Newcastle Save Libraries Campaign; RMT union; Save Our Services; Anti-Cuts Network; Coalition of Resistance; Save Newcastle Play Service (and many more)

Left Labour councillors say: “we’ll refuse cuts”

Councillors Against the Cuts

We are a new network of local councillors formed to support the fight against cuts. We believe that instead of implementing the Coalition’s cuts, councils and councillors should refuse to do so and help workers and communities organise in resistance.

We are pledged to vote against all cuts to services and jobs, increases in rents and charges, and increases in council tax.

We do not accept that cuts are “necessary”: there is plenty of money in society, but it is in the wrong hands. Taxing the rich and business, taking the wealth of the banks and cutting Trident are all rich sources of funds.

We stand in solidarity with anti-cuts campaigns, with people defending their local services and with the broader community, tenants and residents, our children, disabled people, pensioners etc., in defence of the living standards and rights of the most vulnerable people in society as the Coalition government attacks them.

We are working with a network of local government workers and other trade unionists to fight for this policy to be adopted and campaigned for in the unions and labour movement. We believe that close links are needed between Labour councillors and the unions in the public sector whether they are Labour-affiliated or not. We believe that, with the confidence that unions are behind them, many more councillors can be encouraged to refuse to implement cuts — and with the knowledge that councillors will support them unequivocally, many more trade unionists will be prepared to fight back against cuts.

Most of us are Labour councillors and our campaign is sponsored by the Labour Representation Committee, but we are open to all left and labour movement councillors willing to pledge to vote against/refuse to implement cuts.

Whether you are a councillor, local government worker, other trade unionist, anti-cuts campaigner, community activist or Labour Party activist — get involved!

Initial signatories:

Gary Wareing (Labour councillor, Drypool Ward, Hull City Council)

Gill Kennett (Labour councillor, Holderness Ward, Hull City Council)

Kieran Thorpe (Leader of the Labour group and Labour councillor, Hatfield South Ward, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council)

George Barratt (Independent/ex-Labour councillor, Mayesbrook Ward, Barking and Dagenham Borough Council)

Mark Catterall (Labour councillor, Langfield Ward, Todmorden Town Council)

Don Thomas (“Labour councillors against the cuts” councillor, Coxford Ward, Southampton City Council)

Keith Morrell (“Labour councillors against the cuts” councillor, Coxford Ward, Southampton City Council)

Tory-controlled Barnet council’s strategy involves outsourcing a large chunk of services to Capita. If we don’t resist cuts Barnet’s example will be copied elsewhere. Above: a protest in December.

Working-class people face another onslaught of cuts in 2013, as the Tory-led coalition government attacks welfare provision at a national level, and slashes funding to local councils.

Councils face a choice about whether they pass those cuts on to local communities. So far, no councils took the step that Labour councillors in Poplar in 1919 or Clay Cross in 1972 took, and refuse to pass on central government cuts to the working-class communities that elected them.

The Labour Party and its relationship to the working class have changed dramatically since 1972, and even more dramatically since 1919. But it remains a party fundamentally tied to the trade unions, the basic self-defence organisations of working-class people, and a defiant stand by even a small number of Labour councils could help galvanise a wider fight against the Tories. While there is still much work to do to pressure Labour councils into such defiance, there are some small hopeful signs.

Two Labour councillors on Hull City Council, Gary Wareing and Gill Kennett, have released a statement, (on right), committing to a stand against cuts. They have been joined by Kieran Thorpe, the leader of the Labour group on Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, George Barratt, a borough councillor from Barking and Dagenham expelled from the labour group for voting against cuts, and Mark Catterall, a Labour councillor on Todmorden Town Council. The statement, is backed by the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) and by Keith Morrell and Don Thomas, Labour councillors on

Southampton City Council, who left the Labour group after facing disciplinary sanctions for voting against a cuts budget. In an interview with *Solidarity* in November 2012, Keith Morrell said: “We wanted the Labour leadership of Southampton Council to organise a national conference for Labour councillors and Labour authorities to discuss a local government fightback. It has to start somewhere. I think our stance could be a spark that lights a bigger fire.” Don Thomas added: “It’s time to say enough is enough, and start fighting back. We send fraternal greetings to Labour councillors in Hull [...] and anywhere else who want to resist cuts.”

These are small beginnings. But if trade unions and community campaigns loudly and actively support the stand these councillors have taken, and if they can coordinate with each other through the LRC, these sparks could spread into a much larger fire.

**DEMONSTRATE AGAINST CUTS
IN EARLY YEARS PROVISION
Saturday 19 January 11am
Devonshire Green, Sheffield**

The Gramsci enigma

Richard Price reviews *Antonio Gramsci: Working-Class Revolutionary. Essays and Interviews*, edited by Martin Thomas

The legacy of the great Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci has been contested in hundreds of books and articles, particularly since the 1970s — so much so that these days university students are more likely to come across him than Karl Marx. But the Gramsci they encounter comes in a confusing variety of interpretations — a proto-Eurocommunist Gramsci, a liberal Gramsci, a revolutionary Gramsci and a radical democrat Gramsci.

Part of the explanation comes from the particular circumstances Italian Communism and Gramsci faced. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) was illegalised between 1926 and 1943. This meant that, apart from its exiled leaders, it was cut off from the struggles within the Communist International. It never experienced the Popular Front as a practical project during the 1930s and its members retained a self image as revolutionaries.

Gramsci was imprisoned from 1926 until shortly before his death in 1937, and his *Prison Notebooks* were written in a cryptic style that lends itself to different interpretations. Jail insulated Gramsci from the most corrosive effects of Stalinism. Although relations between Gramsci and the PCI leadership almost entirely broke down during his imprisonment, after the Second World War the PCI embalmed him as the prophet of broad alliances with anti-socialist forces.

Where other classical Marxists frequently tended to treat the state unproblematically as resting upon force in the form of “armed bodies of men”, Gramsci saw the state in western Europe as “an outer ditch, behind which there was a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks” composed of a wide range of social institutions and networks. Against this the workers’ movement was obliged to build a “hegemonic apparatus” capable of drawing into struggle other oppressed classes, while simultaneously acting as an educator and educating itself. Gramsci’s interpreters have seen this variously as conducting a revolutionary struggle in alliance with the peasantry, or as a vague process of “cultural diffusion” allied to slowly building centres of support within capitalist society such as local government.

KEY THEMES

This pamphlet is not an introduction to Gramsci’s thought so much as an exploration of some its key themes, and it assumes at least a working knowledge of his main writings.

It takes the form of an interview with and a presentation by Peter Thomas, author of *The Gramscian Moment* and a series of four articles by Martin Thomas. Peter Thomas makes a strong case for rescuing a revolutionary Gramsci, whose politics remained firmly rooted within those of the early Comintern, particularly the debates on the united front. On occasion he does so in such abstruse terms that it is very difficult to detect what he believes the “hegemonic apparatus” should actually do, so hidden are his explanations beneath a thicket of subordinate clauses:

We thus have in Gramsci not only the notion of a hegemonic apparatus, in the singular, but also of hegemonic apparatuses, in the plural — a whole series of hegemonic apparatuses that come together and are unified at the political level by the capacity of elements of a particular social group or class to draw into a dialogue, or, to use Gramsci’s term, to “translate” between, different hegemonic practices in different fields of the society.

Or again in his discussion of the Modern Prince (Gramsci’s synonym for the revolutionary party):

Gramsci conceived of the Modern Prince as a new type of dialectical-pedagogical political and social relation capable of being translated into different contexts and then, just as crucially, of being retranslated backwards, enriched by the dialectical pedagogical exchange and interchange. We have at the end a vision of the Modern Prince not as a particular geographical location in the society, or even as a pre-existing element, but as the result of all these relations, translations and re-translations, as they are constituted in an ongoing process.

At the risk of sounding philistine, this does sound like a Marxist version of the fable of the emperor’s new clothes.

That aside there is much in this pamphlet that is intellectually stimulating. Martin Thomas’s essays are in the main pithy models of clarity that examine a number of important aspects of Gramsci’s politics and philosophy. He takes issue with Peter Thomas’ description of the united front as a “determining strategic perspective” when compared to the lack of emphasis he places on the centrality of a revolutionary party. But surely the two are — or should be — interwoven. What were soviets in 1905 and 1917 if not, in Trotsky’s words, the highest form of the united front? At the very least the united front is a tactic with strategic implications.

Peter Thomas writes that: “From 1926 onwards, at the very latest, Gramsci was quite clear on the nature of what had emerged in the Soviet Union and the ongoing process of Stalinisation and bureaucratisation.” Martin Thomas is more nuanced, stressing that Gramsci’s wrong-headed critique of the Left Opposition as favouring the kind of “strategy of the offensive” more properly associated with Zinoviev undermined his opposition to Stalinism. Martin Thomas’s short essay comparing Gramsci and Trotsky strikes the balance very well.

While Gramsci’s opposition to Stalinism lacked the rigour of Trotsky’s, he also didn’t embrace the kind of catastrophist perspective Trotsky had adopted by the late 1930s, in which small propaganda groups would attempt to resolve the “crisis of leadership” and thereby the “crisis of humanity”. Martin Thomas writes: “Against the sectarian posturing — not Trotsky’s, but in a certain sense Trotskyist — Gramsci has much to teach us.”

RELEVANCE

What then of Gramsci’s relevance today? Clearly the nature of the non-proletarian “subaltern classes” — in Gramsci’s day, mainly the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie — has greatly changed in the 75 years since he died.

Peter Thomas claims that “in some so-called advanced capitalist countries the percentage of the population that could be defined as working class in the broadest terms approaches 70 or 80%, if not more”. This is almost certainly an optimistic exaggeration and a warning of where the politics of “the 99%” can lead.

Such a figure in Britain could hardly be reached even if you added in every last member of the self employed, placed a university professor in the same class as a poverty stricken teaching assistant, and disregarded private wealth, particularly in the form of homes often worth in excess of £500,000. But if it were true, it would not mean that the issue of “proletarian hegemony” would have ceased to exist. Even within sections of society that are more clearly working class, the challenge is to unite what has become a very stratified class behind a single banner. Beyond that, it is to reach out to other sections — principally the professional middle class — to build alliances. To that extent, the problem of hegemony re-

mains to this day in a country like Britain.

In attempting to formulate a revolutionary programme that included the mainly peasant and very poor south of Italy, Gramsci was breaking with the Marxist orthodoxy of his time, which had frequently paid little attention to the rural population. In France, Italy and Spain, the left managed to build rural strongholds. In Germany, the left was almost entirely disinterested in the problems of the non-proletarian rural poor, with the result that they remained hostile to the urban working class and a reservoir of support for the reactionary, and ultimately fascist, right.

While the proportion of those who work the land has fallen dramatically across Europe in recent decades, there are still strong echoes of the north/south problematic in Italy in the campaigns of the Northern League. In this year’s French presidential election, Sarkozy won the rural vote, but there was strong support in some areas for both Hollande and Le Pen, and even the Front de Gauche’s Jean-Luc Mélenchon won in a few dozen rural communes. If nothing else, it shows that there is everything to fight for in the French countryside. In a very different context, the troubled relationship between the left and France’s five million Muslims also poses problems of hegemony.

We can surely draw much from Gramsci’s analysis of how capitalist society gains “coercive consent” to its rule. How else are we explain why millions of American blue collar workers, under the whip of recession, voted for Republican candidates who represent their worst enemy?

And what would the construction of a “hegemonic apparatus” look like in Britain today? I can’t help remembering that when I lived in Islington 35 years ago there were, within a radius of ¼ mile, four left wing bookshops (one Stalinist, one Trotskyist, one anarchist and one pacifist); a radical community newspaper; a thriving fringe theatre scene; federations of tenants and squatters, a short-life housing co-op, and a women’s centre. Not infrequently, councillors in one borough were trade union convenors in another. And this infrastructure flourished even under the hegemony of the old right wing of the Labour Party.

We have slipped a long way backwards from this kind of left wing culture. New media cannot entirely substitute for this, since to a significant degree they remain a dialogue of the middle class with itself.

Gramsci was scathing about the kind of left wing politics that boiled down to shallow exposés of capitalist scandals and exhortations to action. You can’t imagine him chanting ‘One solution, revolution!’ This pamphlet is to be welcomed, because it can not only stimulate discussion upon the philosophical aspects of Gramsci’s thought, but it can also force socialists to think more deeply about their relationship to the rest of society, and how to transform it.

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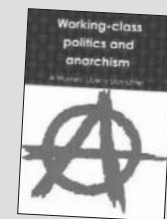


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The SWP crisis: politics without oxygen

By Ed Maltby

At the annual conference of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP, the largest of the would-be Trotskyist groups in Britain) on 4-6 January, the Central Committee (CC, or leading group) was almost defeated in a vote on whether to endorse its handling of an investigation into allegations of serious misconduct against a prominent member.

We do not feel it is appropriate to comment further on that here. The following article was written before those details became public, in response to the debate on questions of party democracy and organisation prior to the conference, during the course of which two opposition factions (the Democratic Opposition and the Democratic Centralist Faction) were formed, and four SWP members sympathetic to the Democratic Opposition expelled.

The question of party democracy isn't just a technical question of the best way to conduct a discussion. It is a political question related to how class struggle happens and how a revolution can be made.

In our view, the SWP has drifted into a concept in which a revolutionary organisation is valued mainly as a machine and measured by its ability to count recruits and issue slogans which "fit the mood", not by its contribution to enlightenment, education, and clarification in the labour movement.

In the political culture of the SWP over many years, "rousing the tired, the demoralised and the half-convinced into action" has become mixed up with "insisting that the CC's latest analysis and latest initiative is 100% right".

But these aren't the same. In the SWP, any attempt to challenge or correct the CC's analysis of a situation, or to criticise a new initiative, necessarily runs up against the SWP rule which insists on unanimity from the full-timers and CC. Circulating critical notes outside of one's branch is prohibited. A culture is promoted of enforced, official, permanent optimism — or pretend-optimism.

This permanent official optimism, interspersed with bouts of equally compulsory official pessimism, makes it hard to assess reality. For the SWP, the government is always "weak", the public mood is always "angry". Events in Egypt are always "the revolution", even when thugs of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood are killing, beating, and kidnapping socialists.

This distorted picture of the world results in slogans which can't educate. The SWP call "all out, stay out" (for 30 November 2011) sounded very radical, but it could not be seriously argued or debated. The SWP's call for a "general strike" essentially called on activists to reinterpret the union bureaucrats' programme of one-day strikes as something more radical than it was.

Even assessing the success or failure of SWP initiatives is stymied. The SWP described the 17 November Unite the Resistance rally as a big success. But the reported attendance was inflated, and anyway much smaller than the SWP's paper membership. Confusing criticism with "nay-saying" and revolutionary discipline with compulsory pretend-optimism obstructs honest accounting.

The SWP has a rule that factions can only exist in a short period before its annual conference. They must disband after conference.

That is effectively a ban on debate. The only way to resolve an important political disagreement is to debate the politics fully.

The SWP rules are often justified by appeals to the history of the Bolshevik Party. SWP leaders argue that the rules are necessary for the SWP's ability to act decisively. Supporters of the CC majority in this latest fight have argued that too much freedom of criticism and debate would turn a party into a mere debating club.

But the internal regime of the Bolshevik party was far more open than the SWP of today — and more open than the regime which the Democratic Opposition proposed.

The Democratic Opposition called for an end to the rule whereby CC members must pretend unanimity to the rest of the party regarding CC decisions.

The practice of artificial displays of public unanimity is corrosive. It corrodes a revolutionary's ardour for the truth, as it obliges activists to pretend to hold views other than their

Above: A previous SWP conference. The question of democracy inside a socialist organisation is a political question related to how a revolution can be made.

own. It corrodes debate. Positions in discussions cease to be open to being modified in argument, and become mandated formulas. Real debate happens only privately, or in code — that is, in ways which cannot clarify.

To present only conclusions, and not the debates which produced them, is undemocratic. As Trotsky put it: "The foundation of party democracy is timely and complete information, available to all members of the organisation and covering all the important questions of their life and struggle".

In order for militants to be able to understand, master, use, teach — or challenge — an idea, it is necessary to see the debate which produced it. In order for a change in position to be assimilated and debated, rather than merely obeyed, the full discussion must be seen.

The demand for an end to artificial unanimity is the demand for an active, thinking party where members criticise and mutually educate one another, and appraise reality fairly, rather than one in which pronouncements are handed out to a passive membership.

BOLSHEVIKS

For the Bolsheviks, open criticism was as fundamental as disciplined (and informed) unity in action. In March 1918, for example, "Left Communists" led by Bukharin were demanding a "revolutionary war" against Germany. A party congress was held as German troops were over-running huge territories and counter-revolutionaries were waging civil war against the fragile workers' state.

"Left Communists" said they would refuse to serve on the Central Committee because of their disagreement. Lenin wrote a resolution: "The Congress declares that everyone can and should deny his responsibility for any step taken by the Central Committee, if he does not agree with it, by means of a declaration to that effect but not by leaving the Central Committee".

The "Left Communist" faction set up a daily newspaper, *Kommunist*, to attack the leadership. They were not expelled. They were persuaded to join the Central Committee, and eventually defeated in debate.

Ideas can only be dealt with and improved rationally through full, open debate. Artificial displays of unanimity clarify nothing.

A revolutionary organisation should publicly present its big internal debates on policy, and not merely its conclusions, to the workers' movement and the left. A relationship between the revolutionary organisation and the workers and youth who join in activity with it day-to-day in which those

workers are not informed about the organisation's discussions but instead are only given pre-processed conclusions, is a Stalinist distortion, not a Marxist approach.

The same name-calling and administrative exclusions that the CC uses against internal dissent are used to wall off the party from meaningful dialogue with other groups on the socialist left.

The SWP should understand that there is nothing anti-Leninist in an activist saying to non-members, "The majority of the organisation thinks X because Y, and we are doing X in a disciplined way, but I personally think B because C".

Of course, some information sometimes needs to be kept confidential; and it is important that debates be structured, that disagreements be written and presented in a clear, formal way. But SWP rules go far beyond that.

Lenin wrote in 1906: "Criticism within the limits of the principles of the Party Programme must be quite free... not only at Party meetings, but also at public meetings. Such criticism, or such 'agitation' (for criticism is inseparable from agitation) cannot be prohibited..."

"Let us take an example. The Congress decided that the Party should take part in the Duma elections... 'Criticism' of the decision to take part in the elections [cannot] be tolerated during this period, for it would in fact jeopardise success in the election campaign. Before elections have been announced, however, Party members everywhere have a perfect right to criticise the decision to take part in elections. Of course, the application of this principle in practice will sometimes give rise to disputes and misunderstandings; but only on the basis of this principle can all disputes and all misunderstandings be settled honourably for the Party."

Full understanding, education and explanation are more important for Lenin than formalities of "discipline" or yearnings for the appearance of public unanimity. The Bolsheviks sometimes had to make quick and drastic political turns, decided at short notice by the leadership; but they knew the leadership could gain the authority to manage that only through educating and discussing as thoroughly as possible, and being tested in practice, not just by laying down rules.

At every turn, for the Bolsheviks, ideas came before any other consideration. They understood that what was necessary to the liberation of the working class was its political self-education. The building of a revolutionary party was the most important means to this end — but it was still only a means. A party which sees its own parade-ground orderliness as more important than ideas is a party that sees its own machine as more important than politics, ideas and truth-telling. Political discussion, clarification and education has to be an open, rowdy process, where every idea is probed and criticised from all sides.

What is at issue is a struggle against a version of "democratic centralism" in which administrative "discipline" comes first. But in our view, and by the standards of the Bolshevik political tradition, politics and telling the truth have got to come first.

The SWP leadership's vision of a revolutionary party, ultimately, is of something which needs simply to be large enough and willing to be switched quickly by the leadership in one direction or another.

The Bolsheviks' vision was different. They understood that where the bourgeoisie was able to develop its own system of education, and gradually capture more and more of the means of production, the working class is not. The working class is a slave class right up until the moment where it seizes power. It must educate itself and fit itself to become a ruling class consciously — it cannot blunder into power on the shoulders of another class, as the bourgeoisie was able to do.

A revolutionary party is the key element in the self-education of the working class. Education and clarification must come first. Simple command and discipline, or a policy solely based on the desire to recruit, cannot aid that education.

A turn to democracy, openness and honest accounting in the tradition of the Bolsheviks is what we need.

• Faction statements and leadership replies: www.workersliberty.org/node/20198

• Background reading: www.workersliberty.org/swp

The Kurds in the Syrian civil war

By Stephen Wood

The areas commonly defined as Kurdistan are in Eastern Turkey, Northern Iraq, North Western Iran and Western Syria. Kurds face repression in all these states.

Approximately two million Kurds live in Syria, in a population of 22.5 million. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its international affiliates have long fought an armed and often brutal war against the Syrian government (as well as those of Iraq and Turkey). The Syrian Ba'ath regime of both Bashar Al-Assad and his father Hafez Al-Assad suppressed both Kurdish cultural identity and their rights and citizenship status in Syria.

The Kurdish language is not taught in schools or recognised as an official language.

Harassment, arrests, and restrictions on work have been common. Early in the current conflict, Assad offered 100,000 Kurds citizenship as "Syrian Arabs", but many others have no formal status in Syria.

In 2004 tensions flared at a football match between Kurdish and Iraqi fans. Chants in support of George W Bush and the newly established Kurdistan Regional Government were followed by the toppling of a statue of Hafez Al-Assad. The Iraqi supporters had displayed pictures of Saddam Hussein and chanted anti-Kurdish slogans during the match. The Kurdish protestors met with severe government repression; hundreds were detained or killed.

The event, known as the Qamishli Massacre (Qamishli is one of the largest of the Kurdish dominated regions), led to thousands of Kurds fleeing to Iraqi Kurdistan and a huge refugee crisis for the newly established Iraqi Kurdish Government.

Further demonstrations were then curtailed and suppressed by the Assad government. That led to a politicisation of Kurdish youth against both the regime and the older Kurdish political leaders who had accommodated to the Ba'athist Government.

The organisations of the Kurdish minority, while hostile to Assad, have been cautious in directly opposing the regime during the revolution. They have played a contradictory role, with some backing Assad and a small minority joining the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army (FSA).

TURKEY

During the 35 years of stable Ba'ath party rule, Syria had an increasingly tense relationship with the Turkish government.

In part this was due to Assad's tactical decision to harbour the leadership and training camps of the PKK at a time when it was carrying out numerous bombings and attacks in Turkey.

Whilst the Syrian government's stance towards the PKK would become more hostile — in 1999 they deported the founder and leader of the party Abdullah Öcalan, who was then captured, and remains imprisoned in Turkey — the Syrian camps enabled the PKK to recruit.

After the Syrian civil war began the Turkish Government gave backing to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and Syrian National Council (SNC) in the hope that the toppling of Assad would provide a government which could assist Turkey in destroying the PKK and be sympathetic to the continued suppression of Kurdish national identity.

This was met a hostile reaction from the leadership of several Kurdish parties in Syria, who feared a Muslim Brotherhood backed government in Syria which would carry out further state suppression.

The Kurdish National Council (KNC), a coalition of most of the Syria-based Kurdish parties, withdrew from a conference in Istanbul coordinated by the Syrian National Council (SNC) (now a part of the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces). The SNC had refused to include anything about the Kurdish minority in a draft manifesto.

The largest Syrian Kurdish Party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which has both stayed outside the KNC and has strong organisational links to the PKK has been accused by the KNC of being an enforcer for Assad, and of harassing other Kurdish activists who reject the more conciliatory stance they have taken to the government.

eone of their leaders as a "de facto truce" between the government and the Kurds.

"The security forces are overstretched over Syria's Arab provinces to face demonstrators, and cannot afford the opening of a second front in Syrian Kurdistan.

"On our side, we need the army to stay away. Our party is busy establishing organizations, committees, able to take over from the Ba'ath administration the moment the regime collapses."

Whilst the majority of Kurds are Muslims, Kurdish nationalism is almost exclusively secular in character or associated with pre-Islamic religious belief. Secularism is an important basis for the distrust of many Kurds towards the FSA and other Syrian Arab rebels.

For their part, Islamist militias and breakaways from the FSA are largely hostile to the Kurds who want to assume control over their regions and are now largely free of direct government intervention. This has led to increasingly strained relationships between the FSA and the Kurdish areas. Many of the Kurdish areas contain oil fields which the Syrian Arab opposition groups would like to get access to.

In November and December last year there were sporadic clashes between Islamist forces and the PYD and around 200 Kurds and rebels have been killed in these attacks.

The PYD has also had conflict with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, which has given support to the Syrian rebels. The KRG is keen to establish influence in Syria. It has attempted to crack down on the smuggling of weapons over the border, as it does not want to appear to be encouraging attacks within Turkey by the PKK or PYD.

A PYD press release from August of 2012 declares that; "This liberated Kurdish region could serve as a safe haven and starting point for all Syrian revolutionaries to liberate all of Syria, therefore this democratic establishment should be considered as a contributor to building a free, democratic, plural and united Syria.

"This peaceful establishment should not be considered as a threat to the regional and global stability but as a constructive contribution to democracy, peace and stability in the region. The Kurds are not separatist and have never had separatist intentions. This is to declare that our goal is to democratically self-govern our regions within the geopolitical borders of the Syrian Republic. Our mission is to play our part in building the future of Syria."

The actual intentions of the PYD seem to be different. The PYD and their co-thinkers in the PKK are Stalinoid nationalist parties who are manoeuvring somewhere between the rebels, the KNC, Assad and the KRG in Iraq.

Syrian Kurdish defence force

Demonstrations have been banned in areas under the control of the PYD — most of the largest Kurdish towns and settlements. Pitched battles with both the army and the FSA have been fought to maintain PYD control, although the government has now largely withdrawn from the area.

The PYD has an uneasy alliance with the KNC for the defence of the Kurdish regions. They have formed a coalition, the Supreme Kurdish Committee. Formally the KNC and PYD govern the Kurdish regions jointly until elections can be held; however, allegations continue that the PYD has enforced its rule, and is flying the PKK flag on administrative buildings. The PYD's links to the PKK give it a strong armed wing. It is now better armed than much of the FSA. The administration of these areas by the PYD has been described by

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Where is Egypt going?

By Pete Radcliff

From a referendum called with only two weeks notice and voted for on 15 and 22 December, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammad Mursi has now forced through the adoption of an Islamist constitution that holds great threats for Egyptian democrats and workers.

The proposals from the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party won 64% of the vote on a dismal 32% turnout. Many urban and working class centres including Cairo and Mahalla voted against it. The Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) distributed two million leaflets against the new constitution in workplaces. However the Brotherhood were strong enough to carry the vote, especially with support from the countryside.

In the run up to the referendum there were mass protests on the streets outside the Presidential Palace, protests which was furiously attacked by FJP and their allies, leading to ten deaths.

Other controversy surrounded the vote. There was a refusal by judges to staff the polls as they were unsatisfied that there could be fair elections. There were widespread allegations of electoral violations such as the mobilisation of FJP supporters outside polling stations intimidating electoral monitors, journalists and women without veils.

Revolutionary democrats were looking for a constitution that would prevent not only a continuation of the dictatorial abuses of the Mubarak period but also likely abuses of an Islamist government. But despite some liberal rhetoric, the constitution makes everything dependent on sharia law. And Mursi has just appointed 90 members to the 270-member upper house of parliament, already dominated by Islamists. The upper house now becomes Egypt's legislature until the new lower house is elected, in elections which are scheduled for February.

CONSTITUTION

Under the new constitution sharia is widely defined and covers its "general evidence, foundational rules... and ... rules of jurisprudence".

New laws will need to be approved by Islamist experts. Al-Azhar, the Islamic School in Cairo, now to be funded by the Egyptian state, is to be given an explicit role here but so are other unspecified Islamic "experts".

The military maintain their right to try civilians on "crimes that harm the armed forces" (Article 198). Because of conservative Islamist objections there are no constitutional guarantees of women's equality.

The new constitution also includes many anti-working class provisions. Article 14 ties wages to production, as opposed to rising prices. Articles 63 and 70 allow for certain sorts of forced labour and child labour to be regulated, rather than banned. Article 53 stipulates that there can only be one union per sector, which is intended as a blow to the growing independent union movement.

Article 44 stipulates: "Insult or abuse of all religious messengers and prophets shall be prohibited."

Mubarak occasionally used concessions to the Islamist agenda in the old constitution, to pacify supporters of the Brotherhood — when he needed to promote division between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority. But Islamist clauses are now far more likely to be pursued vigorously. Indeed if Mursi did not pursue them he would be subjected to sustained pressure from many in the Brotherhood's ranks who feel that the long term tide of history has turned against them and they have to use their immediate dominance to institute the Islamic state they have called for over decades.

Even before the referendum legal action was taken against atheist bloggers such as Alber Saber, cartoonist Daa El-Adl and even TV presenters such as Egypt's version of Jon Stewart, Bassem Youssef. Most of the charges against them are that they have insulted Islam or the president. Attacks on freedom of speech are the most likely way that repression will continue. The Brotherhood's General Secretary Mah-

Anti-Mursi protests in Tahrir Square, Cairo

moud Hussein has even claimed that arguing against the constitution is now illegal and punishable by law.

The constitution deceived much of the western media as it sometimes couched in ambiguous Islamist terms. General inaccuracies in their coverage have caused much anger in Egypt amongst democratic forces.

A *Guardian* editorial on 7 December, effectively took sides with the government and led to their Egyptian correspondent, Jack Shenker, explicitly disassociating himself from it. (<http://bit.ly/128m2Rb>)

US analyst Juan Cole has written that "Egypt is deeply polarised... The Muslim Brotherhood has moved from a cadre organisation to providing street thugs to attack leftist demonstrators, in a haunting evocation of what happened in revolutionary Iran in the early 1980s". This process is not a foregone conclusion, but Cole identifies a real trajectory that cannot be ignored.

ASSESSMENT

In this context, the SWP's assessment verges on the ridiculous. *Socialist Worker* (online 21 December 2012) included the following comment: "To denounce the Brotherhood as fascist is a mistake," said Sameh, a member of their sister organisation, the Revolutionary Socialists.

"There are elements which represent the counter-revolution, and counter-revolutions are violent against workers and activists. But we are not witnessing fascism in Egypt. The working class has not been defeated and the struggle from below is deepening."

This is especially bizarre after Brotherhood thugs injured a member of the Revolutionary Socialists during the demonstrations and are clearly moving against the labour movement and democracy.

So where is Egypt going?

During the run-off to last June's presidential election between the Brotherhood's Mursi and the former Mubarak minister Shafiq, few warned of the profoundly anti-democratic nature of both candidates.

No left strategy was publicly debated or elaborated to fight for democracy, let alone government that would be accountable to the increasingly organised working class and the vast number of desperately poor petty-bourgeois and other urban poor. Many of the revolutionaries, most notably the Revolutionary Socialists, called for vote for Mursi as the lesser-evil.

A victory for Shafiq would have likely meant a continuation of the brutal suppression by the hated SCAF (Supreme Command of the Armed Forces) which had taken over running the country from February 2011. But the social base of the military was weak. In the face of a likely Islamist victory and the absence of a significant campaign against acceptance of either government, there was a significant Christian vote

for Shafiq. But even without an articulated strategy for a third way, the vote for both candidates as a proportion of the population (24% Mursi and 22% Shafiq) was small, with many Egyptians refusing to vote for either Islamist or the military.

Shafiq and SCAF were unable to mobilise anyone on the streets other than the security forces and a decreasing number of paid criminal thugs.

An election victory for him would have given him a boost, but within the majority civilian population he would have remained as isolated as ever. The more affluent section of the population who in the main supported Shafiq would not have had the will to take to the streets. Most Christians who might have been deceived to vote for Shafiq out of fear of an Islamist victory would not have supported any of his attacks on democratic rights.

On the other hand, the Brotherhood as a government is proving potentially more repressive despite having been an oppositional force for decades.

The Brotherhood's ideology, which apologists for it on the left continue to ignore, is openly hostile to trade union rights; it counts women literally as worth half a man; it believes in an autocratic religious state in which non-Islamic minorities can be persecuted; it believes in suppressing free expression and a free press particularly if it dares to criticise Islam and the Islamists claim to government. And it now has a powerful civilian militia, prepared to go into violent confrontation with those who oppose it.

Trust in the Brotherhood's credibility as a revolutionary

Continued on page 14

The Brotherhood and the unions

By Harry Glass

The Mursi regime is attempting to "Brotherhood-ise" the trade union movement, using the law, the old ETUF labour front and the Ministry of Manpower.

When Mursi granted himself sweeping powers on 22 November, his first decree was Law 97/2012. This decree amended Trade Union Law 35/1976 with provisions allowing the Ministry of Manpower to appoint replacements for the state-controlled ETUF labour front's board members over the age of 60. Furthermore, Mursi also postponed ETUF elections for another six months, although these elections had already been delayed for a year. The ETUF claims 4.5 million members.

The great hope of the Egyptian revolution — the working class movement — is under attack. Independent union organisations like the EFITU and the Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress (EDLC) have recruited thousands of new members and established hundreds of new unions. Together they claim a membership of over 2.5 million workers. In October the EFITU and EDLC sought to merge their unions into one unified structure and are also coordinating their efforts as the National Front for the Defense of Labor Rights and Union Liberties.

While the exact figures for industrial action are still being tallied, well over 150 strikes were reported in 2012, along with more than 2,000 worker protests and sit-ins across Egypt. Nearly one million workers are reported to have embarked on industrial action during 2012.

There were an estimated 3,000 strikes during the first decade of this century. They helped topple Mubarak, and show where the counter-power to Mursi is located.

Continued from page 13

force had been on the wane since 25 January 2011. They were reluctant to give any support to the street protests that brought down Mubarak. They attempted to do deals with SCAF after his downfall. On the issues of the treatment of the Christian minority, of workers, and of women by SCAF they were silent (if not openly supportive of SCAF).

Yet the violent attack on protesters outside the Presidential Palace after 5 December 2012 took many revolutionaries by surprise.

Gigi Ibrahim (@Gsquare86 on Twitter) tweeted at the time "Honestly, I never imagined to become this bad with Ikhwan [the Brotherhood], still in shock about the amount of vicious violent attacks on protesters".

Dragging, beating and interrogating protesters under the approving eye of Egyptian security, the Brotherhood militias attempted to force them to say they had been paid by opposition figures such as El Baradei. Almost all the ten killed were protesters against Mursi, but that didn't stop the regime claiming that it was their supporters who had been killed, a lie taken in wholesale by much of the western press such as the *Guardian* editors. Rightly Gigi Ibrahim and others referred to these attacks as the work of fascists.

Recent reports (such as this one, from the *Egypt Independent*, <http://bit.ly/UrSpWx>) indicate that the Brotherhood have started illegally practicing torture on their opponents whilst the Central Security Forces look on approvingly.

CLERICAL FASCISTS

The Brotherhood have been categorised in the pages of this paper for many years as a clerical fascist movement.

Like any fascist movement they only become popular with capitalist and imperialist interests if state forces feel unable to defeat dissent. In such circumstances fascists can do what the state cannot do.

They can challenge revolutionary democrats organising on the street. They can permeate civil society, identify and neutralise their enemies. With a popular force welded together with reactionary ideas, in the Ikhwan's case the creation of an authoritarian Islamic state and the rule of Sharia, they can demoralise those who feel that all that stands between them and victory is a small privileged elite in society and the state. Ultimately, if they take full power, they can ruthlessly eliminate and silence their opponents with a completeness not even military regimes can match.

Egypt is not yet a fascist state. Such a frightening prospect may not be far off. First, however, the Brotherhood faces a number of problems.

Egypt's ruling class has long held the Muslim Brotherhood in disdain. The Brotherhood's international politics, particularly their anti-Semitism, have been an embarrassment. Their

ideology has elements of medievalism unproductive to a modern capitalist economy. The Egyptian ruling class is educated and extensively "westernised" and culturally at odds with the Brotherhood.

Just as in pre-1979 Iran, the Islamists and the associated religious figures very much appear as a historical relic. They had been periodically rounded up and imprisoned by Mubarak as well as by his predecessors, Nasser and Sadat. Many ruling-class figures have never been considered them credible as the leading force in a capitalist state.

An alliance with Islamists has not been an easy step for the Egyptian ruling class. Although Mursi has taken action to limit the military's power (last August), the military high command is still phenomenally powerful both in the personnel in charge, and the capital and wealth they have accumulated.

Mursi has gone some way to assuage their fears. For example, the new Egyptian constitution grants the military the autonomy that Field Marshal Tantawi and Chief of Staff Lt. General Sami Ennan sought during the SCAF period.

The military budget is shielded from public view; the military dominates the National Defence Council; and the defence policy remains the exclusive realm of the military. This is a sop to the military and their US government backers, who have provided year-on-year approximately \$2.5 billion in direct military aid.

The removal of Tantawi as Head of the Armed Forces and Mursi's replacement of him with a suspected Brotherhood supporter, General Abdel Fattah al Sissi, did not lead to dissent in the military — a possible indicator of some degree of Brotherhood penetration of the military as well as a softening of attitudes from the military to the MB.

CONFIDENCE

However any further extension of Brotherhood control would risk the developing mutual confidence of the former military rulers and the current Islamist ones.

The Egyptian ruling class are not yet convinced that the restriction of the Brotherhood's social policies on their own lives are worth the potential economic benefits to them of an intimidated and shackled working-class movement that the Islamists might provide.

Fascist movements have always required centralism and discipline to be successful. They are not bonded by a democratically-decided rational common interest. They need to do drastic tactical reversals without questions asked. They need to demonstrate to the capitalist class that they can maintain discipline — that the future they offer is not as disordered as the chaos they promise to overcome. Discipline, discipline, discipline; order, order, order; profit, profit, profit.

At the moment the Brotherhood cannot offer that. In fact, the tactical switches on foreign policy and Israel, on relationships with the military and the remnants of the Mubarak regime, have so far resulted in greater divisions in the wider Islamist movement. The relations between the Brotherhood and various salafist groups have worsened.

The main Salafist party, Nour, looks to be in decline and is splintering. For the Brotherhood it has served its purpose. Whilst it pulled some votes away from the Brotherhood, it pulled many more Islamic fundamentalists, who had previously abstained from politics, into political activity.

As Nour divides it is throwing up a dangerous new force the Hazemoun, militia forces around Salafist preacher Hazem Abu Ismail.

In retaliation for the December protests the Hazemoun attempted to blockade Media City, the area in Cairo from which foreign correspondents reported, usually unfavourably, the killings by the Brotherhood militias outside the Presidential Palace. In the last few weeks the Hazemoun have even stormed cafes and intimidated women who were dressed immodestly by their sharia standards. Hazem Abu Ismail has openly propagated the need for violent attacks on secular revolutionary forces.

Now the vice chair of the Nour party has quit that party to form a new party, Al Watan, with Abu Ismail.

Ismail reportedly has the support of Al Qaeda's Ayman Al Zawahiri.

The nightmare scenario for democratic and socialist revolutionaries would be the coalescence of the Brotherhood militias with those of Hazemoun whilst the Brotherhood uses its governmental position to shape the political relationship with and reassure the old ruling elements and imperialism.

However, the US would not want Mursi developing a closer relationship with Abu Ismail and that will stymie such a development, for now.

Abu Ismail portrays his forces as defending the President rather than attacking him as a compromiser. However he continues to demand an end to Egypt's peace treaty with Israel and to call for a law making it mandatory for women to wear veils and defining the marriage age as "puberty".

The first of these would be difficult for Mursi to grant and continue to enjoy US support. But child marriage and the compulsory wearing of the veil may be easier. It would lead to mass protests, but if Hazem Abu Ismail has the opportunity of violently taking them on and intimidating them with tacit government and military support, that might prove attractive to the Brotherhood. They know that they are unlikely to enjoy future electoral success unless the spirit of the democratic movement is broken.

Even if Mursi's government and allies were able to put down the street protests of the left, that would not necessarily mean that they have won. The next major confrontation is set to be 25 January, the second anniversary of the revolution's start. It looks as though a protest planned by government opponents will be declared illegal.

WEAPONS

The bourgeois opposition around ElBaradei and Moussa have few weapons other than street demonstrations, and direct or indirect negotiations with Mursi using their contacts with the US and the Egyptian state machine as pressure.

The west's influence on Mursi does not appear to be working much for them — both are now being investigated by Mursi's agents on a potential charge of treason.

But workers have other potential weapons, based on organisation in their communities and workplaces. Even if the Islamists were able to blockade Tahrir and central Cairo from oppositional gatherings, workers could still assert their power through strikes and defend themselves within their local communities from attacks by the Islamist militias and police.

The preparedness within the workers movement for it to take such a lead in opposition is unclear. There is an understandable reluctance to play second fiddle to forces they believe take them for granted and are not attuned to their concerns. Occasional demands for a general strike made by some of the oppositional forces without considering the precise conditions of the trade unions have not always been considered helpful.

However, in the lead up to the referendum an interesting development took place in Mahalla, the major centre of trade union radicalism in Egypt.

On 7 December 2012 several thousand met in the town centre and proclaimed a "Republic of Greater Mahalla" independent of the government in Cairo. The declaration seems somewhat of a gesture but it is still a hopeful development.

The involvement in the initiative of some major trade union figures such as Kamal Abbas of the CTUWS and EDLC and Mahalla workers' leader Sayyid Habib shows that alternatives to the monotonic demands from the democratic opposition for protests exclusively in the form of demonstrations are being thought about.

There is little doubt that, if they could, the Islamists would crush the new trade union movements and take away any power they have been able to build up.

Mursi could use the continuing economic crisis to scapegoat trade unions and democratic social forces. Inevitably, as economic crises continue alongside political uncertainty, right-wing arguments to restore authority and order will gain support from not only from the Egyptian capitalists and US and other imperialist interests but also from despairing petty-bourgeois elements in Egypt.

Any belief that the trade unions can gradually build up their strength under a Brotherhood government would be foolish. The trade unions need to plan to defend themselves and create an alternative form of government as a matter of urgency.

Genuine popular democratic forces need to be built very quickly and need to be strong enough to defend themselves from authoritarian and sectarian threats as well as have the ability to create a government that will create jobs and promote social justice.

The left internationally needs to warn loud and clear about the threat from the Brotherhood. It must make solidarity with the new Egyptian labour movement, making direct links and help it to thrive.

This labour movement is the best guarantor not only of workers' rights but of democratic liberties in the face of the threat from the Islamists.

The left and Islamism

For many years sections of the left, most clearly the SWP in the UK, operated on a principle that Islamism, particularly in Egypt but also elsewhere, was a movement with which revolutionary socialists could form meaningful alliances.

The SWP, in sharp reversal of the traditional socialist approach, coined the slogan "with the Islamists sometimes".

Implicit in this perspective was the belief that many of these "anti-imperialist" Islamic activists would fuse with socialists in a sustained anti-capitalist revolutionary movement. The last two years in Egypt have confirmed that this was a completely false perspective, which did nothing to prepare the socialist and workers' movement for what the Islamists are now doing.

Other than isolated individuals perhaps once attracted to Islamism, there has been no breakaway to the left from Islamism.

If there is a likely potential "anti-imperialist" breakaway from mainstream Egyptian Islamism, judged solely by opposition to the state of Israel, it would be a right-wing, indeed openly fascist, breakaway.

Its "anti-imperialism" in respect to Israel would not be based on fighting for the national rights of Palestinians, but on the anti-Semitic aim of driving Jews out of a future Middle Eastern Islamic state.

Sack the agency, not the workers!

By a **Tubeworker supporter**

33 Tube workers face unemployment unless a battle to save their jobs is successful.

The workers are employed by the Trainpeople agency and work on London Underground stations, with full LU training and wearing LU uniforms.

Some of them have worked on the Tube for over five years, and have even been used to train new staff. But on 19 December, Trainpeople told them LU would not be renewing their contracts and that they would have no new work as of 16 January. The background to the sackings is the arrival of fifteen new directly-employed staff onto the Wembley Central stations group (north of Queens Park on the Bakerloo Line), where the Trainpeople staff work. The Trainpeople workers were not given equal opportunity to apply for these vacancies, despite being entitled to do so. Trainpeople workers' applications to previous recruitments had been blocked or rejected en

masse in favour of people with less experience.

The workers' union, the Rail, Maritime, and Transport union (RMT), has opposed the use of agency labour on the Tube and has argued for the workers to be taken in-house. Trainpeople have been used by London Underground since 2007 despite a dispute settlement in 2008 that the use of agency staff would last a maximum of six months.

The 33 Trainpeople workers are now engaged in a desperate fight for their jobs, against a management that sees workers as expendable commodities to be picked up and tossed aside at will.

A demonstration at Wembley Central station on Monday 7 February drew support from other LU staff as well as local community campaigns and Labour Party figures.

Many of the Trainpeople workers have become involved with the rank-and-file Tubeworker bulletin, and they produced a special issue of the bulletin to explain and publicise their campaign to other LU workers.

Trainpeople workers speak out

"I have been working for London Underground Limited (LUL) on behalf of Trainpeople for over four years, on the Wembley Central Group on the Bakerloo Line and Kew Gardens and Gunnersbury Stations on the District Line.

On 19 December 2012, I got an email from Trainpeople management explaining that there will be no more work with Trainpeople for LUL from 16 January, but also that I

was offered no shifts from 5 January.

I have my bills, rent, and retired parents to look after. Now that LUL and Trainpeople have made us redundant and I have got no other means of income, it has depressed and stressed me.

I feel like there is no place for good and hard working people in this world. This is what we get for working hard for LUL for over four years.

I now have sleepless

nights worrying about my job."

"On 16 January I will be forced out of a job that I have worked and loved for the past five years.

I have transformed my life by working hard and earning honest money. Myself and my husband have been married for the past ten years, trying to have a child. Due to medical reasons, we have had to seek the help of private fertility clinics and we all know that costs an arm and a leg. I have applied for a directly-employed Customer Service Assistant job on LU twice and been told I am not good enough to do the job I am already doing.

The feeling of knowing I was financially secure has been taken away from me. The thought of me seeking help for my basic needs through the government makes me lose hope.

I am a hard-working citizen who wants to be given the chance to better my family's life."

• More: workersliberty.org/tubeworker

Drivers defect from USDAW

A retail distribution driver spoke to *Solidarity* about recent moves by workers to break from the retail union USDAW and join Unite.

AWL has criticised USDAW's role as a collaborationist and sell-out union in the retail sector.

However, we do not have a formal policy of advocating or supporting breakaways from majority/recognised unions, and relate to particular cases on an individual basis. We publish this report for information.

Over 150 members of USDAW at the Sainsbury's distribution centre in Sherburn-in-Elmet, Leeds (operated by Wincanton), have rebelled by defecting to another union – Unite.

Concern with USDAW included ballot fixing allegations, union reps being removed for spurious reasons, and a union rep being appointed without a ballot. USDAW ignored a letter from 80 members raising these issues.

The situation has also been exacerbated by USDAW members and former members receiving threatening letters from USDAW.

This has left USDAW with a minority membership and Unite with a majority membership in the Transport Department.

USDAW is the recognised union at the huge Sainsbury's distribution centre in Sherburn-in-Elmet, Leeds. They were given recognition voluntarily almost five years ago when the site opened. In return for recognition, USDAW agreed to opt-out of the road transport 10-hour night work limit for drivers, which has resulted in HGV Drivers working excessively long hours on nights.

USDAW also signed away the right to strike for all workers at Sherburn.

Reinstate Dave Muritu!

By **Darren Bedford**

Halesowen College maths lecturer Dave Muritu, also the secretary of the University and College Union at the college, was sacked on 20 December (the last working day before Christmas) following what the union has called a "kangaroo court".

The college claims Dave was sacked for poor results, despite his results being above the national average. The entire disciplinary hearing was conducted in breach of the college's own procedure, with no evidence against Dave submitted in advance. Three other lectur-

ers and union activists in Dave's department are now also facing similarly spurious disciplinary charges.

A statement from local supporters of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts said: "As the college has not submitted any evidence of any wrong doing by Dave Muritu, the only logical conclusion which can be drawn is that he was targeted for trade union work."

The UCU is planning a strike to defend the four victimised lecturers. The NCAFC has committed to mobilising student support.

• Sign the petition in support of Dave at <http://chn.ge/X6CazL>

Civil servants' strike ballot

By **Ollie Moore**

Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) members in the Department for Work and Pensions will strike on 21 January if a ballot, which closes on 10 January, returns a yes vote.

The immediate context for the ballot is the announcement of 43 compulsory redundancies, but the potential strike comes against a backdrop of a much wider set of attacks against DWP workers. DWP sites, including Job Centres, face cuts, and the automation of various benefits processes also threatens jobs. Workers at the

DWP Social Fund also face what the union calls "an uncertain future", with the Fund due for abolition in April 2013.

A strong turnout, a high yes vote, and a solid strike on 21 January are all essential if the campaign is to maintain momentum and grow. But the union's strategy is part of a familiar pattern which has not, to say the least, returned many successes.

BULLETIN

In our bulletin for the 30 November 2012 civil servants' day of action, Workers' Liberty wrote:

"There is a pattern developing in PCS disputes. From a standing start members are balloted on industrial action; a ballot is won, usually on a turnout of below 35%; a one-day strike is announced which may or may not happen; the next action after the one day strike, if there is any at

all, takes place months after the first one; in the meantime no real information is given to members as to what is happening; the dispute either fades with no conclusion or it is subsumed into another dispute. This approach has delivered little in concrete gains. We need to be bolder."

It will take much more than the one-day strike workers are now voting on to stop the attacks. Although the ballot also includes an overtime ban, far more sustained, creative, and diverse action than a tokenistic one-day protest strike is necessary.

Workers' Liberty members working in the civil service are active in the PCS Independent Left, which has been advocating a strategy based on rolling and selective strikes, with strike pay levied to fund sustained action.



Cleaners' round-up online:

tinyurl.com/cleanersroundup

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Organising against gender violence

By Hannah Thompson

Up to 800 people protested outside the Indian High Commission in London to demand justice for Jyoti Singh Pandey, the victim of a brutal gang rap in Delhi.

The protest was organised by Southall Black Sisters. Chants include “women’s tradition: struggle not submission!”, and “don’t blame women for rape!”

Rahila Gupta of Southall Black Sisters said: “We are here today to show solidarity with Indian women; their struggle is our struggle. We are here to shame the Indian government into taking action. Notions of shame and honour are used to control women’s behaviour; we’re here to say to the Indian government that you have done nothing about your unsafe cities, your streets and your homes where women are concerned.”

There have also been protests against gender violence in Nepal. Shreya Paudel, a Nepali socialist who is president of Middle-

sex University Students’ Union, spoke to *Solidarity*.

“There have been protests in Nepal under the name ‘Occupy Baluwatar’ — Baluwatar is the area of Kathmandu where the prime minister’s residence is.

“The problem of gender violence and social injustice has always been there in South Asia, like elsewhere in the world. But now it has been taken up strongly by the media but also in the consciousness of ordinary people. That is certainly the case in Nepal, and as you can tell from the name of the protest this is a sort of global, internationalist consciousness too.

WRONG

“Any woman or man, girl or boy, being raped is equally wrong.

“However, there are sometimes symbolic cases which rise to the surface. The main case that sparked the protests in Nepal was Sita Rai, a migrant worker returning from the Middle East, who after being held for a technical glitch at Tribhuvan International

Airport was first robbed and then raped by a policeman with the help of government officials

“Many, many Nepali workers go to the Middle East to work and this is one reason her case has provoked widespread sympathy. It has also clashed with the bourgeois idea that the police are supposed to protect us all equally — people are shocked that she was attacked by public officials who were supposedly there to protect her.

“In November and December, there were also three other cases, all of which actually involved murder. Saraswati Subedi, a domestic worker, died under suspicious circumstances. Bindu Thakur and Shiwa Hashmi were burnt alive in what seem to be so-called honour killings. In all three cases the authorities are being highly obstructive.

“It’s true that in India the class element was the other way round — a middle-class woman attacked by working-class men — and this was a big factor in how it was taken up, particu-

larly by the media. But there are similarities there too.

“One factor was that the attack was in Delhi: if it had happened in a poor rural area, we as internationalists would care, but probably no one much would have noticed. In Nepal too, Sita Rai was attacked near Kathmandu in Nepal’s only international airport. If it had been in a rural area it would have been a different story, or not a story at all.

“In Nepal, like in India, protests are often hijacked by political parties. That is not so much the case this time. The movement here is quite ‘organic’. In Nepal the protests are organised very much by young people, many of them students, with a lot of use of the internet and social media. In London, for sure, the other people organising with me are not particularly political. For sure these protests are creating a new generation of activists in Nepal, which is also evident in our solidarity protest here in London.

“Occupy Baluwatar is continuing. It’s good to make direct solidarity — activists in Britain can organise protests, hold meetings, send messages of support. But one important element of solidarity is organising our own struggle against gender and social injustice here too.”

• Vigil against gender violence in Nepal — 2pm, Friday 11 January at the Nepali embassy in London, 12a Kensington Palace Gardens, W8 4QU (Notting Hill Gate, Queensway or High Street Kensington Tube)

• Women’s Fightback meeting: “Domestic violence — a socialist feminist perspective?” Friday 1 February, 7.30pm, ULU, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY

Lewisham hospital fight: march on 26 January, build for a work-in!

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

On 8 January, the Special Administrator released a response to the public “consultation” over his proposals to re-organise south London health services — including closures at Lewisham Hospital.

It acknowledged that it had encountered 96% opposition to the closure of the A&E department... but pledged to carry on with the closure regardless!

The people behind this plan have an undisguised contempt for the people of Lewisham. We cannot let them shut our services.

On 4 February, Secretary of State Jeremy Hunt will make his announcement in response to the recommendations of Trust Special Administrator Matthew Kershaw.

Kershaw has recommended the closure of Lewisham Hospital A&E, maternity and urgent care units and children’s wards and elderly care in response to massively unjust Private Finance Initiative (PFI) debts in South London Health Trust.

Kershaw also recommends clearing 60% of the hospital site, at a huge loss of £35 million, as well as £100 million cuts to services in Greenwich, Bexley and Bromley.

PFI deals are bankrupting health trusts across the country. The attacks on Lewisham Hospital are spearheading the Tory / Lib-Dem attacks on the NHS across the country. Equally the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign is showing the way on building a broad community and labour movement based fight-back. In just over three months since Kershaw published his recommendations the campaign has organised a local march of between 10 to 15,000 people, a public rally with around 500 people, a protest at a consultation meeting where Kershaw

was speaking with several hundred people protesting their opposition, regular weekly stalls on high streets throughout the borough and a vigil outside the hospital on a freezing cold evening in December with more than 200 people.

Local people are very angry about the threat of closure and the campaign is full of determined campaigners. Many are new to such work. All understand the importance of this fight, not only for Lewisham and south London but for the NHS as a whole.

STRIDE

If the Government is successful at closing Lewisham Hospital, it will confidently stride forward to attack other Trusts around the country.

Just days before Hunt announces his decision, the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign has called another demonstration on Saturday 26 January, assembling midday at Loampit Vale roundabout (next to Lewisham DLR / rail station).

We are urging all those who oppose the Tory / Lib-Dem attacks on the NHS to join the march, sign the 100 foot petition and sign up to the campaign to Save Lewisham Hospital which will continue to fight until the threat of cuts and closures is defeated.

Join the campaign: to get involved or to find out what’s going on or how you can help visit our website.

We need regular help with the leafleting, stalls on high streets, at train stations etc, artwork, ideas etc.

The campaign meets weekly to plan and coordinate activities and welcomes anyone who opposes the closure.

• savelewishamhospital.com
• Download the latest *Lewisham Hospital Worker*, AWL’s workplace bulletin, from workersliberty.org/bulletins