

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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Thousands refuse to pay "Bedroom Tax"

By Dave Kirk

Less than two months into the operation of the "Bedroom Tax", it appears that a very large proportion of social tenants hit by it are refusing to pay, often because they are simply unable.

Inside Housing magazine reports on a number of Housing Associations and Councils with a massive rate of non-payment of the rent deficits which the bedroom tax aims to compel tenants to cover.

The Riverside Housing Association in Liverpool has around half of its 6,193 affected tenants not paying.

Wakefield Council say 42% of its 3,000 affected tenants are not paying.

Two-thirds of the 7,350 tenants of Glasgow and Cube Housing Associations have underpaid. Some

Housing Associations are citing non-payment as a real threat to their survival.

There was a 338% increase in the number of people applying for Discretionary Housing Payments in April.

The tax is causing untold misery behind closed doors throughout the country as people decide whether to not pay and take the risk, or cut other essentials to pay the amount. A glimpse of the effect is shown by the case of Stephanie Bottrill.

The 53 year-old from Solihull committed suicide, and

in the note left to her children cited the government as the cause of her distress. Her son Steven said: "She was fine before this Bedroom Tax. It was dreamt up in London, by people in offices and big houses. They have no idea the effect it has on people like my mum."

Whilst we must be careful about attributing one cause to someone who decides to kill themselves, this "tax" is causing real pain to hundreds of thousands of people right now.

Ten households have

raised a legal challenge in the High Court against the policy for discriminating against the disabled or against people who have suffered domestic violence.

We cannot rely on legal challenges or non-payment by individuals alone to defeat the policy. We need the labour movement as whole to fight alongside those who are not paying by kicking bailiffs off estates if necessary but also by demanding councils and housing associations re-classify rooms and make a firm commitment to refuse to evict.

A key demand is for the Labour Party to get off its knees and commit its councils to refuse to evict anyone who falls behind on payments as a result of the tax. It must also commit to abolish the tax if elected in 2015.

Bad precedent

By Ruben Lomas

The Victoria branch of the construction section of Australia's big CFMEU union has been found guilty of contempt of court after it failed to comply with "restraining orders" issued to prevent it blockading construction sites in Melbourne in August and September 2012.

The sites (the Myer Emporium site and the Footscray site) were operated by construction company Grocon. CFMEU's grievance related to issues of health and safety on the

sites.

Grocon now plans to sue the CFMEU for \$10.5 million in damages for money it lost during the blockades to Myer Emporium, Footscray, and two other sites.

The court ruling sets a worrying precedent for the case of Bob Carnegie, a labour movement activist currently facing charges of contempt of court for his role in organising solidarity with a construction workers' protest in Brisbane during a similar period.

• bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com

Workers' Liberty ran a stall at the Fête de Lutte Ouvrière (18-20 May), the largest gathering of the revolutionary left in Europe. Despite consistently bad weather, we sold literature and ran a forum on the campaign to defend our comrade Bob Carnegie. For a fuller report, see bit.ly/lofete2013

Fight to save ULU is on!

On Wednesday 22 May, around 100 students marched in the middle of exam term to protest the decision of university management to abolish the University of London Union (ULU).

The demonstration was loud and visible, and was boosted by the presence of a solidarity delegation from Sussex University, where activists are involved in a militant struggle against the outsourcing of 235 jobs.

Outside Senate House, the marchers heard from speakers including ULU Vice President and Workers' Liberty member, Daniel Cooper, ULU President Michael Chessum (pictured left), the incoming ULU Women's Office, Susuana Antubam, and activists from Goldsmiths and Sussex.

After the demonstration, around 50 students met for an open meeting to launch a broad-based student campaign to Save ULU. Another open meeting is planned for 12 June in ULU.

Veteran French Trotskyist Jean-Michel Krivine died on 14 May. Read obituaries here: bit.ly/krivineberger

400ppm: climate barbarism or socialism!

By Paul Hampton

May 2013 will probably count as a significant turning point in the struggle to tackle dangerous climate change.

Earlier this month at the Maura Loa Observatory in Hawaii the global carbon dioxide concentration briefly hit 400 parts per million (ppm) for the first time.

This is not any old threshold at any old observatory. Maura Loa has taken consistent readings since 1958, when the carbon dioxide concentration was 315ppm. That means it has increased by a quarter in half a century. In the early 1960s the annual increase was 0.7ppm. Now it is 2.1ppm per annum — three times as fast.

The IPCC's fourth report in 2007 estimated that the global atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide increased from a pre-industrial value of about 280 to 379ppm in 2005. The last time the earth reached a 400ppm concentration — some four million years ago — northern Canada was covered in jungle and sea level was 30 metres

higher than at present. Whilst values sawtooth during the year, the direction of travel is clear.

The planet is already heading away from the "goldilocks" zone which has sustained life for countless millennia. The Stern review said 450ppm was the limit to aim for by 2050. At this rate the limit will be breached well before 2040. NASA climate scientist James Hansen believes 350ppm is the safe limit. Already floods, droughts, storms and heatwaves are afflicting the ecology.

WARNINGS

Despite these warnings, global emissions from fossil fuels continue to grow.

The International Energy Agency's World Energy Outlook registers a resurgence in oil and gas production, spurred by unconventional sources such as tar sands and hydraulic fracturing (known as fracking), with coal demand growing faster than renewables.

Contemporary climate change politics, dominated by neoliberal and ecological modernisation framings, has reached an

impasse. The efforts of national states to secure a global agreement stalled at Copenhagen in 2009 and have barely gone further ever since.

The suggestion last week by the Chinese government that it plans to reduce emissions from 2016 is a small sign of hope. But at present, no deal to reduce emissions is close.

The central market solution developed over the last decade (the European Union's emissions trading scheme) has hit rocket bottom. The plan was to set a "carbon price" through issuing permits to heavy industry, as an incentive to invest in less polluting sources of energy. The net result so far has been the over-issue of free permits, leading to the undulation and now collapse of the carbon price, while generating billions of profits for fossil fuel giants.

Recent technological breakthroughs have not had an impact. In fact, the main technological drives have been towards ever-deeper drilling for oil and gas. By contrast carbon capture and storage, on which the IPCC put a high premium, has not been per-

fectured and rolled out on a scale necessary. Nuclear technologies that burn waste products without high carbon emissions similarly remain technically possible but not yet widely operative. Progress with offshore wind technology continues, but fewer breakthroughs are visible to assist the spread of solar and tidal power, which could provide renewable energy at low cost.

PLANS

In short, none of the bosses in the energy and finance industries, nor their representatives at the head of states and multilateral institutions, have come up with any significant plan to tackle climate change.

Twenty five years after they turned their attention to it, and two dozen years since the Kyoto protocol, extreme energy remains hegemonic, emissions are accelerating and extreme weather is already manifesting itself across the globe.

The result is widespread demoralisation of the climate movement and the dithering of environmental NGOs and Green Parties

linked to larger or smaller capitals. The elitist, scientific climate discourse has failed to grapple with the systemic social and power relations that give rise to global warming and climate denial continues to impede efforts. Capital has simply failed the climate challenge.

What is needed in this situation is a working class-based climate movement. It requires socialists to articulate a critique of the systemic causes of climate change and the inherent limits of capital's approach. It necessitates an orientation to the labour movement, aimed at mobilising workers who are the immediate victims of exploitation and environmental degradation and so have a direct material interest in campaigning around climate change.

The organised labour movement also has immense social, economic and political power to deploy against capital. First of all that means transforming the existing trade union movement, sloughing off the pedestrian, pro-capitalist partnership approach of many union leaderships and mobilising union reps

for climate action. It means championing efforts like the Vestas occupation in 2009, in which workers' direct action became a magnet for solidarity.

A working-class movement will have to challenge capital's ownership and control of the means of production, which in the hands of capital are simultaneously the means of climate destruction. Social ownership and workers' control of the major energy firms (as well as the big banks that finance big energy) is a burning necessity to get to grips with climate change. Climate-related employment is also the direct answer to the economy mired in economic stagnation.

There is huge scope for forming alliances between the labour movement and climate activists. This includes support for and work with anti-fracking and anti-tar sands campaigns, which are taking on the extreme energy agenda. Climate campaigning cannot be a desirable add-on for the left.

It is either an integral part of the struggle for socialism, or we face a future of climatic barbarism.

Four-month car strike wins concessions

On 17 May, workers at the PSA Aulnay car factory near Paris ended a four-month strike over plans to close the factory. They did not stop the closure, but they won many concessions. Below is the editorial of the Aulnay bulletin of the French revolutionary-socialist group L'Étincelle for 21 May 2013.

The end-of-strike agreement just signed does not mean the end of our struggle, quite the contrary. This was the first round. Many new developments may occur between now and 2014. [The factory is due to shut on 31 December 2013.]

By opposing management's closure plan for four months, we have not only raised our heads, but led a determined strike which had impact throughout the country. A popular strike, as shown by the 800,000 euros collected in

solidarity. A strike that warmed the hearts of tens of thousands of workers who had their eyes on us, and that worried the bosses and the government that supports them.

The agreement eliminates all sanctions against the militants of the strike: the social amnesty, which the government refuses to pass into law, we have won in practice by our struggle! This achievement alone, limited though it may be, made it possible for us to suspend the strike head high, while saving our determination for the future.

The agreement does not solve anything in substance: during the coming months, those who have faced the "freeloaders" and led all the actions will continue to mobilise and might be joined by all those who may not have been on strike yet, but now feel betrayed by the management. PSA is not immune to new

outbursts of anger!

There is the situation in Aulnay, but also in the rest of PSA, with the so-called competitiveness agreements (called "performance agreement" in the group), the job cuts, and the pressure for allegedly voluntary departures. These will require new re-

sponses, and not just in PSA.

Across the country, companies are continuing to close, layoffs are proliferating. We must not resign ourselves to scattered responses. Our four-month strike and the popularity of our movement gave us quite an experience. We knew how to prepare for months before the strike, we succeeded in uniting the most determined workers from one production unit to another, and then went on strike, elaborating and making our decisions in a strike committee and in general assemblies, while organising actions outside the plant.

We got an extremely warm welcome from other workers during our visits to Saint-Ouen, Flins, Cleon, the cargo section of Charles-de-Gaulle airport, Geodis, Lear and elsewhere.

Many bonds can be cre-

ated and structured. We must therefore consider what will come next.

In the same way that we coordinated the combative minorities of the different workshops within the factory, we can do it outside, by seeking to coordinate the efforts of all those who, in the recent months, have fought as they could against their boss, as well as of those who will in the future.

The general strike, which will change the balance of power and will force the employers to step back, will not happen miraculously. It will require workers who have been at the forefront of the struggle — as in Aulnay (but also in other forms, Sanofi, Candia, Arcelor, DMI, Freescale, Ford and others) — wanting to initiate the preliminary steps.

We will need to put in place — together with other workers fighting

against their boss — stepping stones for the coordination of these struggles (often very localised and invisible at the national level), allowing their eventual convergence, their extension and ultimately their generalisation. In short, it is now a question of giving a perspective to those who are currently feeling isolated and backed to the wall.

We will therefore need to consider setting up a committee for the struggles and mobilisations with all those who have the same problems than we have, with all those who have responded against dismissals, whether with gatherings, legal actions, demonstrations, walkouts or strikes more or less long.

Stopping redundancies will only be possible if a part of our class coordinates to give the perspective of the convergence of the struggles.

“Anti-imperialism” no excuse to back Assad

The Left
By Mark Osborn



The latest campaign by the Stop the War campaign, the remnant of the group which ten years ago organised big marches against the invasion of Iraq, is to prevent Western intervention in Syria.

An attempt at a major public meeting on the issue, held in London on 21 May, attracted only 50 people.

This was a meeting organised by leftists (Counterfire and Socialist Action) to oppose Western intervention in Syria... at which no platform speaker was willing to criticise the disgusting Syrian regime. They say: “our duty is to build a movement against Western intervention.” But, even if such an initiative made sense as an immediate priority, what makes combining opposition to intervention with championing freedom and democracy problematic?

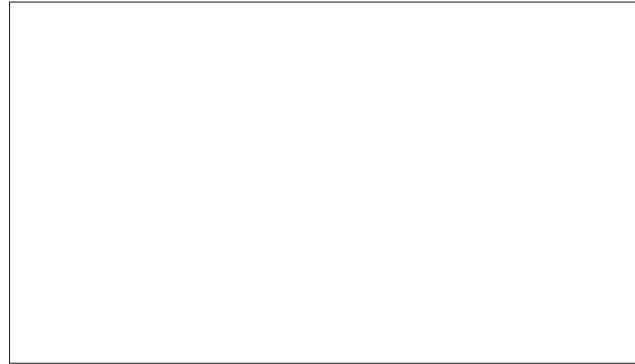
Only that Counterfire has made a political choice not to criticise Assad’s filthy regime. Why? Because in this war Counterfire and Socialist Action are effectively siding with the regime.

Stop the War’s organisers are seriously politically disorientated. And that leaves them sharing platforms with a ridiculous Stalinist, Kamal Majid, and a Syrian academic, Issa Chaer, who when interviewed by the Iranian state’s propaganda outlet, Press TV, said, “I see President Assad as the person who is now uniting the country from all its backgrounds, all factions and all political backgrounds... anybody who calls for President Assad to step down at this stage; would be causing Syria an irreversible destruction.”

Majid’s reasons to oppose Western intervention in Syria are, from a genuinely left-wing perspective, senseless.

He says: the US wants to overthrow the regime of Bashar Assad. Don’t we all? Apparently not. Majid thinks this would be a bad thing.

The American dilemma is rational: they want Assad to go, and replaced by some sort of stability, but don’t know how to get it. They are worried that intervention might embroil them in an expensive, bloody war — like in Iraq or Afghanistan — and end with Syria falling to pieces in sectarian slaughter. They are alarmed by the rising Islamists. So



Stop the War used this cartoon on its publicity

they try to negotiate a new government. But that too is problematic because Assad hangs on, and the Russians and Iranians continue to back Assad.

Majid says: the US and Europe want to intervene to grab Syrian oil and gas. Yes, the EU was the biggest customer for Syrian oil before the civil war and sanctions. But if the US and EU simply wanted Syrian oil they could use the normal capitalist mechanism of buying the stuff with cash. Assad would be delighted to hand over oil for dollars.

LEBANON

Another argument is: US wants to get rid of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Invading Syria would not remove Hezbollah, the reactionary, militarised, Shia party from Lebanon.

If the US wanted to remove Hezbollah from Lebanon it would have to invade Lebanon, not Syria! However, Lebanon is one of quite a few countries on the US’s list of “places we do not intend to invade any time soon”.

Of course Hezbollah’s recent turn towards very significant fighting for Assad in the town of Qusair is very alarming. This might be the point at which the civil war spills over the border. An anti-war campaign worthy of the name would oppose Hezbollah, not seek to protect them. Counterfire won’t do that because Hezbollah oppose the US and Israel and so are to be considered “on our side”.

The final argument is: US wants to remove Assad because it

intends to invade Iran. The cartoon used by Stop the War shows Uncle Sam vaulting from Libya to Syria to Iran, bringing democracy. Much is wrong with US policy, but not that it wants democracy in Libya, Syria and Iran. Stop the War presents itself as the group which opposes democracy.

There are foreign troops in Syria already — Iranian troops. A genuinely anti-imperialist movement would also oppose Russian policy and demand the withdrawal of Hezbollah’s fighters and Iranian troops from Syria.

For STW it is quite a come-down from a million people on the streets against the Iraq war to a couple of dozen cranky Stalinists and fragments from the SWP in the basement of a London college. The reason is that the premise of the meeting — that the US is about to invade or bomb Syria, and that the main issue for us in Syria is stopping the West — is nonsense.

Indeed, if the US is eagerly looking to use its troops and planes, it has a funny way of going about it. It is now over two years since the uprising in Syria began and — despite plenty of regime outrages that could be cited as justification, and pressure from some on the American right — Obama has shown no appetite for a major intervention. He has applied diplomatic pressure favouring the opposition, but has also prevented advanced weaponry getting to the Syrian rebels.

In April US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told the Senate Armed Services Committee, “Military intervention at this point could ... embroil the US in a significant, lengthy and uncertain military commitment.”

US policy has shifted a little recently towards efforts to engage the regime and find a diplomatic process which can end the war. The US is working with the Russians to organise a peace conference in Geneva in June.

Western advocates for lifting the EU arms embargo on weapons for the Syrian opposition see their efforts as strengthening the opposition during negotiations, rather than helping the rebels overrun the state. The BBC comments, British Foreign Minister William Hague, “has argued that partially lifting the EU arms embargo... would complement, rather than work against, the peace process because it would strengthen the opposition’s hand in negotiations with President Assad.”

Unions should stop funding STW’s nasty little rump of a campaign.

Letters



Confronting Stalinism

Martin Thomas is opposed to kicking the Stalinists out of the May Day march in London. “Much better,” he says, “to deal with the Stalinists politically, by mobilisation and argument ...”

He didn’t read my article, at least not until the end. I wrote: “We begin by debating and confronting the Stalinist Left, demolishing their arguments and educating their members and periphery. We fight them on their turf and we fight them seriously. This is a fight over historical memory, over truth, and it is a fight we must win in order to cleanse and revitalise the Left.”

So we agree on that.

Here’s where we disagree: Martin says that the handful of people who carried the massive banners of Stalin at this year’s London May Day event “reckon themselves left-wingers” which is, I think, about as irrelevant a point as one can make in this context.

Who cares what they think about themselves? I have no doubt that all kinds of people with nasty politics “reckon themselves” as having good politics, or even being “socialists”.

What matters is, of course, their actual politics.

Which brings me to the part of Martin’s argument I find

most unappealing: the notion that this infinitesimal group — and I’m speaking in particular of the micro-sect in Britain that carried the very largest banners — “are in fact left-wingers, of a sort” as Martin puts it.

“Of a sort?” He adds: “on the direct struggle of workers against capitalists in Britain or in Turkey”.

In other words, on some historical, theoretical or otherwise meaningless level, they are of course rotten totalitarians. But in “direct struggles” they are — what? Our allies? Surely the AWL doesn’t consider “The Stalin Society” a legitimate part of the British left, or does it?

The counterposing of direct real-world struggles in which groups like the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist) presumably play a positive role with irrelevant, theoretical issues (like democracy) is false and unworthy of the AWL.

The CPGB(M-L), with its dozen or so members, seems to be mostly engaged in trying to win free trips to North Korea, not leading some fight against hospital cuts. The only time in recent memory when they made the news was when Kim’s ambassador to London used their platform to defend his regime’s threats to turn South Korea, Japan and Guam into nuclear wastelands.

The last time I saw the Stalin Society in action was when they handed out an extraordinarily offensive leaflet at a showing of the Polish film “Katyn”. I should re-phrase that: not “they” but “he”; I’m not sure this Society has more than a single member.

A generation or two ago, I’d have understood Martin’s hesitation — I would not have agreed even then, but I’d have understood. Stalin was a revered figure to many decent people right up until his death, and even beyond. The left was unfortunately full of Stalinists.

But today, people who carry his banner on May Day demonstrations in the streets of London represent no one, and serve as a reminder of a disgraceful history for a part of

the left which has already acknowledged that Stalin was a monster and his regime monstrous.

So we agree that Stalinism must be dealt with politically and I welcome any activity that raises awareness of this. But I also think it shows a real lack of political guts to refuse to confront the tiny remnants of Stalin worshippers on the streets, and to tell them — go away, this is not your holiday, you are not part of our left.

Eric Lee, London

One million council homes

It is time for Trotsky’s transitional programme list of demands and the key demand is the building of one million new council houses over four years. This demand was put forward by Owen Jones in *The Independent* recently.

Building one million new council houses over four years answers the question which many workers ask about what a workers’ government would do.

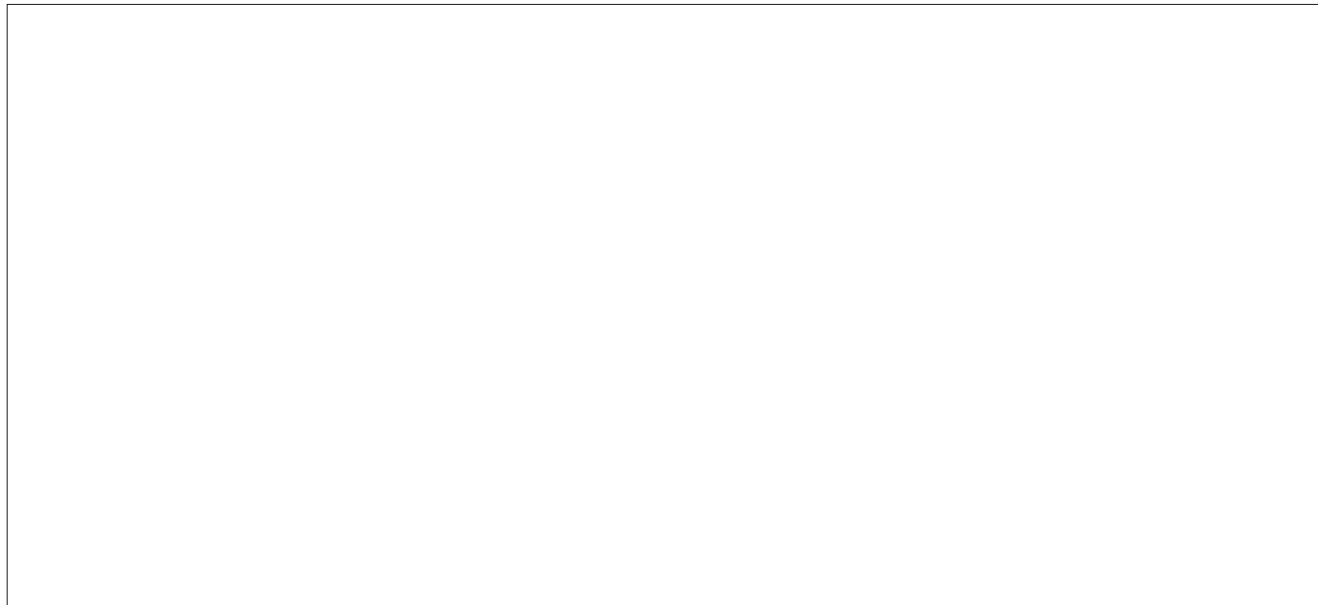
A council house building programme can be achieved under capitalism but raises a whole series of questions about how such a demand can be met.

One answer is to use the £24 billion a year currently paid to private landlords via housing benefit. This has to be linked to the expropriation of the banks, the land, and the building industry.

At the same time, it is necessary to raise the minimum wage to £18,000 a year, followed by the phasing out of housing benefit and tax credits.

Such a demand puts pressure on Ed Miliband to “make Labour fight”, and is the only way of undercutting support for UKIP amongst the most despairing sections of the working class.

John Smithee, Cambridgeshire



The EDL and others will use the Woolwich killing as an opportunity to stoke up racism

Unite against the EDL and Islamism

The murder of an off-duty soldier in Woolwich, in South East London, on 22 May should be unequivocally condemned.

The young men who did it seem to have been ultra-Islamists — supporters of violently reactionary theocratic politics. Islamists — whether ultras or softer varieties — are a threat to many others besides off-duty soldiers.

Islamism is a threat to the working class, in the first instance the Muslim working class. It is also directed against women, LGBT people, atheists and secularists, dissidents and critical-minded people in Muslim-majority countries and in some Muslim communities in countries like Britain.

This killing has ramped up other threats too.

There is a nationalist, racist, far-right backlash under way, championed by the English Defence League, which will violently target a wide range of dark-skinned people living in Britain on the assumption that they “look Muslim”.

There has been an alarming rise in the number of anti-Muslim incidents. These range from shouting in the street to the firebombing of a mosque in Grimsby while people, including children, were inside. After a long period of decline, the EDL has outnumbered anti-fascists twice in the last week (Newcastle and London). Now the BNP has announced it will be demonstrating in South East London too.

The far right campaign feeds off and feeds into a more widespread, “mainstream” hysteria about Muslims and terrorism, playing on the ridiculous and disgusting idea that all or most Muslims are in some way responsible for the actions of the Islamist killers. This in turn interacts with a media promoting sensationalist messages about the threat of terrorism. (The murder — also by brutal stabbing — of an elderly Muslim man, Mohammed Saleem, it seems by a white racist, in Birmingham on 29 April has generated much less and very different coverage.)

AUTHORITARIAN

There will now be an authoritarian state backlash which will target civil liberties and democratic rights in the name of fighting terrorism.

There is talk — pushed by the Labour Party — of extending the “Prevent” strategy to combat “extremism” which the Coalition government cut back when it came to office. The problem with the Labour government’s version of Prevent was that it involved creating a police-orchestrated system of spying in Muslim communities, on Muslim students, etc, while also providing support and funding to “non-violent” but deeply reactionary Muslim organisations.

Labour is also flirting with support for reviving the Communications Data Bill — the “Snooper’s Charter” — which was shelved earlier this year due to Lib Dem opposition. The Bill would give police and security services access, without a warrant, to details of all online communications in the UK, such as the time, duration, originator, recipient and the location of the device from which it was sent. It would also give access to web browsing history and details of messages sent on social media, subject to a warrant from the Home Secretary. The Lib Dems are coming under huge pressure to change their position on this.

The taskforce the government is creating in response to the Woolwich killing may come up with further attacks on democratic rights.

The left needs to stand up for rational thought in the midst of hysteria. We need to oppose attacks on civil liberties. The labour movement should offer to help defend Muslim communities — including the buildings such as mosques, community centres and shops — from EDL demonstrations and racist attacks.

We advocate working-class unity, and help organise anti-racist counter-protests against the likes of the EDL.

University students, the Labour Party and others mobilised to meet a planned EDL protest in York outside the mosque. In the event just four EDLers turned up, were argued with, and were sent away.

Help us raise £15,000

AWL North East London branch is resuming its Sunday film-showings with a screening of the classic Dolly Parton movie 9 to 5 on Sunday 9 June.

The showing takes place from 3-6pm at Menard Hall near Old Street in central London.

Events like this are a good way to raise some money for Workers’ Liberty’s fund appeal, as well as being a good opportunity for comrades to socialise.

Other AWL branches will be organising public events in the run-up to Ideas for Freedom where they’ll be collecting for our appeal. See our website for details and get down to your local meeting.



Help us raise £15,000 by 22 June. 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: £10,904

We raised just £100 in the last fortnight in extra sales and donations. Thanks to Barry.

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

Greek workers still moving left

Sofia Theodoropoulou, an Athens activist of the revolutionary socialist organisation Okde, spoke to AWL members at the Lutte Ouvrière fete near Paris on 18-20 May.

The last elections in Greece, in May and June 2012, showed a big movement to the left in the country. That was expressed in much bigger votes for the left. That shift to the left is still in progress.

Over the months since then we have not seen so many one-day or two-day general strikes, or demonstrations, but we have seen long-running sectoral strikes, weeks or months long, in steel [31 October 2011 to 26 July 2012], in the Athens metro [16-25 January 2013], and among the municipal workers [late 2012 and early 2013]. There has been a very big percentage of popular support for the strike, despite the denunciations of the government and the media.

The shift to the left has also been expressed in the unions. In April there were elections for the national leadership of the Gsee (the private-sector union confederation). For the first time since the end of the military dictatorship in Greece, in 1974, the left won a majority. By "left", I mean Syriza and KKE and some of the far left, not Pasok.

The vote for the Pasok tendency in Gsee collapsed, and the supporters of New Democracy also lost votes. The left vote was over 35%.

However, the left has not strengthened itself as much as that in the base-level unions. [In Greece, a "union" is a workplace, or company, or trade organisation, usually relatively small. Then there are "second-level" unions, local or trade federations of base-level unions; and, at the third level, two confederations, Gsee for the private sector and Adedy for the public sector].

The increase of the number of left activists in the base-level unions has not been so big. There has been an increase in the number of Syriza activists, but only a small one.

Next week there are elections for the second-level union organisation in Athens. I would say that Pasok will definitely lose ground. I would guess that Syriza will show increased support, but the far left may show a smaller share of the vote, partly because there have been big job cuts in the workplaces where Antarsya [a coalition of some left groups] is strong, and partly because some support has shifted from Antarsya to Syriza. In these Athens election, Okde will be running our own list, called "Workers' Fight-back", for the first time.

Elections for the second-level union organisation in Thessaloniki took place in late 2012. The Pasok-supporting tendency declined. Syriza ran a joint list with some ex-Pasok people, and gained ground. The far left gained some representation, including three representatives from Okde. Pasok retained the presidency of the second-level union organisation because KKE withdrew their own candidate and abstained in the vote.

The most important thing has been the long-term strikes, even though they have been only sectoral.

Last July I told you about the coordination of left-wing base-level unions in Athens. There has not been much progress on that. The coordination still does not meet on a regular basis, but convenes only to support particular struggles. Some new efforts were made to support the municipal workers and the metro workers.

The metro workers' union leadership, which is close to Antarsya, called for an open meeting of unions across the city. But the call was not successful. Disagreements on details of approach slowed it down so that there was not enough time to build a committee before the strike ended.

Some ultra-leftists, anarchists and others, are calling for unions to get out of Gsee and Adedy and build new second and third level unions. We believe that is wrong. We say workers should build new first level unions — espe-

cially in the private sector, where 90% of workers have no union, or a union that exists only on paper — and fight within Gsee and Adedy. Trade-union unity is an important strength for the Greek working class.

Some new first-level unions are being built, but at the same time job cuts and closures are weakening or destroying unions, so on balance the organisational basis of the working class is weaker than it was.

The coalition government led by New Democracy [Tory] leader Antonis Samaras is still in office — mainly due to a huge mobilisation of the army. When workers go into struggle in Greece now, they face not only the police, but also the army.

Greece has a part-conscript army [all men have to serve nine months in the armed forces after reaching 18], but as yet we are very far from building organised left influence in the army ranks. That is because the left is not strong enough in Greece generally.

We believe there is value in intervention in the ranks of the army; but as yet we are far from that. Our priority now is self-defence of the workers' movement.

Golden Dawn has increased its profile, but not grown as an organised force. They have not organised a social basis, or strong organisations in neighbourhoods. The state helps create racist and fascist incidents by ghettoising migrants and poor people into certain neighbourhoods, but you can't say that there are fascist neighbourhoods. Whenever the working class starts to mobilise seriously, Golden Dawn disappears.

The government and the right-wing media criticise Golden Dawn, but they also publicise and boost Golden Dawn by way of criticising it.

In July Syriza will hold a congress and the new party will be formed [in place of the old coalition structure of Syriza]. Probably minority tendencies will be banned within the new party. I don't know whether it will be a strict ban or a loose ban which allows left minority tendencies like DEA and Kokkino in fact still to operate, but I don't think that is important because Syriza is moving more and more to the right.

The Syriza leaders have dropped a lot of the things they stood for before the May and June 2012 elections. They no longer say they will cancel the EU/ECB/IMF Memorandum, but that they will renegotiate it. They no longer say that they will refuse payment on Greece's debt, but that they will delay it. More and more the Syriza leaders focus on the prospect of getting a left government at the expense of mass struggles.

And the leaders command a majority inside Syriza of over 60%.

The organised base of Syriza has grown relatively little, although its poll scores remain high. The mass of workers will vote for Syriza even though they do not trust the Syriza leaders.

The policy of the KKE [the diehard-Stalinist Greek Communist Party] is more and more crazy. It is losing members, even leading members, and support in the trade unions. Most of the members who leave KKE go to Syriza, and some to the far left, for example to NAR [the largest group in the Antarsya coalition].

Antarsya is losing ground to Syriza. The far left groups outside Antarsya — Okde, EEK, KKE-ML — are gaining increased support.

The neighbourhood assemblies have continued to decline. Some remain, but only a few. The centre of activity has been the long-term strikes. There could have been a new long-term strike, by the teachers, just recently, and that could have produced a rebirth of the movement.

Syriza fail

By Theodora Polenta

Until recently we knew Syriza would at least support all workers' struggles. Syriza might not take the initiative for struggles, it might not propose a plan for them, but at least Syriza would support them.

The Greek secondary school teachers' strike was due to start on 17 May. Syriza collaborated with Pasok's trade-union network, Paske, and New Democracy's, Dake, to call it off.

Syriza, which is seeking a popular mandate from the Greek working class to form a government of the Left and overthrow the EU/ECB/IMF Memorandum, could not even carry through the mandate from the General Meetings of teachers.

During the last three years of Memorandum policies, one teacher in five has left her or his school. Their wages have been reduced by up to 45%. 1,000 schools have been "merged" (i.e. closed down). Government spending on education has decreased by 50%.

Just one week before the Greek Easter, one day before the commencement of the school Easter holidays, and a month from the Greek university entrance exams, the government announced further counter-reforms.

The teachers' unions have not called a strike during the university entrance exam period since 1988. The government was cynically using the exams and the anxieties of parents and students to blackmail the teachers.

The new measures included mandatory transfers of teachers across the country, increased working hours, and an increase in class sizes to more than 30 students.

Ten to 15 thousand teachers faced being geographically displaced without compensation; around 5,000 being made redundant; around 10,000 substitute teachers losing their jobs; and it would become even more difficult for young, unemployed teachers to find a job.

In remote villages and islands the situation is already dire, with schools being shut down and the parents having to cater for their children's transportation to the not local schools.

SLANDER

The government backed up its measures with slander about the supposed inadequacy and laziness of the Greek teachers, saying that they work only 16 hours a week.

Classroom teaching hours in secondary education start from 21 hours a week and de-escalate over years of service to 19, 18 and, finally, 16 hours after 20 years of service. However, teachers' actual work hours must be and are much longer than their classroom hours.

Under the pressure of the rank and file, Olme, the secondary school teachers' union, voted for a strike to commence on Friday 17 May — scheduled to coincide with this year's university entrance examinations, taken by 110,000 students — with five further strike days from Monday 20 to Friday 24 May.

The current balance of forces in Olme (with new elections pending for 27 May) is as follows: three affiliated to ND, three affiliated to Pasok, two affiliated to Syriza, two affiliated to KKE, and one affiliated to Antarsya.

The Olme strike call was to be ratified by the local first-level trade unions. It was followed (not unexpectedly) by the three-party coalition government led by ND's Antonis Samaras signing a civil mobilisation order on Saturday 11 May.

The order affected all 88,000 secondary school teachers and was to come into effect from 15 May. For the first time, a civil mobilisation order was to be imposed prior to a planned strike.

Civil mobilisation orders were originally only used in times of national emergencies, such as earthquakes. But this is the third time this year such an order has been used against

Is test of teachers' strike

Teachers' protest against civil mobilisation orders, 13 May, evokes the regime of the Colonels

workers. In January the government used a civil mobilisation order, backed by hundreds of riot police, to break a nine-day strike by Athens subway workers. It was followed by the extension of civil mobilisation to 2,500 rail and tram workers, after they protested at the action against the subway workers. In February, sailors on strike because their wages had not been paid for months received the same treatment.

In July 2010, the then Pasok government issued a civil mobilisation order to break a strike of 33,000 truck drivers. In October 2011 an order was used again to break a strike of refuse workers in Athens.

The civil mobilisation order meant teachers would be treated like soldiers, with a strike considered equivalent to a soldier deserting their post. Teachers who struck could face up to five years in prison, and dismissal.

The Olme leaders signalled that they never intended to wage a serious struggle against the order, but instead had authorised a strike that they never intended to see through, using the civil mobilisation as an excuse to call it off.

Olme president Nikos Papachristos said: "In the final analysis, if the government decides to put us in khaki, we will return to schools with our heads held high and trade unionists will be able to look their colleagues in the eyes".

Yet, following the signing of the civil mobilisation order, Olme asked the two union confederations, Gsee and Adedy, to call a solidarity general strike for 17 May.

The Greek Communist Party, KKE, and its trade-union front Pame, fell short not only of the needs of rank and file teachers but also of the level of the trade union bureaucracy of Olme.

They condemned from day one the teachers' intention to strike during the exam period. They proposed an inconsequential two-day strike before the exams, and KKE's youth section KNE asked students to focus on their exams and ignore the teachers' strike plans.

The Greek Supreme Court rejected a request from Olme for a preliminary injunction against the civil mobilisation order. On Monday 13th, the Greek police served 88,000 high school teachers with civil mobilisation orders. Thousands of people gathered on Monday evening in front of the Olme union hall in Athens and marched to the parliament building on Syntagma Square. Protests also occurred in other cities such as Patras and Thessaloniki.

Adedy rejected Olme's request for solidarity, declaring that the union did not want to jeopardise exams. It refused to or-

ganise a solidarity strike on Friday 17 May, and instead called for a strike on Tuesday 14 May and a joint action on Thursday 16 May with the Gsee, the union federation for private-sector workers. Adedy's decision was condemned as a divisive token by Olme and by teachers, with the exception of KKE/Pame.

On Tuesday 14th, the demonstration advertised by Adedy at Syntagma Square in Athens was attended by just a few hundred people, and the advertised "24-hour strike by the public service" got little support. The token four-hour strike on Thursday called by both Adedy and Gsee did little more.

On Tuesday evening, regional conferences of the teachers' union took place, at which 95 percent of those present voted for strike action. Pame's proposal for a 48-hour strike on 16-17 May, with a re-assessment on 18 May, was supported only by Pame members. Participation at the conferences was estimated at more than 20,000.

Several meetings in the province (in Arta, Patras, Karditsa and elsewhere) were followed by demonstrations where

teachers joined with other workers. In Ilia the teachers symbolically burned the notices of civil mobilisation.

A lot of students' councils and parents' collectives passed motions in solidarity with the teachers' strike.

The national executive of Olme responded to its members' vote for strike action by entering negotiations with the government and opposition parties to discuss ways of averting the strike.

On Wednesday 15 May, the presidents of the "first-level" unions making up Olme met. Despite the overwhelming majorities in the local meetings, trade-union leadership figures from Pasok, ND and Syriza worked to suspend the strike.

The "first-level" union presidents were asked to vote on two issues. First, for or against the strike, based on the decisions of their assemblies; then, second, on whether "the terms and conditions were right for the implementation of the strike." In the first vote, 78 out of 85 "first-level" unions voted "yes", four "against", and three cast blank votes.

At a further 12-hour meeting on Thursday 16th, Papachristos asked the local presidents to vote again on whether they felt there was enough social support to sustain a strike. Only 18 voted to say that conditions existed for a strike, nine voted against, and 57 voted blank. The strike was called off.

That was justified on the excuse that the relation of forces was not right. But on Wednesday 15th, the trade union of primary school teachers (Doe) had voted in favour of solidarity strike action coordinated with the secondary school teachers.

At least a few Federations and Labour Centres controlled by the Left would also have pledged solidarity if Syriza had wholeheartedly and unequivocally thrown itself into ensuring a victorious outcome of the teachers' strike.

Later assurances by the president of Syriza that a future left government will repeal the measure of mobilisation, and that every future civil mobilisation order by the government will be met by Syriza with a call for a political strike, are moving in a positive direction... but at the wrong time — the weekend after the teachers' strike was called off!

The Left needs to take the lead to organise meetings between unions and federations in order to decide in advance that the next conscripted workers will not be left on their own, but will have the whole of the Greek working class on their side, and unconditional support and political direction from the Left.

Syriza's revolutionary left unites

Over recent months, three revolutionary-left groups within Syriza, DEA, Kokkino, and Apo, have formed an alliance under the name "Rproject".

Rproject declares: "A 'government of the Left' which would bring the reversal of austerity, the memoranda, the Troika and debt, creating the conditions for the overthrow of neoliberal strategy across Europe, is a direct and realistic goal. However, such a historical development depends on important conditions relating to the policies and organisational choices of the radical Left, in constant dialectical relation with the movement and society.

"Rproject aims to contribute to building up the necessary radical-left line and character for SYRIZA and the widest possible alliance of organised forces, trends, and individuals".

It has a website at <http://rproject.gr>, and, oddly, explains its name in English, not Greek: "The R project — resist, reclaim, revolt".

Syriza is due to convert fully from being a coalition into

being a unified party at a congress on 10-14 July. In the run-up to the congress, Rproject and other Syriza leftists have flagged up several issues.

They argue for a clear-cut line against the IMF/EU/ECB memoranda, against the drift by the Syriza leadership into talking of "suspending" or "renegotiating" the memoranda, "delaying" the debt payments, etc.

They call for a slogan of "no sacrifice for the euro", against both the Syriza leaders' claim that the eurozone authorities will not attempt serious punishment against a left government in Greece, and the argument of some on the Syriza left for Greek readoption of its own currency (drachma) as a solution.

They call for full internal democracy in Syriza, against the Syriza leaders' line that the component groups of the old Syriza coalition must dissolve entirely, and that distinct factional lists should be banned in Syriza's internal elections.

They call for Syriza to emphasise organisation in the workplaces.

The “blowback” theory

Press

By Patrick Murphy

theguardian

In the aftermath of the Woolwich killing on 22 May all of the press, to one degree or another, and within the constraints of their own individual styles and prejudices tried to make sense of the horror.

Events like Woolwich are straightforward for the right-wing press to deal with. Crazy Muslims attack an off-duty soldier in the most brutal way imaginable in broad day light on the streets of the capital. The killers obligingly hang around to deliver on camera a religiously-inspired rant against “the west” warning that “you people will never be safe”. Cue recycled reports of hate speeches from imam X and radical preacher Y. The story fell so easily into the agenda of the *Sun*, *Mail* and *Express* that you could almost feel them pull back from the most extreme reaction.

Much worse things about immigrants, Muslims and multiculturalism have been written throughout the year than in the immediate aftermath of this event. Maybe it was the rapid attempt by the thugs of the EDL to exploit the story by stirring up local tensions that held the tabloid-land back from full-throated hate.

In many ways the most self-revealing analyses could be found in the more left-leaning press. You expect *Guardian* and *Independent* writers to avoid and warn against the demonisation of a particular community and to protest against greater restrictions on liberty as the way to keep people safe from future attacks.

These papers occasionally give space to people of a more radical or socialist stripe and it might be hoped that they would have something more insightful to say on why these things happen, the type of people who perpetrate them and how we might best combat their ideas. But just as after 9/11 or the July 2005 London bombings, it turns out that they have only one thing to say — repeatedly and at length, presented as a great and controversial insight ignored by “the establishment commentators”.

They say that the Woolwich killing is down to “western foreign policy”. It is blowback. People like the killers in Woolwich do these things because they are angered by the invasion of Iraq, the oppression of the Palestinians and the propping up, by western governments, of a series of repressive Arab regimes.

They say so in the macabre amateur videos they leave behind after suicide missions. One of the Woolwich killers spelled it out to nearby mobile phone users.

The evidence is so unmissable that nobody really misses it! The *Sun* published the “eye for an eye, none of you people will be safe” rant as a banner on its front page. So prominent was it that they reported a couple of days later that the paper was removed from a shop after a customer thought it was a poster supporting the act. Every other paper also reported the rant.

Two comment articles in the *Guardian* typify the paucity of this repetitive single-focus attempt to explain events like Woolwich.

EAGLETON AND GREENWALD

On Monday 27 May Terry Eagleton played the role of brave free-thinking historian against all those who refuse to face the evidence.

His article, “To explain is not to excuse” was an exercise in the Jesuitical logic for which he has become famous. In several hundred carefully chosen words he managed to say four things: that anyone who links this killing to western foreign policy is being “speedily shut up”; that the alternative to that link is to see it as mindless and without cause (which is what “they” want you to think); that people like him who try to explain it are acting as historians just like those who seek to explain Hitler or Stalin; that none of that is an attempt to justify or mitigate.

The day after the killing Glenn Greenwald, in the same paper, decided to challenge the idea that the attack could be accurately and usefully described as “terrorism”. He used the space as a platform for the common-enough argument that the actions of the US and other western governments

Tunisian Islamists demonstrating for sharia law. Islamism is not an “inevitable” reaction to the imperialism of the west. It is an ideology which is hostile to women’s freedom, workers’ organisation, LGBT people and secularists. Most victims of Islamist violence are people from a Muslim background.

could fairly be described as terrorism, therefore actions like Woolwich were hardly any different. But this is a confused and contradictory argument. He defines terrorism as violence which “deliberately targets” non-combatants. Because a soldier was killed in Woolwich this is an act of war committed in response to the “war on terror”.

Throughout, however, he makes reference to other attacks which did “deliberately target” civilians such as the Boston marathon and London 2005 bombings without seeming to note the contradiction. The essential point being made has little to do with this distinction, as can be seen from this stark and stupid paragraph:

“Basic human nature simply does not allow you to cheer on your government as it carries out massive violence in multiple countries around the world and then have you be completely immune from having that violence returned.”

Taken seriously the claim seems to be that the “returned violence” (Boston, Woolwich, London) is no more than human nature. There is really nothing these young men could have been expected to do given the “massive violence in multiple countries around the world” they had witnessed (or rather seen on TV and read about in newspapers).

How millions of other humans who had seen the same events (and very many witnessed in “real life”) had not turned into crazed killers will have to remain a mystery. There are other mysteries left unexplained by this call to human nature.

For instance, why the Woolwich, Boston and 9/11 attackers remained so unmoved by so much other “massive violence in multiple countries” like Zimbabwe or Iran or by the murder of trade unionists in Colombia or the mass death of garment workers in Bangladesh.

Or why they remain unmoved by forms of extreme repression, often violent, which deny the most basic rights to millions of people in “multiple countries around the world” — women most especially but also trade unionists, gay people and democrats. Is it not human nature to be angered by this? Or is it only certain types of violence and injustice, committed by specific agents and not others, that moves human beings to violence? And if this is the way humans “naturally” respond to violence done to us or people we sympathise with, then couldn’t that explain the US invasion of Afghanistan, home of the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the aftermath of 9/11?

This “basic human nature” is a lot more indiscriminate than Greenwald will allow. You do not have to be someone who “cheers on” your government as it carries out violence to lose your immunity to having that violence returned. You only had to live, work or be in New York, Boston or London

at the wrong time and place to risk the violent wrath of these poor victims of their own human nature. Jihadists have no interest in whether you opposed or supported or weren’t sure about the Iraq war or any other aspect of western foreign policy.

These are not cheap rhetorical points. A socialist intellectual, the beneficiary of the kind of education which allowed time to develop critical ideas and perspectives, the holder of a world-view which professes to a deeper fuller understanding of the underlying forces that drive human actions, given space in national media to explain such events, ought to have important things to say.

They ought to know that it matters that the vast majority of Muslims have no time whatsoever for those who bomb and kill in their name. That alone is evidence that this is not about human nature.

Intellectuals should be the first to point out that the primary and most numerous victims of people who share the ideology of the Woolwich killers are Muslim or of Muslim heritage — women, socialists, apostates and indeed intellectuals. Among other things, such arguments will help combat the ideas that this is a matter of “Muslims versus the rest”. They ought to be explaining, describing and clarifying that this is about a reactionary political ideology which uses Islam, not about Islam in general.

That kind of discourse helps us understand the reasons why the vast majority of Muslims, and the millions who oppose western foreign policy (war, invasion, the propping up of unsavoury regimes) do not as a result support bombing or otherwise killing civilians or off-duty soldiers.

There are also explanations for the lack of anger generated among jihadists against the repression in Iran, Zimbabwe and any number of other countries. These are not people who just can’t help getting angry about injustice. Their anger is particular, singular, ideologically driven. There is plenty of injustice and violence they are not only not angry about but would like to see an awful lot more of.

BETTER

Terry Eagleton and Glenn Greenwald ought to be able to explain that the difference between most opponents (or even sceptics) of western foreign policy and the jihadists is that we oppose it in favour of something better, more democratic and progressive whereas they (the jihadists) oppose it in favour of something much worse.

The problem with the self-proclaimed left wing commentators is not that they want to have another pop at the west or that they want to force people to think about what “terrorism” really is. And a generous assessment of Eagleton and Greenwald would acquit them of justifying attacks like Woolwich (their assurances are no doubt sincere).

The problem here is the lack of intellectual rigour. The way they present a conflict between the “west” and Islamic fundamentalism or jihadism. This is an abject failure to explain. They may not want to justify but they don’t want to blame too much lest that reduces the responsibility which should be laid at the door of the West. In that reluctance to draw attention to anyone else’s responsibility they lose any ability to explain events like this.

Because words and arguments matter it is hard to see how they don’t in fact mitigate and excuse. Greenwald’s appeal to “basic human nature” to explain why we cannot be immune from the “violence returning” logically implies acts like the Greenwich killing are inevitable and that the two men were doing no more than acting out a natural human drive. Apart from being transparent nonsense, this absolves him from considering the actual motives behind such actions, the causal factors that separate these two men and other perpetrators from the rest of us.

An examination of those factors would make it a lot harder to hold on to the childish “good vs evil” worldview that saturates everything Eagleton and Greenwald write.

If you want to be an advocate and fighter for a more thoroughly democratic, equal and free society, then the social forces that rule the most powerful states in the world are your enemy. But so too, and no less so, are the religious fascists who have inspired and carried out two decades of violent assaults on a whole range of targets in the name of holy war.

Two factions in Iran's regime

The following article about the coming presidential election in Iran (14 June) is the English translation of the editorial of *Militant* No. 58, March 2013, produced by the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency.

The newspapers and news bulletins are full of clashes between the Khamenei and Ahmadinejad camps. These two main representatives of the Iranian bourgeoisie's warring factions have even used their Nowruz [new year] messages to criticise each other. The regime's crisis of leadership has now become deeper and more bitter than ever before — with no sign of a quick resolution.

In his message Khamenei said that the next so-called "president" of the regime should have all the "[positive] points of today without the existing weaknesses". In turn, Ahmadinejad said that "the Supreme Leader has said that he has just one vote and the nation has the right to elect. Everybody has to respect the right of the nation. The government... is looking for an election with passion and glory and maximum [participation] and [one that is] ultimately healthy." He went on to say that he will be "extremely sensitive and... will not tolerate the slightest violation" in the so-called 'election' in June.

So what has made Ahmadinejad sound like a champion of free, fair and clean elections? What makes the man who was fully-backed by Khamenei in 2009 disagree with him so publicly now?

IRANIAN CAPITALISM

The answers to these and similar questions about the fighting will escape us if we do not pay particular attention to the origins of this regime.

The ruling system in Iran is a unique form of capitalist regime that came about after the bourgeois state was severely damaged — but not completely smashed — during the 1978-79 revolution.

The Shah's monarchist-military regime was replaced by a contradictory formation that had two broad tendencies, each with a distinct approach to economic policy. All along one tendency has been aiming to normalise the capitalist relations of production in Iran and to restore full relations with the imperialist countries. Meanwhile the other tendency has been in favour of import barriers, selective trade, and so on, and has represented the interests of the coalition of bourgeois (and some petty-bourgeois) forces that crushed the 1978-79 mass movement.

Over the years the names of these factions, and their representatives, have changed many times. For example, Rafsanjani was once a very "radical" figure, but has for a long time been in favour of privatisation, foreign trade and investment, cutting subsidies and so on. Ahmadinejad has now, in effect, become the representative of the same tendency which dates back to Abulhassan Banisadr, the first so-called "president" of the Islamic Republic, who was forced out in the clashes with Khomeini's faction in 1981. It is therefore no accident that a number of people have been comparing Ahmadinejad with Banisadr.

The friction between the two factions will continue until there is a modern and centralised capitalist state in Iran that

is fully integrated with the world market and the region's geopolitical structure. (Or, quite possibly, the workers could overthrow the bourgeoisie before it is able to resolve this contradiction!)

This position has been the basis of our analysis right from the inception of this regime and we have consistently put these faction fights in this context (most recently in the editorial of *Militant* No. 57).

While the regime's media have paid a lot of attention to trivia surrounding the so-called 'election', e.g., how many times Ahmadinejad has said "Long live spring" or just used the word "spring" in his speeches; or, worse still, how much physical contact Ahmadinejad had with Chavez's mother during the funeral in Caracas, or covering up Michelle Obama's arms; millions of workers and their families have been sinking deeper into poverty, hunger and destitution.

The contrast between the regime-connected capitalists who are making huge profits out of the current situation — even from the crippling sanctions! — and those who are going hungry, queuing hours for their basic necessities and having to make very hard choices about what they can afford and what they have to do without, could not be more stark!

On the one hand:

There are over 200,000 malnourished children under the age of six, a growing numbers of street children and 60% of rapes being committed against children!

Workers' minimum wage for 1392 [March 2013-March 2014] has been set at 6% below inflation!

The official inflation rate is 31.5% but anyone who has had to pay 30,000 tomans [\$24.45] for a kilo of meat and other unaffordable prices knows that the true rate is higher.

17 million people will need food coupons to feed themselves.

Shockingly, in this "Islamic Republic", there are now 3.6 million addicts and 26% of drivers breathalysed in Tehran recently had drunk alcohol!

On the other:

\$33bn is missing from the Iranian banking system!

In a country where the currency has lost 55% of value in a year 500 Porsches have been brought into the country without anyone knowing the exchange rate used for importing them!

And how is the regime responding to this situation?

- Boosting the repressive apparatus, including setting up a special women's riot police!
- Islamisation of the universities.
- Suing Hollywood for *Argo* and similar films.
- Near industrial collapse

In the meantime certain parts of the economy are collapsing. In particular, industrial production, which, of course, hits the industrial bourgeoisie very hard, is on its knees.

Just in Shahrivar 1391 [August-September 2012] there was a 65% drop in vehicle production in Iran. As a result of the near collapse of production many workers have been laid off. Any industry that needs to import parts, raw materials or machinery has been hit severely.

Even oil production, the main source of foreign revenue, has dropped. The regime's oil revenue fell by 45% and prospects for the new year are no better. In 1392 [March 2013-March 2014] the oil revenue is going to be 40% less than in 1391!

The economic and social situation has now become worse than the 1355-57 [1976-78] crisis that led to the revolution. Objectively Iran is now ripe for revolution.

LABOUR MOVEMENT

The Iranian labour movement is at a turning point.

On the one hand we have seen that syndicalism has clearly failed. Syndicalism, which can be summed up as the viewpoint that thinks that the trade unions — by themselves — can realise all the aims and tasks of the struggle of the working class, has been active in different industries and various parts of the country for more than a decade. And despite all the self-sacrifice, prison terms and torture that labour activists have suffered, and all kinds of pain and hardship that workers' families have endured; if the correct strategy and tactics are not adopted the workers will not reach a positive outcome (although, of course, they will learn many impor-



Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the current Mayor of Tehran, is one of eight Presidential candidates. He has a background in the army and the Revolutionary Guards.

tant lessons for the next stage of the struggle).

We can see the proof of the failure of syndicalism in the latest actions of Mansour Osanloo, the person who for many years was the standard-bearer and the most prominent symbols of the labour movement for the revival of trade unions. He has now left the country and has joined a political movement. Through this he clearly admitted to the failure of the syndicalist viewpoint. However, unfortunately he has crossed to the other side of the barricade and has joined the class enemy of the working class. And this also shows that a section of the bourgeoisie is prepared to put down roots in the working class in an organised way — of course, as long as workers and their leaders do not forget who "the boss" is.

Now an important question is posed: if unions by themselves cannot achieve this, then what kind of other organisation do the workers also need? The answer that Osanloo has given has set his path. But what must be the answer of workers who do not want to throw away the experience of decades of struggle and all that they have already gained? If we look at history, we see only one type of organisation that can fulfil this role: the vanguard party of the working class. The main role of revolutionary Marxists lies in this that they have to be able to turn a merely historical lesson into a living and active organisation that is set deep in the heart of the working class.

We have seen in history that at time of the First Imperialist World War, the social democratic parties mostly betrayed the working class. And such a split also took place among the syndicalists, so that very few of them upheld their revolutionary standpoint. Many of these revolutionary syndicalists eventually joined the ranks of the Communist International. What separated the revolutionary syndicalists from the reformist (and eventually treacherous) syndicalists was that they understood the need for overthrowing capitalism and smashing the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state. If a labour activist believes this, then he or she is faced with only one way to organise this, just one political standpoint: revolutionary Marxism.

We have seen that despite all the economic, social and political problems in society, including the most basic issues such as feeding children (!), the capitalist class shows no interest in solving them. It is only the working class that has the potential to solve these problems. That which can put this potential into action in practice is the creation of the revolutionary vanguard party of the working class. Only such a party can connect the most militant elements of the working class and revolutionary Marxism, to solve the crisis of the leadership of the working class and the crisis of the bewildered and boastful 'left', that is even afraid of admitting its own crisis.

In Iranian society there are two crises of class leadership [capitalist, working-class] and only one revolutionary solution.

This pamphlet by Sean Matgamna covers the pre-history of the SWP in the *Socialist Review* and IS groups of the 1950s and 1960s, and the period between 1968 and the late 1970s in which the essentials of today's SWP were formed. Written by one of the very few members of the IS National Committee of 1968-71 still active, it dispels myths and identifies some of the deep-set roots of the SWP's current troubles.

Buy online £1.70 at <http://bit.ly/wl38-swp>



Don't despair of "two states"!

Around 30 prominent Palestinian leaders, most from Fatah, but some from other groups within the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, have signed a statement saying the two-state solution in Israel-Palestine is no longer viable; the only "realistic" demand is for one democratic, secular state for Arabs and Jews, made up of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. The PLO has had a "two states" policy since 1988.

The group, calling itself "Popular Movement for One Democratic State in Historic Palestine", say they are frustrated with zero progress on negotiations and Fatah's passivity in the face of massive growth of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

In a recent article former Defense Minister Moshe Arens argued that Israel was already effectively a bi-national state, a reference to the approximately 20 percent of Israeli citizens who are Arab. He wants to maintain that status quo and deny Palestinian Arabs their national rights.

(The project of a "binational" Palestine comes from left Zionists in the 1920s-40s. It was to be made up of Jewish and Arab cantons, headed by Jewish and Arab "National Councils" which would cooperate in a "Federal Executive". But the idea gained little support among Jews, and even less among Arabs.)

The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research recently found that just under a third of Palestinians, about 29%, support "a one-state solution based on equality for Arabs and Jews." — a figure that has remained more or less the same over ten years.

This piece by veteran Israeli socialist and peace activist Uri Avnery takes up the arguments for "two states for two peoples", and explains why the "idealist" one-state line lacks grip.

By now [the idea that the two state solution is dead] has become an intellectual fad. To advocate the two-state solution means that you are ancient, old-fashioned, stale, stodgy, a fossil from a bygone era. Hoisting the flag of the "one-state solution" means that you are young, forward-looking, "cool".

Actually, this only shows how ideas move in circles. When we declared in early 1949, just after the end of the first Israeli-Arab war, that the only answer to the new situation was the establishment of a Palestinian state side by side with Israel, the "one-state solution" was already old.

The idea of a "bi-national state" was in vogue in the 1930s. Its main advocates were well-meaning intellectuals, many of them luminaries of the new Hebrew University, like Judah Leon Magnes and Martin Buber. They were reinforced by the Hashomer Hatza'ir kibbutz movement, which later became the Mapam party.

It never gained any traction. The Arabs believed that it was a Jewish trick. Bi-nationalism was built on the principle of parity between the two populations in Palestine — 50% Jews, 50% Arabs. Since the Jews at that time were much less than half the population, Arab suspicions were reasonable.

On the Jewish side, the idea looked ridiculous. The very essence of Zionism was to have a state where Jews would be masters of their fate, preferably in all of Palestine.

At the time, no one called it the "one-state solution" because there was already one state — the State of Palestine, ruled by the British. The "solution" was called "the bi-national state" and died, unmourned, in the war of 1948.

What has caused the miraculous resurrection of this idea?

Not the birth of a new love between the two peoples. Such a phenomenon would have been wonderful, even miraculous...

But, alas, the renewed "one-state solution" was not born of another immaculate conception. Its father is the occupation, its mother despair.

The occupation has already created a de facto One State — an evil state of oppression and brutality, in which half the population (or slightly less than half) deprives the other half of almost all rights — human rights, economic rights and political rights. The Jewish settlements proliferate, and every day brings new stories of woe.

Good people on both sides have lost hope. But hopelessness does not stir to action. It fosters resignation.

Generally, the spread of the settlements is cited as the sign of death [of "two states"]. In the 1980s the respected Israeli

Tel Aviv 2006 protest against Israeli bombardment of Gaza. Fighting for "two states" means not giving up on unity for social and political change.

historian Meron Benvenisti pronounced that the situation had now become "irreversible". At the time, there were hardly 100 thousand settlers in the occupied territories (apart from East Jerusalem, which by common consent is a separate issue). Now they claim to be 300 thousand, but who is counting? How many settlers mean irreversibility? 100, 300, 500, 800 thousand?

History is a hothouse of reversibility. Empires grow and collapse. Cultures flourish and wither. So do social and economic patterns. Only death is irreversible.

I can think of a dozen different ways to solve the settlement problem, from forcible removal to exchange of territories to Palestinian citizenship. Who believed that the settlements in North Sinai would be removed so easily? That the evacuation of the Gaza Strip settlements would become a national farce?

In the end, there will probably be a mixture of several ways, according to circumstances.

All the Herculean problems of the conflict can be resolved — if there is a will. It's the will that is the real problem.

APARTHEID

The one-staters like to base themselves on the South African experience. For them, Israel is an apartheid state, like the former South Africa, and therefore the solution must be South African-like.

The situation in the occupied territories, and to some extent in Israel proper, does indeed strongly resemble the apartheid regime. The apartheid example may be justly cited in political debate. But in reality, there is very little deeper resemblance — if any — between the two countries.

David Ben-Gurion once gave the South African leaders a piece of advice: partition. Concentrate the white population in the south, in the Cape region, and cede the other parts of the country to the blacks. Both sides in South Africa rejected this idea furiously, because both sides believed in a single, united country.

They largely spoke the same languages, adhered to the same religion, were integrated in the same economy. The fight was about the master-slave relationship, with a small minority lording it over a massive majority.

Nothing of this is true in our country. Here we have two different nations, two populations of nearly equal size, two languages, two (or rather, three) religions, two cultures, two

totally different economies.

A false proposition leads to false conclusions. One of them is that Israel, like Apartheid South Africa, can be brought to its knees by an international boycott. About South Africa, this is a patronising imperialist illusion. The boycott, moral and important as it was, did not do the job. It was the Africans themselves, aided by some local white idealists, who did it by their courageous strikes and uprisings.

I am an optimist, and I do hope that eventually Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs will become sister nations, living side by side in harmony. But to come to that point, there must be a period of living peacefully in two adjoining states, hopefully with open borders.

The people who speak now of the "one-state solution" are idealists. But they do a lot of harm. And not only because they remove themselves and others from the struggle for the only solution that is realistic.

If we are going to live together in one state, it makes no sense to fight against the settlements. If Haifa and Ramallah will be in the same state, what is the difference between a settlement near Haifa and one near Ramallah? But the fight against the settlements is absolutely essential, it is the main battlefield in the struggle for peace.

Indeed, the one-state solution is the common aim of the extreme Zionist right and the extreme anti-Zionist left. And since the right is incomparably stronger, it is the left that is aiding the right, and not the other way round.

In theory, that is as it should be. Because the one-staters believe that the rightists are only preparing the ground for their future paradise. The right is uniting the country and putting an end to the possibility of creating an independent State of Palestine. They will subject the Palestinians to all the horrors of apartheid and much more, since the South African racists did not aim at displacing and replacing the blacks. But in due course — perhaps in a mere few decades, or half a century — the world will compel Greater Israel to grant the Palestinians full rights, and Israel will become Palestine.

DONKEY

According to this ultra-leftist theory, the right, which is now creating the racist one state, is in reality the Donkey of the Messiah, the legendary animal on which the Messiah will ride to triumph.

It's a beautiful theory, but what is the assurance that this will actually happen? And before the final stage arrives, what will happen to the Palestinian people? Who will compel the rulers of Greater Israel to accept the diktat of world public opinion?

If Israel now refuses to bow to world opinion and enable the Palestinians to have their own state in 28% of historical Palestine, why would they bow to world opinion in the future and dismantle Israel altogether?

Speaking about a process that will surely last 50 years and more, who knows what will happen? What changes will take place in the world in the meantime? What wars and other catastrophes will take the world's mind off the "Palestinian issue"?

Would one really gamble the fate of one's nation on a far-fetched theory like this?

Assuming for a moment that the one-state solution would really come about, how would it function?

Will Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs serve in the same army, pay the same taxes, obey the same laws, work together in the same political parties? Will there be social intercourse between them? Or will the state sink into an interminable civil war?

Other peoples have found it impossible to live together in one state. Take the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia. Serbia. Czechoslovakia. Cyprus. Sudan. The Scots want to secede from the United Kingdom. So do the Basques and the Catalans from Spain. The French in Canada and the Flemish in Belgium are uneasy. As far as I know, nowhere in the entire world have two different peoples agreed to form a joint state for decades.

No, the two-state solution is not dead. It cannot die, because it is the only solution there is.

Despair may be convenient and tempting. But despair is no solution at all.

• http://zope.gush-shalom.org/index_en.html

Northern Rail strike: sack the agency, not the workers!

From the *Off The Rails* bulletin

RMT members working for Northern Rail have voted by a 58% majority to strike against management's use of agency labour in new areas.

Northern Rail has been using the Trainpeople and G4S agencies to carry out work, including checking tickets. Management claims this is only a "trial".

AGENCY
Under the Agency Worker Regulations 2010, agency workers employed in equivalent work to directly-employed staff are entitled to the same pay, terms, and conditions.

But employers have found loopholes in the law, and do not guarantee agency workers the same job security as directly-employed staff.

If Northern Rail gets away with using agency staff to check tickets, it will use agencies across other areas of work, leading to

The "Justice for the 33" campaign on London Underground has highlighted the need to demand in-house employment when fighting casualisation.

pay cuts or job losses. If bosses can get away with having our job done by somebody cheaper, they will.

The strike is an attempt to stop Northern Rail doing this and to ensure that all work on the railways is done by properly-trained workers on permanent contracts whose pay and conditions are in line with union agreements.

We want Northern Rail to sack the agency, not the workers. RMT is demanding that any agency worker currently working along-

side directly-employed is taken into direct employment, given full training, and have their pay and conditions levelled up.

Unfortunately, some of the union's material has focused on criticising management's use of agency staff rather than the demand for permanent jobs for them, creating a suggestion of hostility to them. Off The Rails believes every railway worker's job matters, whether they're agency or in-house.

ASLEF and TSSA both have formal positions of

support for the RMT's dispute, but have not translated that into action. TSSA has instructed its members not to do RMT members' work in the event of any strike, but gives only weak advice about respecting RMT picket lines and implicitly suggests workers should join TSSA in order to avoid striking.

Casualisation is an issue for the whole railway industry. TSSA and ASLEF should be actively involved in this dispute.

If you're in TSSA or ASLEF and you want to see your union join this fight, go to your branch and demand your union call a strike ballot.

If you're not a member of any union, join! No union is perfect, and *Off The Rails* fights for democratic reform within all unions, but at the moment the RMT is the all-grades union leading the fight against casualisation.

You can join the RMT right up until the strike day itself. Join a union, protect your job!

PCS conference

By a conference delegate

This year's Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) conference (21-23 May) heard that the union will be taking action in early and late June and hopes to link up with the teaching unions for their action from 27 June.

DWP and HMRC members have one-day strikes rolling across regions from 3 June; smaller departments and commercial organisations will strike on 30 or 31 May.

Conference finally voted to support the introduction of a strike levy and the inclusion of selective action as a tactic, after years of Workers' Liberty supporters and others unsuccessfully proposing this. The leadership has made no attempt to explain why it was so resistant to the proposals in the past.

The union refused to print a motion calling for

DWP workers to refuse to sanction claimants. Instead, a fudge was created in another motion which said a refusal to sanction could be a tactic in the national campaign. Outside conference, disabled and welfare rights activists staged a road blockade in solidarity with PCS members and calling for help in opposing sanctions.

Another motion called for union full-time officials to be paid an average workers' wage. This principle is hypocritically opposed by the Socialist Party, who dominate the PCS leadership, though they push it in other unions.

More hypocrisy from the SP came on the issue of Cuba, which was uncritically celebrated at a conference social (despite the illegality of independent unions there), and on the boycott of Israel, which the SP oppose in other unions but nod through in the PCS.

More industrial news online

- Fund for injured anti-blacklist campaigner — bit.ly/georgetapp
- FBU edges closer to strike on pensions — bit.ly/fbuconf
- LGBT transport workers build links — bit.ly/rmtlgbt
- Unison recommends rejection of HE pay deal — bit.ly/hereject
- "3 Cosas" plan summer of action — bit.ly/3csummer

Disabled workers' action

By Janine Booth, TUC Disabled Workers' Committee (pc)

This year's TUC Disabled Workers' Conference roundly condemned government attacks on disability rights, and pledged action against cuts in jobs and benefits.

Meeting in London on 23 and 24 May, around 200 trade union delegates debated issues including work capability assessments, benefit cuts and the propaganda war against

claimants.

On the first day, Conference adjourned an hour early to take part in direct action against the cuts, blocking Tottenham Court Road for an hour.

Two Conference fringe meetings discussed autism and neurodiversity in the workplace, and disabled access to public transport, the latter putting the case that public ownership and adequate staffing levels are as important to access as structural improvements such as lifts and ramps.

Tube union plans action

By Ollie Moore

A City Hall discussion on possible reforms to the Transport for London pensions scheme provoked an angry response from the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT), which organises workers on London Underground.

Some London Assembly Tories want the scheme reformed to bring it in line with the (worse) scheme available to local government workers. A London Assembly budget committee is also discussing possible cuts to the travel pass scheme which currently allows Tube workers to nominate a family member for a free travel pass.

The City Hall discussions follow another recent attack, in which Tube Lines workers reinte-

grated into Transport for London employment were barred from joining the TfL pension scheme, meaning that a two-tier pension system now exists amongst TfL employees.

The RMT has also declared a dispute with London Underground over the related issue of casualisation, and is demanding that all agency workers currently employed on the Tube are taken in house.



Tube workers face attacks on pensions and staff travel schemes

Grassroots union launches dispute



By Stew Ward

The "Pop-Up Union", a grassroots union initiative involving workers at the University of Sussex, has declared an official trade dispute with the university.

The Pop-Up Union emerged from the militant struggle against the outsourcing of 235 jobs, against which Sussex students held a lengthy sit-in. The union's demands include the immediate cessation of the ongoing bidding process for the 235 jobs.

It recently received a boost when it was officially certified by the Certification Office.

The campaign against

outsourcing won a minor victory on 13 May when the university announced that outsourced staff's pension arrangements would be given protection that is "in excess of the provision in law for Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) transfers."

A campaign at the University of Birmingham recently forced management to back down from a proposed job cuts plan.

Sussex campaigners say that the Birmingham win, and Sussex bosses' concession on pensions, is "proof that pressure from all parties concerned has an effect."

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

End tax dodging, fight for control

By Ruben Lomas

A report by the charity Oxfam, published ahead of EU talks on tax evasion, shows that there is £12 trillion hidden in tax havens around the world.

This figure is enough to eliminate "extreme poverty" worldwide, twice over. The figure represents a daily loss of £156 billion. Two thirds of the amount is stored in EU tax havens, including Luxemburg, Andorra, and Malta. £4.7 trillion of the total sits in British Overseas Territories or Crown Dependencies.

A 2012 study by the Tax Justice Network into similar practises showed that 0.001% of the world's population control 30% of its financial wealth, with the bottom 99.9% controlling just 19%.

Such figures explode some of the key mantras of austerity politics — that there simply isn't enough money to go around, and a collective social belt-tightening is necessary to ride out the financial crisis. There is enough money; the issue is with who controls

Activists protest outside notorious tax dodger Sir Philip Green's Topshop

it. The rich are doing very well indeed out of the crisis, with not much belt-tightening. On the contrary, the number of billionaires in Britain increased from 77 in 2011/12 to 88 in 2012/13, with the combined wealth of the richest 1,000 people in the UK increasing by £35 billion.

The Oxfam scheme does not even necessitate increasing taxation. It simply requires closing loopholes that allow the super-rich to legally avoid tax. That the world's wealth contribute so directly to the continua-

tion of poverty by dodging taxes they ought to be legally required to pay is an obscenity.

Only the rich can access the offshore havens and other loopholes that allow them to dodge so much tax. Working-class people have to pay the full amount. Loopholes and legal tax avoidance is so grotesque that, in 2007, even the *Daily Mail* was publishing exposés of private equity bosses paying less tax (proportionally) than the workers who cleaned their offices.

Pointing out these injus-

tices and inequalities is an important part of the socialist critique of capitalism. We should demand not only that tax loopholes are closed, but that taxes on the rich and big business are massively increased.

But a focus on "tax justice" is not enough. The "Robin Hood Tax", a proposed global tax on financial transactions, is often presented as something of a magic bullet, but would in reality leave the real inequalities of wealth and power untouched. To win a real shift of power, workers must take control of bosses' wealth — at a workplace level, by taking over production, and at a societal level, by building a movement capable of taking social power and expropriating the massive wealth of the banks and the financial sector.

We are light-years away from the existence of such a movement, but fights for immediate reforms — including for increased taxation of the rich and business — are a key part of the process of building it.

Questions after Newcastle march

By a Newcastle anti-fascist

On 25 May between 500 and 700 anti-racist activists, trade unionists, anarchists, and socialists marched in Newcastle against the EDL.

Between 1,000 and 1,500 EDL supporters marched in opposition to an Islamic faith school.

The EDL's march was planned before the Woolwich murder, but the racist backlash being whipped up since then will have helped the EDL swell their numbers.

The march was initiated by the SWP and Dipu Ahad (a Labour councillor). In the run up to the demonstration, closed meetings were held including the Trades Council, the SWP, the Socialist Party, and councillor Ahad, but which explicitly excluded AWL, the Revolutionary Communist Group (who publish *Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism*), anarchists, and other key trade union, anti-cuts, and student activists. (It is claimed a vote was taken to exclude certain groups/individuals).

• When comrades from RCG attempted to attend an organising meeting, they were barred. Worse still, sexist and violent behaviour was used. A member of SP was threatened with exclusion if she supported them.

• Following this socialists were blocked from the Facebook event for the protest, "accused" of being anarchists (and one accused of being a fascist) by either SWP or councillor Ahad. This was for simply asking questions.

• The organisers threatened that the police would prevent those banned from attending a public meeting held on Thursday 23 May, and the demo itself.

• At Thursday's public rally, some who tried to attend were taken to one side by the police, who had a list or were told (apparently by SWP) who to exclude.

• And finally, at the demo, half an hour before the start time, police arrested 12 activists (including seven members of RCG), apparently on instruction from the demo organisers. I do not know who gave the order. I do not know who was chief

steward for day, or police liaison. We do not know if it was councillor Ahad or SWP members. But the organisers of the Facebook event were two members of SWP, one of Counterfire, and one Labour councillor. The SWP have not distanced themselves from the arrest. The article on the *Socialist Worker* website doesn't mention it (amongst other inaccuracies).

A Counterfire member since the demonstrations has stated they were added as an organiser on Facebook a few days before the demonstration and were not complicit "in things that may have been wrong with Newcastle Unites: from sexist intimidation to barring people from meetings, from weaknesses in mobilising the unions to the relationship with the police".

CRITICISMS

Workers' Liberty has clear criticisms of how SWP/UAF organises anti-EDL actions, and about the democracy of UAF and other SWP-led fronts.

Equally, we have serious criticisms of the RCG, whose sectarian attitude towards Labour Party members and trade unionists can often lead to unnecessary division.

But these discussions cannot be ignored. And by attempting to sideline them, or ban those raising them in the name of "unity", has led not to a big united turnout, but perhaps a smaller turnout than we could have achieved, and after the demonstration no honest assessment.

Where to do we go from here? We need:

- An honest assessment on why and how police banned and arrested socialists and other activists, including raiding their homes. Who gave them this information and why?
 - An honest discussion on tactics and strategy, including how to get trade unionists and their unions to build for such protests.
- Let's not shy away from the truth, no matter how bitter it may be.**

• Abridged from bit.ly/newcastlequestions. The online article includes a comment from a local SWP member responding to some of the issues raised.

Ideas for Freedom 2013 Marxist ideas to turn the tide

Thursday 20 June-Sunday 23 June

University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 8HY

Sessions, workshops, and discussions include:

The cleaners' revolt (with speakers from IWGB and RMT) • Introductory series on workers' power (Paris Commune 1871, Chinese revolution 1925-27, Solidarnosc 1980-81, South African workers vs. apartheid, Dublin lock-out 1913) • Art, theatre, and socialism • Challenging sexism in the labour movement • Workplace and community activism in Turkey •

Black soldiers in the Second American Revolution • What is Hugo Chavez's legacy? • The Warsaw Ghetto uprising • Clay Cross: how a Labour council defied a Tory government and won • Lenin or "Leninism"? • Radical East End walking tour • Screening of *The Spirit of '45* and discussion

Tickets are £30/£20/£8 (waged/low-waged/unwaged) before 1 June. £33/£22/£8 after that and before event. Ticket price includes food. Free creche and crash accommodation available. For more, or to book tickets online: workersliberty.org/ideas