



For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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For a
united
Europe
with open
borders!



The *Daily Express's* new year message. The campaign of anti-migrant hatred will intensify in the run-up to the European election. Socialists must fight it.

see page 5

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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



We stand for:

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

Contact us:

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Greece: thousands face eviction

By **Theodora Polenta**

A law restricting evictions in Greece expired at the end of 2013.

The law said before eviction many things must be taken into account, and mortgage repayments can be adjusted to 30% of income for 48 months, giving some protection from seizure and auction for the debtor's principal residence.

The law protected about 180,000 households from eviction. In December 27,000 eviction orders were pending but frozen, and about 100,000 families were at risk of losing their homes.

About 1.5 million households have taken loans, and about one million mortgages. 84% of those have difficulty in repaying the loans.

23% of mortgages (about 200,000) already have payments overdue.

Even before the law expired, in 2013, tax officials did not hesitate to auction even unemployed people's homes even for small tax debts. In October 2013, the tax authorities auctioned off 1,553 homes and properties.

The European Union authorities overseeing Greece's austerity "memoranda" consider the rate of home ownership in Greece to be unsustainably high.

In 2006 it was the highest rate in the EU, 84.6% (well above the average of 64%). The rate fell to 80.1% in 2010 and 75% in 2013.

Over decades, the lack of social housing policy, the

rise of construction activity as the "growth engine" of Greek capitalist development, and a ready supply of mortgage loans, prompted many working-class families to buy their homes.

That trend accelerated during the 1996-2008 period of "banking Keynesianism" (relatively easy credit).

An increase in property taxes for ordinary homeowners have changed things. Property taxes have risen under the Memoranda from 487 million euros in 2010 to 2.75 billion euros in 2013.

Second properties owned by many middle-class people to supplement their income have become burdens, and vulnerable to seizure, as there are often no tenants to pay the rent.

PROMISES

The government promises that it will exempt the most impoverished householders from repossessions.

It presents the auctioning-off of debtors' properties as justice being done against rich Greeks who refuse to pay their mortgages at the expense of the Greek people, a response to "the damage created by systematic non-payers who have money but do not pay their housing/mortgages - damage that is passed on to the banks and which all of us have to pay for".

But the government is not talking about the large loans granted to build the Athens Concert Hall, money never to be seen

again.

Nor about the bourgeois parties which all took advances of grants and loans, money never to be seen again.

Nor the loans that the Greek state has handed over to big subcontractors, media barons, etc.

The government is talking about working-class and poor people in houses worth up to 200,000 euros.

Vulture funds are buying up defaulted mortgages from banks at big discounts and hope to profit from speculation or from auctions.

DESPERATION
Desperation, despair, and individual isolation will dominate everywhere, if the left and the labour movement do not rise on the occasion to build a militant movement against these repossessions.

The labour movement and the left must co-organise the struggle in the communities and the workplaces,

20 collectives in the Attica region (round Athens) are undertaking joint actions through the Coordination Collective of Attica. The same is being done in many other areas. The first results are encouraging. Auctions have been halted in Perama, Kifissia, Heraklion, Crete, and Lesbos.

There is a need for a mass movement of civil disobedience which organises squatting of empty houses and defends the right to good housing for all.

The experience of the Spanish movement against repossessions is invaluable. There, 420,000 families have had their homes repossessed in the last five years, but a dynamic movement has prevented 700 auctions.

In order for the battle against the government plans to repossess houses to be victorious it must become part of the political struggle for the overthrow of Samaras and its memorandum politics, and it must have radical anti-capitalist demands and practices.

- No home allowed to fall into the hands of the bankers! Mass mobilisation outside each home facing a threat of eviction.

- Housing is a right for all, Greeks, immigrants, and refugees.

- Utilisation of empty properties (thousands of empty properties are owned by municipalities, churches, public bodies). A public body under workers' management and control to ensure social housing on the basis of people's needs

- Abolition of all taxes on primary residences of up to 140 sq.m. and abolition of property taxes on all properties that do not generate income.

- Write off debts for poor households and the unemployed.

- Nationalisation of the banking system under workers' and social management and control, to be the vehicle for public investment and social needs.

Korea solidarity

By **Tom Harris**

In December, South Korea was rocked by a massive strike of rail workers that lasted for 22 days. The strike, led by the Korean Rail Workers' Union, opposed the introduction of private companies into the state-owned rail network.

Early on in the dispute, the government declared the strike illegal and issued arrest warrants for the union leadership, who were forced into hiding. The rail union had its offices raided and its computers confiscated.

Police attempted to break into the headquarters of the KCTU union federation but were fought off by a large crowd of workers. The repression generated broad support for the strike, including from students who organised "flashmob" demonstrations outside public buildings.

The strikes have been called to a halt in response to the creation of an official committee to review the rail situation. Nevertheless, the government is still taking legal measures to further victimise the union and its members. International solidarity will be important in the coming weeks.

The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) has called a solidarity protest outside the South Korean Embassy in London, 10am, Thursday 16 January. More: bit.ly/korail-demo

Duggan inquest jury to reconvene

By **Phil Grimm**

The jury in the inquest into the killing of Mark Duggan by armed police is due to reconvene on 7 January.

The killing, which took place in August 2011 in Tottenham, led to a local protest and then rioting on a nationwide scale. The public inquest was set up to uncover the truth surrounding the killing, but it has been characterised by confused and contradictory evidence from the police. Officers



have variously claimed that Duggan had a gun, that he shot first, and that the gun "disappeared" once he was dead.

The jury had been adjourned in December after failing to reach a conclusion.

Firefighters' dispute escalates over New Year

By Darren Bedford

The FBU's pensions campaign cranked up a notch over the holiday period, with three further periods of strike action as well as the first action short of a strike.

Firefighters took strike action in England and Wales for five hours on Christmas Eve, a further five hours on New Year's Eve into New Year's Day and for two hours on the morning of Friday 3 January.

The FBU argued that the firefighters provide a 24/7 service and it was therefore legitimate to take action over the festive period. A Guardian poll found that 85% of the public said fire-



fighters' should take strike during the holiday period. The strikes were solid with picket lines at many fire stations. The union authorised some members to work in those areas worst affected by floods and storms in the

south of England.

3 January was the ninth time firefighters have taken strike action since September, although this amounts to just under 35 hours of strikes in total.

In addition, firefighters

took action short of a strike in England, Wales and for the first time, in Scotland, refusing to undertake voluntary overtime.

FBU officials met fire minister Brandon Lewis for the first time since October to formally discuss the dispute. The government has started the process of imposing the new pension scheme, announcing its consultation to run until March. After that, legislation imposing the new scheme is likely to be laid.

Therefore firefighters have a window over the next three months to make an impact. The union's executive council meets before 10 January to plan the next steps.

Student solidarity

By Ed Maltby

On Wednesday 22 January, students in London will organise a "March on Senate House", to put pressure on the management of the University of London to grant the demands of the "3 Cosas" strikers (outsourced workers), and to support the pay claim of higher education workers in their national dispute.

Students are also demanding that their organisation, the University of London Union, is not disbanded, as the university's management currently proposes to do.

This demonstration comes after a series of student rallies in solidarity with workers' strikes last term, which were subject to violent and overwhelming

police brutality.

Students, staff and supporters should join the rally at University of London Union, Malet Street, at 1pm on 22 January.

On Wednesday 29 January, students from activist groups across the UK will attend a national meeting and demonstration in Birmingham University, called by Birmingham Defend Education, Sussex Against Privatisation, and the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

We will be protesting against Birmingham University management using an injunction to ban student protests and to discuss and plan the next steps in the national student movement.

Meet at University of Birmingham Guild at 10am on 29 January.



New book portrays an era

Between the 1930s and the 1950s the revolutionary socialist press in the USA had talented cartoonists such as "Carlo" (Jesse Cohen).

A new collection of their work gives a snapshot history of the times — the rise of the mass trade union movement in the USA, the great strike wave of 1945-6, the fight against "Jim Crow" racism, World War Two, the imposition of Stalinism on Eastern Europe...

It puts socialist policy proposals — opening the books of the corporations, organising workers' defence guards... — in vivid form.

For readers who already know a bit about the politics, it gives an illustrated mini-history of the struggles and activities of the revolutionary socialist movement in the era of turmoil between the great capitalist disruption of 1929 and the restabilising of the system (for the time being) in the early 1950s.

• *In an era of wars and revolutions*, by Carlo and others, edited by Sean Matgamna. 312 pages, £8.99. To order by post, pay £8.99 plus £1.60 postage at www.workersliberty.org/payment

Criminal barristers refused to work for half a day on Monday 6 January, in protest at government cuts to legal aid, causing disruption across Britain's courts.

The Justice Secretary Chris Grayling plans to cut £220 million from the legal aid budget. As well as restricting barristers' pay, the cuts will make it harder for ordinary

people to access top-quality legal representation or bring cases against powerful institutions.

Solicitor Matt Foot said: "There is widespread opposition to Grayling's proposals. They will have a devastating effect on the rights of ordinary people in this country and undermine the ability to challenge unlawful government actions."

Iraqi labour at risk in sectarian battles

By Colin Foster

Escalating sectarian conflict in Iraq reached a new peak on 2 January.

According to academic Juan Cole, an Al Qaeda group took over "big swathes of some al-Anbar cities and... police stations", abandoned by the cops after mass anti-government demonstrations by local people.

"Allegedly half of Fallujah had fallen to the Al Qaeda affiliate".

Anbar is a large but mostly desert province in the west of Iraq, bordering Syria and Jordan, and mostly inhabited by Iraq's large Sunni minority.

Iraq's government, led by Shia Islamists round prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, has negotiated alliances with some local Sunni militias which dislike Al Qaeda even more than they resent Maliki's policies, and launched counterattacks. But government control in Anbar's cities has still not been restored.

Maliki has obtained urgent shipments of missiles and drones from the USA, and on 7 January the government reported that it had killed 25 people with missile strikes on the city of Ramadi.

The Al Qaeda group which took the cities is ISIL (or ISIC), the same group currently in battle in northern Syria against secular and softer-Islamist strands of the Syrian opposition.

The anti-government surge which ISIL profited from was triggered by Maliki, in late December, sending troops to disperse a long-running and peaceful Sunni protest camp outside Ramadi and arresting a Sunni MP who had been negotiating between the protesters and the government. 44 MPs, mostly Sunni, resigned from the Iraqi parliament.

Maliki's policy for many years now has been one (as Cole puts it) "of almost ignoring Sunni complaints". To rule Iraq, he has relied more or less totally on his Shia base and on deals with Kurdish parties which, despite many ten-

sions, in return get virtual autonomy for the Kurdish north of Iraq.

Deaths from sectarian attacks, across Iraq, rose to 8000 in 2013, the highest figure since 2008.

Some on the left acclaimed the militias active in 2006-7 as "anti-imperialist resistance", but the worst of them have become even more active since US troops withdrew, targeting not imperialism but Iraqis of other creeds.

Anbar was a stronghold of rebel militias under the US occupation of Iraq from 2003-8, but then, as Cole notes, "the old Islamic State of Iraq [group] was powerful in some areas at some times, [but] it was a guerrilla organisation which faded away when conventional troops came in".

The US was adroit and flexible enough to nurture, negotiate with, and finance a militia of anti-Al-Qaeda Sunnis. That militia, Sahwa, had 100,000 fighters by 2008. Maliki disbanded Sahwa and largely broke promises to give its fighters jobs in the Iraqi army or bureaucracy.

Economically Iraq has boomed in recent years, and foreign investment continues to flow in. This seems to have given Maliki false confidence. Many provinces, not just Anbar, are demanding autonomy and a bigger share of the oil revenues.

Elections are due in April. A working-class political presence is urgently needed there, to avoid Iraq collapsing into a militarised regime in which sectarian conflicts dominate, and the labour movement is crushed.

To organise it in time, in current conditions, will be difficult.



Following in Stalin's footsteps

Eric Lee



The downfall of Chang Song-thaek, once considered the second most powerful person in North Korea, is a lesson in history for a new generation — and not only in Korea.

The parallels to Soviet history are so striking that one almost wonders if Kim Jong-un read Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror* — the classic history of the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s.

That's not an entirely rhetorical question either, as Kim was educated abroad and may well have had access to history books denied to ordinary North Koreans. In any event, the regime he now heads openly reveres Stalin and is perhaps the only one in the world that does so.

Fidel Castro has criticised Stalin, but also says "He established unity in the Soviet Union. He consolidated what Lenin had begun: party unity."

People with only a passing acquaintance with Soviet history may be surprised to discover that nearly all the victims of Stalin's massive purge which peaked in 1937 were not, in fact, oppositionists.

Nearly all the former White Guards, Mensheviks, and Social Revolutionaries had already been killed or exiled. And there were practically no survivors of earlier purges directed against Bolshevik opponents of Stalin such as Trotsky or Zinoviev by the time the Great Terror was unleashed. (Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and others were kept alive — but their supporters were either dead or in the gulag by the time of the great show trials.)

Stalin's victims in 1937 were overwhelmingly loyal supporters of his regime, including almost the entire leadership of the Communist Party and the Red Army.

Chang Song-thaek was, as far as we know, a loyal supporter of the Kim dynasty and the North Korean regime his entire life. His sacking, swift trial and even swifter execution fit precisely the pattern seen throughout the USSR in the last years of the 1930s as thousands of Communist Party leaders went to their deaths — often believing that the great Stalin had nothing to do with what was happening.

Media coverage in the West shows some basic misunderstandings of how a classically Stalinist reign of terror unfolds.

For example, as soon as word came out that Chang Song-thaek was executed, some Western journalists speculated that his wife might come next.

But then reports came out saying that Chang's widow, Kim Kyung-hee, had actually demanded his execution. Instead of being arrested herself, she was promoted to a prominent state committee.

This process — leading the calls for her husband to be killed, then apparently being accepted back into the fold — is classic Stalinist practice.

Unfortunately for Kim Kyung-hee, it will inevitably be followed with the discovery that she was as guilty as her late and unlamented husband. Her days are numbered — and she certainly knows this.

The language used by the regime — which referred to Chang as "despicable human scum ... who was worse than a dog" — reminds one BBC journalist of Shakespeare, but the inspiration is surely the Stalinist prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky, who infamously declared during one of the Moscow trials: "Shoot these rabid dogs. Death to this gang who hide their ferocious teeth, their eagle claws, from the people! ...

Down with these abject animals! Let's put an end once and for all to these miserable hybrids of foxes and pigs, these stinking corpses!"

The chronology of Chang's downfall also follows a template perfected by Stalin and his secret police boss Yezhov during the Terror.

First of all, Chang's closest associates were brought down — and apparently, publicly executed. It was standard practice in Stalin's USSR to discover traitors and spies at lower levels, and then to use this to topple powerful men who had "protected" them and covered up their treason.

One cannot understand what is happening in North Korea without understanding Stalin. This lack of historical context is causing even academic experts to misread developments — and to make wildly inaccurate predictions.

One of these is the argument that the current purge will somehow weaken the Kim regime.

Some North Korean defectors now living in the South are spreading reports they've heard that some North Koreans consider the execution of Chang a sign of weakness by the young leader.

But this ignores not only the Stalinist template he appears to be following, but even the history of the specifically North Korean variant of Stalinism.

Kim's grand-father, Kim Il-sung, did not inherit his post as Great Leader from his father, but rose to power on the corpses of political rivals — many of them loyal Communists.

His grandson is simply following in the family footsteps — and continuing with a tradition that began in Russia nearly eight decades ago.



Chang Song-thaek

Resurgent religion threatens gains of struggle

Letters



We continue our debates on attitudes to religion. What's your view? Email us at solidarity@workersliberty.org

Religion is pre-modern in origin, bereft of any explanatory power in the wake of scientific knowledge of the universe. It is primitive — "... preserving the character of an early stage in the historical development ." (Oxford Dictionary)

Historically religion has played many roles. It has encoded laws by which societies have been controlled to the benefit of the ruling class. It has aided the social cohesion required by human society. It has given explanations for the unknown. It has given a moral justification for conquest and revolt.

In modernity many of these roles are taken by secular science. However the rotting remains of religion have proven too useful to the ruling class to be binned. Interwoven with custom, prejudice, and fear, religion and its institutions have remained a powerful agent for backwardness — counter-revolution in Iran in 1979 and Spain in 1934, for example.

The oppression of women is the oldest form of human oppression and religion is its oldest vehicle. The founding text of every world religion relegates women to inferior status and this attitude is reflected in the attitude of fundamentalist religion today (fundamentalist here means "literal interpretation of scripture").

The anti-women demos of the Hindu BJP in India, the attempts by Hamas and the Taliban to impose the veil through violence, the Catholic Church's opposition to women's right to choose in Ireland, the attacks on girls' education in Pakistan, and the cultural/religious practice of female genital mutilation are just a tiny fraction of modern examples.

Most alarming, though, is that the situation is getting worse. Like a zombie, religion is coming back and is on the march. On the streets of Paris where homophobic priests and fascists unite against gay marriage, and in mainstream politics in Turkey, Egypt and Sri Lanka, where Buddhist monks

have organised anti-Muslim pogroms.

Religious fundamentalist activists all have different gods and would like to wipe each other out either by conversion or a bomb; but what they can all agree on is their hatred of secular society with its sex education for girls or its teaching of science and history without the mumbo jumbo of religion.

In Britain, religious groups have been setting up or taking over state schools; in Pakistan the Taliban shot Malala Yousafzai in the head for wanting to go to school; in Nigeria Boko Haram spell it out in blood. Their name means "Western education is sinful".

In a period of working-class defeat some people will reach out to old prejudices in desperation. Seeing their chance, the religious zombies will rise, demanding special rights to protect their lies through blasphemy laws, by threats, or acts of violence to protect their gods and prophets, apparently all-powerful but surprisingly still in need of the state to protect them from verbal or written insult. This may mildly worry

some ruling-class politicians but others revel in the distraction from class struggle.

Resurgent religion threatens the gains of centuries of struggle and yet the left, who should fight it, cower, too confused by a diet of cultural relativism to act. When confronted by demands for segregated meetings or religious schools they mutter about not being racist and leave children to fight the battle for reason on their own.

Socialists should be in no doubt here — we demand an end to religious schools; across the world we unite with those fighting for secular education and a secular state. We reject the veiling of women and oppose the wearing of the niqab in school, or by those working with children or the public.

We do not apologise for calling religion primitive and we do not leave anyone to fight their battles without solidarity because we are scared of being called racists.

Mark Sandell, Brighton



RT's success reflects left's failings

I welcome the sentiments of Eric Lee's article "why socialists should have nothing to do with Russia Today" (Solidarity 306, 4 December 2013).

However, to effectively call for complete boycott of watching RT seems to imply that the way for people to assess media outlets or information sources is by making a black or white decision about the entire station. Instead I think we should be encouraging that people critically assess the news, the source, and the interests behind it and do so in juxtaposition to a variety of media.

More importantly, however, we need to recognise that Russia Today has achieved such prominence on the UK's alternative media circuit because the independent left in the UK has utterly failed to come up with an answer of its own to the demand for well-produced, modern media that gives a voice to the labour movement and dissident opinion.

In the US there are daily independent online news programmes like "Democracy Now!" and "The Real News Network" that offer a diverse array of radical left opinions on

global events in a high-quality newsroom format. There is nothing like that here.

If the left does not take this issue seriously, the vacuum for quality, independent media will be filled by cranks and reactionaries. A new online project called "The People's Voice", has just been launched through a crowd-funding effort, and is basically promising to be a well-produced blend of programmes that cover pseudoscience, conspiracy theory, and Middle East politics in a way that would make Russia Today look fair and balanced. This is unfortunately going to be a powerful draw to a new generation of potential activists who are looking for answers about how the world works. The left has nothing of its own to counterpose.

Online news programmes should be no replacement to newspapers, books, pamphlets, and the more engaging forms of debate, but the reality is they set the narratives in society with great efficiency.

It's time for the left in the UK to get with the programme and bring their media into the 21st century.

Andy Forse, Milton Keynes

For a united Europe with open borders

The British labour movement needs more migrant workers. It needs to be invigorated by the spirit shown, for example, in the Tres Cosas campaign of ancillary workers at the University of London, almost all migrant workers.

Our movement needs to be enlivened by the militancy shown by a series of battles in the last year by cleaners and fast-food workers, again almost all migrants.

Historically, our labour movement owes a lot to migrants, right back to the start. The Chartist movement in the 19th century owed a lot to Irish migrants, who faced even worse narrow-minded hostility than East European migrants to Britain do today.

Migrant workers, knowing different conditions and different cultures, are less likely to accept things as “just the way it is” or “the way it’s always been”. Being people with the energy and drive to leave friends and family and accustomed surroundings in order to try something new, they are less likely to stick in ruts, more likely to be willing to take risks.



Migrant workers have been central to the 3 Cosas campaign of outsourced workers at the University of London.

Freedom of movement for all

By Andy Shallice

The latest ideas coming from reformists on migration are worth discussing.

On the one hand you have a recent Institute for Public Policy Research report which argues that we have to accept freedom of movement of labour within the EU and it distances itself from UKIP and the Tories. That’s fine. But it also talks about being tough on the misuse of these rights.

So, on the other hand, it is missing the point about the ideology and politics of the right. If we are all citizens of the world then we have to be in favour of freedom of movement for all people around the world, and especially in Europe.

The logic here shouldn’t be about whether or not migrants contribute to GDP. Or that we don’t mind migrants if they are rich, or highly trained IT wizards, single and healthy, but “save us from your poor”. If we defend migrants on that

The response of the wealthy classes is, now as always, to feed on prejudices and fears, to try to divide the working class, longer-settled from migrant.

The *Daily Express* started 2014 with a front page slandering Bulgarian and Romanian workers now legally free to come to Britain under European Union rules.

“Benefits Britain here we come! Fears as migrant flood begins”, it declared.

The Tories are restricting migrant workers’ rights to benefits, and agitating in the European Union for limits on migration. Ukip outflanks them on the right. The Labour leaders apologise again and again about the Labour government in 2004 having made some unspecified sort of mistake in admitting Polish workers to Britain earlier than was absolutely required under EU law.

The slurs about migrant workers being an unbearable pressure on budgets and services are lies.

Even in the *Express* that is clear. It has right-wing Tory MP Peter Bone complaining that the Government’s benefit restrictions “do not tackle the main problem”.

Why not? “Most migrants come to the UK to work. Why wouldn’t they when they can earn ten times what they can back home?” [Actually, Bulgaria’s income per head is 38% of the UK’s on purchasing power parity measure, not 10%].

But, writes Bone, “up to 70,000 a year will come, putting even more pressure on our schools, hospitals, and housing”.

In fact the migrant workers are contributing more staff to our schools and hospitals, more labour to the construction of new housing — or at least they are to the extent that Tory government cuts allow anyone to contribute.

The “services under pressure” depend heavily on migrant labour. Migrant workers put in vastly more, in productive labour and taxes paid, than they claim in welfare and benefits. Migrant workers are part of the working class, and a highly productive part.

Even in capitalist conditions, countries with freer and larger immigration generally do better than more closed-off countries.

In the EU, the free movement of labour has been a pressure for the levelling-up of wages across the continent. The gap between Spanish wages, for example, and German wages today is much smaller than it was when Spain joined the EU. EU bosses are now trying to use the debt crisis to reverse that levelling-up, but the free movement of labour makes it more difficult for them to do so.

Our trade unions should make a special effort to welcome and integrate Bulgarian, Romanian, and other migrant workers, and to help them contribute to the labour movement’s campaign for improved services and standards for all.

basis we are on dangerous ground.

If you are a poor Roma family from Romania just been “re-housed” on the site of a disused chemical factory, should you be ineligible to come to Britain? Or from eastern Slovakia, where the council has just erected another wall between you and the rest of the town?

These are the things not being said by the reformists.

After a report on the government’s new restrictions on Job Seeker’s Allowance to migrants on 18 December the BBC leading journalist Nick Robinson said that he had been told by “senior sources in government” that the government’s real concern (on Bulgarian and Romanians being free to come to Britain) was an influx of Roma migrants, suggesting that there’s a “problem now with Roma in Central London...”.

He really let the cat out of the bag there.

• Andy Shallice is a social activist in Sheffield.



Scrap the Bedroom Tax... and what else?

Join the dialogue

This month the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (AWL), the organisation which publishes *Solidarity*, is starting a project of seeking conversations with working-class activists about what one or two demands each of them would most like to see the labour movement focused on winning from the next government after 2015.

There is widespread dissatisfaction in the labour movement with the Labour leaders’ line of continuing with cuts and a public sector pay freeze.

However, there is no focused, coherent push by the labour movement to press a compact, well-known set of positive demands on the next government. Low expectations, defeatism, and union leaders’ would-be clever tactics are combining to shape things so that a new Labour government, if we get it, would face few sharp demands.

Where there has been a relatively focused, coherent push by the labour movement, on bedroom tax and the Health and Social Care Act, it has produced results, i.e. public commitments by the Labour leaders to repeal which provide a measuring-rod for their actions in government and a lever for the movement to use if the Labour leaders renege.

We as AWL have our own ideas about what wider demands we’d want, which we expound week after week in *Solidarity* and in pamphlets like *A Workers’ Plan for the Crisis*.

We will continue to argue those ideas. But we know that some of them are for now minority views. We are also interested in finding out what more limited selection of demands has enough grip that a real labour-movement campaign to enforce them is a short-term possibility.

We heed Trotsky’s advice: “Agitation is not only the means of communicating to the masses this or that slogan, calling the masses to action, etc. For a party, agitation is also a means of lending an ear to the masses, of sounding out its moods and thoughts, and reaching this or another decision in accordance with the results.”

“Only the Stalinists have transformed agitation into a noisy monologue. For the Marxists, the Leninists, agitation is always a dialogue with the masses”.

We are not strong enough, yet, that we can pretend to have a real “dialogue with the masses” outside individual workplaces and struggles. But it is within our power to undertake a dialogue with a selection of working-class activists much wider than our membership. We hope you will join the conversation.

1914-18: what we should remember

The First World War, which started 100 years ago in 1914, was very popular at the start. Tory minister Michael Gove is trying to revive that mood.

But by the end of the sordid carve-ups which followed the war's end, many had come round to the view advocated by only a small revolutionary socialist minority at the start: that governments had sent millions to be killed or maimed in pursuit of imperialist rivalries.

This article from the US Trotskyist weekly *Socialist Appeal* on the 20th anniversary of the end of the war (11 November 1938) explains why.

The patriots are celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Armistice Day this week the signing of the agreement on November 11, 1918 which brought the hostilities of the first World War to an end.

The workers, too, have a right to commemorate Armistice Day in their own way. So let them:

Remember that 14,000,000 workers and peasants were killed or reported missing, and 20,000,000 wounded and maimed in order to determine whether German and Austro-Hungarian imperialism or French, British, Tsarist and American imperialism would dominate the world, and reap profits from the millions of white, black, brown and yellow slaves throughout the world.

Remember that in the midst of all the misery and devastation inflicted on the masses, the profits of the capitalist class swelled beyond the highest limits it had yet attained. At the beginning of the war, in the year 1914, the investment return of the United States Steel Corporation was 2.8 per cent, whereas towards the end of the war, in the year 1917, the return was 24.9 per cent, amounting to \$478,204,000.

Remember that the war was fought under the slogan of a "war to end all wars," and that there has not been a year since the end of the World War in which wars, large or small, were not being fought, that we are today closer to a new and more dreadful world war than at any other time since the Armistice was signed.

Remember that the war was fought under the slogan of a "war for democracy", and that there is less democracy, that the masses today enjoy less democratic rights in every capitalist country in the world, than they did at any other time in the last fifty years.

Remember that the masses were mobilised and driven to the charnel house of war with the cry that "We'll hang the Kaiser to a sour apple tree!" The Kaiser remains free and alive while millions rot in war graves, the Kaiser remains one of the wealthiest men in the world today. His place has been taken not by a "democracy" but by the Fascist regime of Hitler, which makes the Junker regime of the pre-war Hohenzollerns look like child's play.

Remember that the masses throughout the world went wild with enthusiasm on receiving the news of the Armistice and the promises of the war-lords of the belligerent countries that they would henceforward live in peace. Today every country — Germany as well as France; England as well as Italy; the United States as well as Japan — is engaged in a frenzied armaments race the like of which the world has never before seen.

Remember the abominable lies which the rulers of every land told their people for the purpose of drugging their minds with the poison of chauvinism and nationalism. The same lies, the same poison, are being disseminated at this very moment by the same rulers, who pursue the same aim preparing docile cannon fodder for a new imperialist war.

Remember that the "peace" which was established at Versailles after the Armistice was a monstrous lie — a brazen attempt to reduce the peoples of the defeated na-



In 2012 University of London Union vice-president Daniel Cooper refused to join an official Remembrance Day ceremony.

- His statement on the ensuing row: bit.ly/dlc-rem
- Report of the public meeting in London where he defended his stance: www.workersliberty.org/warmmeeting
- How the old socialist movement collapsed under the pressure of war fever in 1914: bit.ly/2int-1914

tions to the positions of slaves. It was this "peace" that contributed so mightily to the rise and triumph of Hitlerism in Germany and Austria.

Remember also that even from the standpoint of the war-patriots, the millions did die in vain, for the defeated powers of yesterday once more threaten the preferential imperialist position of the victorious powers — the twenty years that have elapsed have only brought the imperialist rivalries and conflicts to the point at which they stood on the eve of the last World War.

Remember that the infamous Versailles Treaty signed after the Armistice — which brought neither peace nor democracy — was supported by the Social Democratic parties and their International, the Second International, which supported the capitalist class in its war and which took upon itself the responsibility for the indefensible crime of the spurious "peace" and all its consequences.

Remember that the Russian masses brought the war to an end, at least for themselves, a year before the imperialists signed their Armistice, and that they did it in the only effective way, by the revolutionary overthrow of the warmongers and their social system, capitalism, which breeds war.

Remember that the German ruling class decided to sue for peace only after the millions of German workers and peasants in soldiers' uniform resolved to stop murdering their French and English brothers, and to turn their guns instead upon their Junker officers and their own ruling class.

And as the new world war threatens — the new war which would be infinitely more horrible and destructive than any in history.

Remember the Armistice.

Remember the lies of capitalism which drove the masses into the war that led to the Armistice.

Remember the frightful "peace" which came after the Armistice.

Remember that only the independent action of the working class, that only the war of the masses upon the warmongering rulers, can put an end, really and once for all, to wars in general.

In the great class war between the exploited and exploiter, the oppressed and the oppressor, there is neither armistice nor peace.

It is only by our victory, only by smashing capitalism and its ugly offspring, war, that the socialist society can be ushered in, and along with it abundance for all men, freedom from all social iniquity, and a true and lasting peace.

"Opening

Camila Bassi concludes a series of articles looking at the recent history of China.

The post-1979 era of "opening and reform" opened China's economy to global capital. Since then the state has been managing this process to ensure its own political legitimacy and stability. It fuels a populist nationalism, embedded with anti-American and anti-Japanese feeling, and a neoconservative nostalgia for the past.

Moreover, although Confucianism was rejected under Mao, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has since pursued a spiritual moralisation and harmonisation programme known as "new Confucianism", in which "Confucius [has been] turned, through an extraordinary sleight of hand, into an advocate of profit and economic growth" (Mitter, 2005).

From the early 1990s, the pace and intensity of economic growth in China has been extraordinary. There has been a dramatic proliferation of rural migrants and consumer goods into the urban domain — stirring up two phenomena.

On the one hand, there is the significant growth of labour unrest, which is the only political force capable of threatening State power. See my *Solidarity* pieces, "Chinese workers fight for democracy" (bit.ly/china-democ) and "China's new worker militants" (bit.ly/china-mili), for more on this. On the other hand, there is a crisis of culture, particularly among China's new (sociological) middle class.

Wang (in Rosen, 2004) refers to an apolitical, material-seeking, "post-communist personality" that rejects life under Mao and reflects the CCP's drive for wealth. This, I suggest, operates in contradictory conjunction with what Yang (in Schein, 1999) identifies as a micro-political "counterstate individualism" expressed through consumerism.

SHANGHAI

The city of Shanghai is worth briefly exploring to grasp the contemporary nature of a rapidly globalising, developing and urbanising China.

The city's evolution is commonly identified through three main periods, commencing with the 1842-1945 imperial era.

From a fishing village, the Nanking Treaty of 1842 established Shanghai as a major treaty port, attracting an influx of foreign capital and key imperial powers to transform it into a major financial and trade centre of the Far East and one of the leading cities in the world. Under the treaty-port system the city was divided into two wealthy foreign-run districts (which developed, at that time, the most advanced urban amenities in Asia, with the exception of Tokyo) and an impoverished Chinese municipality.

These socio-economic districts, to this day, are apparent in the urban landscape: with the Western-style boulevards of the International Settlement and French Concession, known



Shanghai in the 1930s

and reform” in China



View from Shanghai over to Pudong

then and now as the “high corner”, and the industrial centres and shantytowns of the Chinese municipality, the “low corner” (Wu, 1999, 2002; Wu and Li, 2005).

During this imperial era, Shanghai gained a reputation as “the Paris of the East”, “the bright pearl of the Orient” and “the paradise of adventures”, and the Shanghaiese as natural entrepreneurs (Farrer, 2002; Zhang, 2002). Bickers (2004) comments on the high corner of Shanghai in 1919:

This was a rhapsody to light, to modernity, style, display and opulence. [...] Shanghai was not only a city of wealth, but a city unashamed of displaying wealth. [...] East didn't meet West in Shanghai: Russia met Britain, Japan met Portugal, India met France, and all met in China. And China met China there too. New China met 'Old China' [...].

Furthermore, Shanghai had the repute as “the whore of Asia” (Farrer, 2002) — with foreigners in the city sensitive to its association with bars and brothels.

In marked contrast then, the subsequent 1949-1976 Maoist era saw the end of this so-called Western decadence as the city's doors were closed. Shanghai became one of China's major industrial bases and “cash cows” (meaning a significant proportion of its annual revenue was siphoned off for central government). The establishment of a number of work-units (compact, self-contained areas in the city) typified where many ordinary Shanghaiese both worked and lived.

The post-1979 opening and reform era has been shaped by a decentralisation (not a decline) of state power, the emergence of non-state economic players, and a new economic structure based on tertiary industries and a rationalised selection of primary ones (Han, 2000; Wu, 2003a).

While the engines of the country's early economic growth during the 1980s were the special economic zones (SEZs) in southern China, Shanghai itself was held back until the beginning of the 1990s (central government preferring instead to maintain the city as a reliable cash cow). In response to the international fallout of the 1989 military suppression of the Tiananmen Square uprisings, i.e., the easing of foreign capital to China, the CCP reasserted its commitment, symbolic and real, to opening and reform by announcing in 1990 the designation of its largest SEZ at that point in Pudong, east of Shanghai's Huangpu River.

This was twinned with the state's ambition to make Shanghai China's first global city (an international economic, finan-

cial and trade centre) (Han, 2000; Wu, 2003a).

Since the 1990s Shanghai has undergone an economic and building boom, which, in scale and pace, has arguably been exceptional in the history of global capitalism. The dominant symbols of the city are those of Western cultural commodities (Wu, 2003b). The city's government has drawn upon the past imperial discourse of Shanghai as “Paris of the Orient” in order to promote the place globally as a reawakening hub of entrepreneurialism, which is rediscovering and rekindling its internationalism and cosmopolitanism and restoring its place in the world order (Wu, 2003a, 2003b).

Sensationalist journalism in the 1990s pitched the city as the “Far Eastern Promise”, “The Shanghai Bubble” and the “Field of Dreams” (Wu, 2003b). The target for its economy is to develop the largest trade and retail centre in China, as well as real estate, information services and tourism (Han, 2000).

Shanghai has been marketed as a city of work and a city at play (Wu, 2003a), with the local government strategy to “create an internationalized and attractive image to global capital” (He and Wu, 2007). One consequence is that “the demand for pursuing exchange value overwhelms the demand for maintaining the everyday use value of old urban neighbourhoods”, so, notably, residential displacement (of poor people) from the inner city to the suburbs has been vast (Han, 2000; He and Wu, 2007; Zhang, 2002). Another consequence is the acute exploitation of labour-power, in particular, of the city's millions of rural migrants.

RURAL MIGRANTS

Rural migrants, because of the hukou or household registration system, work without basic legal rights and welfare benefits in China's cities, since the hukou restricts such rights and benefits to one's place of origin.

The Financial Times (2013) estimates that there are 260 million rural migrant workers in China's cities, which brings the total proportion of the population living in cities to 52.57%. 35.29% of the population have urban hukou. The idea of scrapping the hukou is resisted by local and central government as it is seen as economically burdensome. Minor reform to the hukou has led to some concessions, but this literally comes at a cost (for example, access to schooling at a fee

higher than for city residents). The hukou effectively makes rural migrants second-class citizens and especially precarious workers. This has not stopped significant numbers of rural migrants from protesting for better conditions of existence.

China Labour Bulletin reports that the workers' movement in China, during the period of 2009-2011, was revitalised by a new generation of migrant workers demanding better pay and working conditions:

These young activists have not only won noticeable concessions from their employers, they have also forced the government and trade unions to reassess their labour and social policies.

In December 2013 the CCP detailed a plan to ‘abolish’ the hukou, which is part of its wider ambition to drive forth with urbanisation in order to boost domestic demand for goods and services as both export-led growth and investment in infrastructure have slowed. However, while:

... China will continue to emphasize the growth and development of “small cities” by removing hukou restrictions for these underdeveloped areas. ... “megacities” like Beijing and Shanghai will likely continue to have strict limitations on hukous in a bid to fight overcrowding and rising housing costs. (Tiezzi, 2013)

CONCLUSION

As China's economy has grown, so too has both inequality and the visibility of inequality, such that anger against the super-rich and Party corruption is commonplace.

In addition to an increased militarisation of labour movement unrest, political protests around land grabs, lack of affordable housing, environmental damage (albeit with an element of NIMBY-ism), and unsafe food and water are on the rise. The Party clings to power by relying on a combination of nationalism and economic growth (the latter of which has been decelerating of late). The omnipresence of the totalitarian hand of the state continually threatens the closure of outlets of resistance.

Today's China (like yesterday's China) is one where the Party can “make disappear” its critics. And yet the struggle continues, courageously unabated.

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Collapse in Central Africa

By Colin Foster

The Christian majority in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, are reported to be impatient and disillusioned with the French army intervention, which at first they welcomed. The Muslim minority are reported to be flatly hostile.

France has long had troops in the CAR, and has been the power behind CAR thrones ever since the country became formally independent from French rule in 1960. France's decision on 5 December 2013 to send 1600 French troops onto the streets of Bangui, together with 4000 troops from nearby African countries (all also countries where France has heavy influence), was spurred by a collapse of government in the country.

The collapse was and is real, not an excuse. About one million of the CAR's five million people have fled their homes. At least a thousand have died. In Bangui, 100,000 people are sheltering in a refugee camp near the French-controlled airport.

What is now the CAR was a marginal part of France's colonial empire. The territory was seized in the 1880s more as part of geopolitical ambition than with specific plans to develop it. By 1960 France had realised that it would do better to give formal independence to its colonies quickly, and be in a position heavily to influence the new governments, than delay and be forced out by militant nationalist movements as it had been forced out of Vietnam and would soon be forced out of Algeria.

The unit given independence as the CAR had no access to the sea, and borders which were drawn for the convenience of imperial officials and diplomats, rather than reflecting real frontiers of geography, language, or culture.

The CAR's longest borders are with Chad in the north and the war-ravaged Democratic Republic of Congo in the south.

It also has borders with South Sudan and Sudan in the east, and Cameroon and Congo in the west. It is close to the exact geographical centre of Africa. Most of its trade, at least its legal trade, moves through Cameroon, which itself has only mediocre transport links.

On official figures the CAR is one of the poorest countries in Africa, despite having large mineral wealth (uranium, gold, diamonds) and fertile land for cash crops such as cotton. It may be a bit less poor, or at least some people in the CAR may be less poor, because much of its trade is illegal and unreported in official figures.

Wealth is very unequally distributed. The majority of the people suffer low life expectancies and the scippiest of education and health provision. Some people have become very rich, most notoriously Jean-Bedel Bokassa, who rose in the French army through service in Indochina and then became ruler of the CAR, under French protection, from 1966 to 1979, when the French finally lost patience and replaced him by David Dacko.

The CAR is large in land area, about the size of the Ukraine or Texas, but much of its north is sparsely populated. Most of the population is concentrated in the south west, near the capital, Bangui, which has 700,000 people.

In March 2013, power was seized by a rebel militia called Seleka. The French military presumably reckoned that the incumbent ruler was too unpopular and unreliable to be worth defending (the CAR army made no attempt to halt the rebel forces), and that it could do business with Seleka.

Seleka originated with some rebel groups in the north, where much of the CAR's 10% Muslim minority live. By the time it took power it had gained strength by the adhesion of many other groups who wanted to join the winners. It was mysteriously well-equipped, with armoured and other vehicles as well as light arms.

Experts have suggested the governments of over-50%

Muslim Chad or of heavily-Muslim Sudan as the source of Seleka's equipment. Both governments have denied it. It is reported that most of Seleka's equipment was Chinese or Iranian made, suggesting Sudan as the source. Many people in the CAR's south refer to Seleka as "the Chadians", though most Seleka fighters are from the CAR.

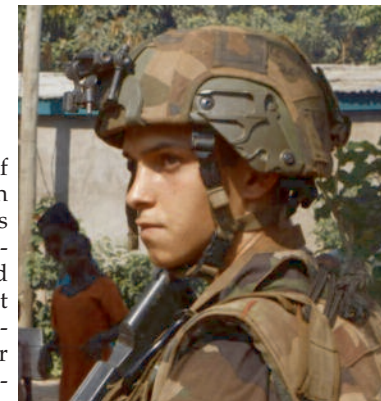
Further in the background, possibly, is China, which has strong ties with the government in Sudan, has increasing economic interests in Africa, and is now a major export destination for the CAR.

Whatever the plans behind the Seleka coup, they did not work. The Seleka alliance soon broke up. Its forces became scattered gangs, profiteering and terrorising the population. Rival gangs, called "anti-balaka", developed in response. Much of the fighting has taken a Christian (southern, anti-balaka) versus Muslim (northern, Seleka) character.

The French and African troops are supposed to be disarming the militias on all sides, but the collapse of the country into mini-warlord strife makes that project difficult or maybe impossible.

The French government talks of organising elections late in 2014, and must hope that by then it can put together a team of allies within the CAR cohesive enough to form a working government.

France's record over 130 years of domination in the CAR gives no reason to expect any solid good from the French plans.



A French soldier in CAR

Fighting for secularism among London's Bengalis

Ansar Ahmed Ullah, an activist with the Nirmul Committee (International Forum for Secular Bangladesh), based in East London, spoke to *Solidarity* about the conflicts between secularists and Islamists in Bengali communities.

The issues facing Bengali people are the same social issues faced by any other community, including the white working class, living in a deprived inner-city area. Bengalis suffer from high unemployment, underachievement in education, bad health, and overcrowded housing conditions.

The political landscape of the Bengali community in London's East End can be seen in different time phases, beginning with localised welfare politics in the 60s and 70s, politics connected to the Bangladeshi national independence movement in 1971, political mobilisation of second-generation Bengali community activists (around 1978), which involved anti-racist politics, community representation, and moves into mainstream politics. Now there's a connection to global politics, and the rise of Islamism

The importance of religion in people's lives increased throughout the late 1990s. This was partly due to the New Labour government's attitude to "faith groups" and their inclusion in its agenda.

In addition, after 11 September 2001, the SWP-led Stop the War Coalition brought together a number of organisations, including the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), linked to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The anti-war movement mobilised thousands of Muslims, including young Muslims. This was the first time that third-generation Muslims were taking part in global political campaigns.

But secularist and left-leaning Bengali organisations failed to take any lead or engage with the community's own young people. The Islamists found this vacuum an opportunity to claim that they were speaking on behalf of the community.

MAB was led by Middle Eastern Muslims, whereas the Muslim Council of Britain was South Asian, but both are linked to Islamists. The SWP gave them a boost.

The decision to focus on Islamist organisations, instead of drawing support from smaller secular organisations, had a

serious adverse affect on the Bengali community. Some community activists argue that it helped create a schism within the community, and the Islamists gained further ground, both ideologically and organisationally.

At the local level, in the East End, some secular social organisations objected to the involvement of Islamists in the local anti-war movement, but in vain. Some refrained from joining the movement, despite their outright opposition to the invasion of Iraq by the United States and Britain, but campaigned from their own platform against the war.

ENGAGEMENT

There is not much engagement with young people by the secularist and left-leaning organisations. The UK Bengali community is very much polarised, most obviously along the lines of secularism versus Islamism.

The political struggle between two camps is being fought out every day throughout the UK in Bengali communities. The Bengali left is divided, and cannot be unified, but on the question of secularism some left groups are working together.

Central and local government funding had previously sourced community organisations led by secular activists. That's been cut as the Islamists have gained the upper hand, and, being the loudest and best-organised, were appeased by local councils. Much of the funding from the central government "Prevent" project [part of the government's counter-terrorism strategy] has gone, via local councils, to groups associated with Islamists. The Islamists in Tower Hamlets are in a very cosy relationship with Christian and other faith leaders, as well as local unions and the SWP.

Religion is definitely a growing force in the community. The Islamists are very strong, as they are very well-funded and financially self-reliant. They have strong organisational structures with paid staff/cadres. By contrast, the secularists are disorganised and unable to challenge the Islamists.

The racism Bengalis face today cannot be compared to what the community faced from the 1970s-1990s. That was a more brutal and violent racism. Today, Bengalis, like any other Black community, may face institutional racism. Focus-

ing on "Islam" or "Muslims" has perhaps given another angle for racists to discriminate against anyone who is different from them. What we are dealing with here is prejudice, and how it can manifest as overt racism.

We do not use the term "Islamophobia". Calling things "Islamophobic" is a defence card used by Islamists whenever they are criticised.

We can fight racism today by collectively taking on the challenge, and working in partnerships just as we did from the 70s to the 90s.

The best thing leftists and secularists outside the community can do to help us is supporting initiatives on the ground by Bengali secularists and leftists. There are groups from a variety of different backgrounds and traditions, many of which are linked to organisations in Bangladesh itself, which have members and activities in Britain.

These include the ICT Support Forum, Gonojagoron Moncho, Nirmul Committee, Awami League, Muktiyoddha Sangsad, Bangladesh Workers Party, Bangladesh Socialist Party, Communist Party of Bangladesh, National Socialist Party of Bangladesh, and the National Awami Party, amongst others.

They are campaigning on a daily basis – holding demos, meetings, seminars, processions, vigils, and other activities. They would appreciate attendance at their events, solidarity speeches, and support.

More splits in the SWP

The Socialist Workers' Party conference in December 2013 ended with an endorsement of the current leadership and with many of the opposition resigning.

Our comments on the fall-out: bit.ly/swp-opp

The murder of Patrice Lumumba

“Dead, living, free, or in prison on the orders of the colonialists, it is not I who counts. It is the Congo, it is our people for whom independence has been transformed into a cage where we are regarded from the outside... History will one day have its say, but it will not be the history that Brussels, Paris, Washington, or the United Nations will teach, but that which they will teach in the countries emancipated from colonialism and its puppets... a history of glory and dignity.”

Patrice Lumumba, October 1960

“The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.”

WEB DuBois, Black Reconstruction, 1935

WEB DuBois wrote about the Black Americans who, liberated from slavery, had a moment of optimism — “in the sun” — in the aftermath of the US civil war. The period was short. Soon, African-Americans would become the victims of a racist white counter-revolution and Jim Crow segregation.

Similarly, in the late 1950s, the Congolese peoples lived through a short historical moment full of democratic possibilities. Belgian colonial rule was ending. The slave trade that had devastated the region was long gone. Gone too was the murderous insanity of the period of the Belgian King Leopold II’s personal control of Congo.

The person who symbolised the new period and what it might offer to the Congolese was the left-nationalist and first Prime Minister of the newly independent Congo, Patrice Lumumba. The overthrow of Lumumba, and his subsequent murder in 1961 — with the active complicity of the US and Belgium — was an outrage that prepared the ground for the police-state and kleptocracy of Mobutu and the subsequent wars which still blight Congo.

Here, Dan Katz tells the story of the killing of Lumumba.

600 years ago the Kingdom of Kongo was emerging as a powerful force with a capital, Mbanza Kongo, in what is now northern Angola.

In 1483 a Portuguese explorer sailed up the Congo river and made contact with the local population. In the 400 years that followed, the Portuguese slave trade took over 13 mil-



King Leopold II of Belgium, colonial butcher of the Congo

lion slaves; Arab slavers and other European powers seized millions of slaves too. The local economic and political structures collapsed.

Posing as a benevolent friend, Leopold II, King of the Belgians, proposed to help the Africans by ending the slave trade. Leopold was a greedy and ruthless pig who was determined to share in the European powers’ colonial land-grab. He attempted to acquire colonies in Asia, and South America, but failed. In 1876 Leopold founded a company — the International African Society — which, disguised as a philanthropic association for African welfare, he used to pursue the aim of colonising Congo.

He hired the famous British explorer Henry Stanley (a peculiar chancer and nasty reactionary) to help him. Stanley did much of the ground work in Congo, buying land, charting territory, and preparing the way for Belgian rule.

By flattering and bribing politicians, Leopold got US recognition for what had become his personal project in Congo. Then, in 1885, at the Berlin Conference, by playing off the big European powers against each other Leopold won control of Congo. On 5 February 1885 the Congo Free State was established under Leopold’s personal rule. It was a country 76 times the size of Belgium, with 20-30 million people.

Leopold had pledged to end slavery in Congo. He did defeat the Arab slave traders who operated in the east, but imposed his own staggeringly cruel system of forced labour, policed by his private army, the Force Publique.

Over the next 23 years half the population (10-15 million people) were killed or died as a result of Leopold’s rule. The Congolese peoples were either murdered, or died of exhaustion or disease (chiefly smallpox, which had been brought by the Europeans, or sleeping sickness).

Leopold became enormously rich, behind the back of Belgium’s parliament. His organisation (he never personally travelled to Congo) plundered ivory, and then wild rubber.

Dozens of local rebellions, big and small, took place as the people rose against brutality. Chants and slogans included:

*O mother, how unfortunate we are!
But the crocodile will kill the white man,
But the elephant will kill the white man,
But the river will kill the white man.*

*We are tired of living under this tyranny
We shall make war...
We know that we shall die, but we want to die.*

Leopold’s rule became associated with the chicotte (a whip made of hippo hide) and the amputation of hands (from the dead to prove a killing, and from the living as a punishment for failure to fulfil a work quota).

Gradually the barbarity of his rule attracted a mass campaign in Europe and America.

The names of the Africans who rose against Leopold are sadly not well known and mostly lost to us. The international opposition, which began in Britain, was led by E.D. Morel, a former clerk with the Liverpool shipping company which

Leopold employed, and Roger Casement, an Irish civil servant working for the British state, who had been based in Congo.

Morel was later jailed for opposition to World War One, became an Independent Labour Party activist and then a Labour MP. Casement joined the fight for Irish freedom, and was hung for treason in Pentonville jail in 1916.

Morel and Casement began the Congo Reform Association (CRA) in 1904. The CRA opposed human rights abuses in Congo rather than demand an end to Belgian rule. Morel did not oppose colonialism per se. In fact, he was able to pull in much of the British establishment behind the cause because the CRA was opposed to Belgium’s abuse of Africans rather than colonial rule as such. Although Morel saw Leopold’s brutality as especially bad, similar systems operated in French Congo and German Cameroon.

The extermination of the local populations in each of these areas was primarily the result of the methods used for rubber extraction. But in other parts of West Africa there was genocide — a deliberate attempt to wipe out an entire people. The authorities in German South West Africa (now Namibia) issued an extermination order against the Herero people. From 1903-6 75% of the 80,000 Hereros were either shot, bayoneted, clubbed to death, or driven into the desert to starve.

The CRA’s activity spread across Europe, and was particularly strong in Britain and America. Morel produced a weekly paper, the *West African Mail*, and spoke at 50 mass rallies between 1907 and 1909. Many of these meetings had several thousand in attendance, and the CRA had strong support from MPs and the (Protestant) clergy. In the UK, Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a book in support of the campaign, *The Crime of the Congo*, which sold 25,000 copies per week when it was first released, and was immediately translated into several languages. In the US, Mark Twain wrote a pamphlet for the movement, *King Leopold’s Soliloquy*. Many hundreds of public protest events were held.

Leopold responded by building a formidable propaganda machine of his own. He bought politicians, newspaper people, and lawyers and paid them to protect his vile money-making operation in Congo. However, Leopold came to realise he would have to bend. He transferred his private property — the Congo — to the Belgian state. He then had the state take on 110 million francs of debt, pay 45 million francs towards his various building projects, and hand over a further 50 million francs “as a mark of gratitude for his great sacrifices made for the Congo.”

Before the state took control Leopold burnt all the state archives relating to Congo. His furnaces were burning the material for eight days. Leopold stated, “I will give them my Congo, but they have no right to know what I did there.”

Leopold’s financial network was so complex it is difficult to tell exactly how much he personally gained from mass murder in Congo. Belgian historian Jules Marchal estimates his profit, conservatively, at well over \$1 billion in current value.

In November 1908 Congo became Belgium’s colony. Morel immediately warned that nothing much would change.

Much of Leopold’s structure remained intact, only mutating over time because scavenging for wild rubber was replaced by more profitable plantation production.

Forced labour — which was wiping the population out — was replaced by onerous taxation, and repression continued. All political activity was banned. The Force Publique was maintained and until the end of the 1950s no Congolese had risen above NCO rank.

The Belgians opened up copper ore production and gold and diamond mining. Coffee and palm oil production increased, with profits going to Europe in dividends.

The Belgian state ruled the region alongside the Catholic church and in alliance with Belgian capital. The church had a slogan — “No elite, no problem” — which summed up the foreign power’s strategy: they were determined to prevent an educated middle class emerging. By 1958 there were 1.4 million children attending Catholic Primary schools, but only 25,000 in secondary education. At the time of independence, in 1960, there were only 30 Congolese university graduates in the entire country.

Black Congolese lived under a curfew in the cities, from 9pm to 4am. City centres were white-only areas.

Continued on page 10



Congo timeline

1300s: rise of Kongo empire
1482: first European, Diogo Cao,

arrives in Kongo

1600s and 1700s: British, Portuguese and Dutch develop slave trade through Kongo

1870s: Leopold II manoeuvres to set up a colony in Kongo

1885: Berlin conference of European powers gives the Congo to Leopold II as his own personal property

1908: Belgium state takes over control of Congo Free State after 10-15 million Congolese have died

Late 50s: nationalist movement grows

June 1960: Congo wins independence. Patrice Lumumba is first Prime Minister.

December 1960: Lumumba arrested

January 1961: Lumumba murdered with Belgian and US help.

1965: Joseph Mobutu leads coup and begins decades of US-backed dictatorship. After 1971 country is known as Zaire

1984: By this date Mobutu is estimated to have stolen and hidden away US\$4 billion

1994: genocide of Tutsis by Hutus in Rwanda

1996-7: First phase of Congo war: Rwanda and Uganda invade, Mobutu overthrown and Laurent-Desire Kabila takes power. Country reverts to name Democratic Republic of the Congo.

1998: Second phase of war, involving nine African states and many private armies. 5.4 million people die over the next decade

2006: Joseph Kabila elected President in first real elections since 1960. Conflict in east of Congo ongoing

Continued from page 9

Hospitals and shops were often reserved for either whites or blacks.

Significant reforms followed after World War Two. Homes and medical centres were built. In the mid 50s, for the first time, black people were allowed to buy and sell property in their own names. Corporal punishment using the chicotte was abolished.

In 1957, local elections in large towns took place which were open to black voters and candidates. Political organisation spread very quickly in the second half of the 1950s and Congolese people debated various forms of national project: reform or independence? Should the country become independent quickly, or more slowly? Should a unitary state be maintained or some form of federalism adopted?

The Belgians anticipated a decades-long period of movement towards independence. They were unprepared for what happened. The pace of change accelerated sharply, particularly after Ghana and French Congo won independence in 1958.

In 1958 the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC) constituted itself as a national political party. It was for a unitary state and was intended to be non-tribal; its most prominent leader was Patrice Lumumba.

Lumumba was born in 1925, the son of farmers. He trained as a postal clerk and later worked as a travelling beer salesman in the capital, Léopoldville (now Kinshasa), and Stanleyville (now Kisangani). Originally, in 1955, he joined the Congolese section of the Belgian Liberal Party, editing its newsletters. In 1956 he helped to found the MNC and by the late 50s was the leader of its radical wing, demanding immediate independence. He represented the MNC at the anti-colonial All-African People's Conference, held in Accra in December 1958.

RIOTS

1959 opened with riots in Léopoldville when one of the new political parties (Alliances des Bakongo, ABAKO) was prevented from meeting.

The riots were partly driven by unemployment and were brutally repressed by the Force Publique, who killed 49 protesters. The state arrested some of the leaders and flew them to Belgium. But King Baudouin also announced Belgium's intention to "lead the Congolese towards independence." Over the next seven months, 40 discriminatory acts were abolished or amended.

There was a great surge of political activity. 50 new parties were registered, nearly all based on ethnic groups. Congo has 250 ethnic groups and many hundreds of different languages and dialects.

Most of the main Congolese political parties met in Luluabourg in April, a meeting dominated by Lumumba and the MNC. A little later the MNC split, with a more moderate group peeling away. The main effect was to weaken Lumumba's base in Katanga and Kasai, something which would become important in the immediate future.

In September 1959 Lumumba published an open letter declaring his party would no longer cooperate with Belgium. At an MNC conference in October he demanded negotiations for immediate independence, otherwise "1960 would be a year of misery and war." Riots followed in Stanleyville, with 20 dead, and Lumumba was arrested and jailed.

The Belgians were afraid of becoming embroiled in an independence war of the type the French were fighting in Algeria. In January 1960 a conference was held in Brussels where the Belgians proposed a four-year independence plan. The Congolese demanded Lumumba's release from prison so he could attend; they demanded immediate independence.

A longer transition would have given a better chance of stability and democracy, but the demand for immediate independence was understandable, especially given Belgium's attempts to retain all sorts of secondary rights and powers.

Eventually it was agreed that elections would be held on 22 May, and independence granted on 30 June 1960. The Belgians announced that the new government would inherit £350m of public debt.

On 22 May only two parties — Lumumba's MNC and the moderate Party of National Progress (PNP) — stood lists in more than one region. There was an 81% turnout (of men over 21) and the MNC won by far the biggest share of the vote, 26.6%.

Lumumba entered a coalition with the leftist, anti-sectarian Parti Solidaire Africain (PSA) which had come second in the poll with 12.6%. Lumumba became Prime Minister and



Patrice Lumumba

Joseph Kasavubu, of ABAKO, became President.

The Belgian King Baudouin attended the independence celebrations. His visit started badly when a man grabbed his ceremonial sword and started dancing in the road with it.

The King was welcomed warmly by Kasavubu. However the King's Independence Day speech was patronising, praising the "genius" and "tenacious courage" of the mass murderer, King Leopold II. Baudouin added, "[D]on't replace the structures that Belgium hands over to you until you are sure you can do better... Don't be afraid to come to us. We will remain by your side, give you advice."

Lumumba was not scheduled to speak, but rose anyway, and tore into the King: "[N]o Congolese worthy of the name will ever be able to forget that it was by fighting that [independence] has been won, a day-to-day fight, an ardent and idealistic fight, a fight in which we were spared neither privation nor suffering, and for which we gave our strength and our blood. We are proud of this struggle, of tears, of fire, and of blood, to the depths of our being, for it was a noble and just struggle, and indispensable to put an end to the humiliating slavery which was imposed upon us by force." The Western powers and press were shocked by Lumumba's militancy.

Days after independence Lumumba increased all public sector wages except those of the Force Publique. The Force mutinied, demanding the dismissal of their white officers. In Léopoldville arms were seized and the Belgians driven out. Whites were attacked in the streets and martial law declared.

Lumumba attempted to control the situation by Africanising the Force Publique, getting rid of the whites, renaming it the Congolese National Army, and promoting each soldier by one rank.

Without asking permission, Belgium sent in troops. The Belgians not only went to the aid of their citizens (the majority of the 80,000 Belgians who were still working and living in the Congo left within weeks), but also backed the independence of Katanga province which Moshe Tshombe declared on 11 July. Katanga was the centre of Congo's mineral wealth, where the mining companies were eager to maintain their control.

Lumumba initially asked the US for help against the Belgians. US President Eisenhower refused, and so Lumumba turned to the United Nations. On 12 July Lumumba warned he would appeal to the USSR unless the UN ended the Belgian intervention. On 15 July British planes began flying in African troops under UN control.

Inside Katanga province, where 6,000 of Belgium's troops secured the secession, and in Kasai, there was resistance to the breakaway, and fighting began. In Katanga, Tshombe's forces were also backed by the South African regime who enabled a large number of white mercenaries to get into Congo and help the secession movement. Lumumba, tired of the unwillingness of the UN to deal with the Katanga split, arranged to use Russian planes to move his forces. Lumumba was not pro-Russian, but he believed he should be able to use any help he could get to deal with Belgium's interference.

He declared, "I am not a Communist. The colonialists have campaigned against me throughout the country because I am a revolutionary and demand the abolition of the colonial regime, which ignored our human dignity. They look upon me as a Communist because I refused to be bribed by the imperialists."

The USSR quickly responded with an airlift of ANC troops

into Kasai and a supply of military trucks. In turn the US became enormously alarmed. CIA operations chief Richard Bissell stated President Eisenhower regarded Lumumba as "a mad dog." And CIA boss Allen Dulles claimed Lumumba was, "a Castro, or worse."

At a meeting in August 1960, Eisenhower told Dulles that "Lumumba should be eliminated," and a batch of poison was sent to the CIA station chief in Congo (bizarrely, they intended to kill Lumumba with poisoned toothpaste). Dulles sent a telegram on 26 August saying the "removal of [Lumumba] was an urgent and prime objective." The Belgians had the same policy, naming their assassination plan Operation Barracuda.

However, on 5 September Kasavubu sacked Lumumba. Lumumba refused to accept the decision. The UN responded by grabbing the airports, which had the effect of stopping the Russian-backed airlift of Congolese troops moving against the secessionist regions. Nevertheless the nationalist fight to reintegrate Katanga and Kasai continued. By this time Belgium had flown in 100 tons of arms, including mortars, machine guns, and automatic rifles, and provided 25 air force planes to back the breakaway. 89 Belgian officers were serving in Tshombe's guard and 326 Belgian troops were "volunteering" for his army.

On 12 September forces controlled by army chief Joseph Mobutu seized Lumumba, and Mobutu took power in a CIA-backed coup two days later. Mobutu left Kasavubu in place as President. Lumumba, however, was put under house arrest and parliament was shut down.

Lumumba escaped on 27 November, aiming to head for Stanleyville where an armed rebellion against Mobutu was beginning. Lumumba was recaptured on 2 December, and the UN ordered its forces not to protect him. At this point various states which had provided forces for the UN in the Congo withdrew in protest.

The Congo nationalist forces, meanwhile, were beating the secessionists in an offensive launched from Stanleyville; the US and Belgium were afraid that if Lumumba was freed, and parliament recalled, he would immediately regain power. A telegram from Brussels referred to the, "disastrous consequences of releasing Lumumba."

On 12 January 1961 an army revolt began at Thysville where Lumumba was being held. The next day the CIA in Léopoldville told Washington, "[The] current government may fall within days. Result would almost certainly be chaos and [Lumumba's] return to power... Refusal to take drastic steps at this time will lead to defeat [of] US policy in Congo."

As the army rebellion spread to the capital, Lumumba was flown to Katanga — heartland of his enemies — by a Belgian pilot, with US help. He was tortured, and, together with Maurice Mpolo and Joseph Okito, was shot on 17 January by a Katangan firing squad led by a Belgian, Captain Julien Gat. The bodies were buried, then later disinterred; two Belgians cut up Lumumba's body and dissolved it in acid. Allegedly some teeth and bullets were kept as souvenirs.

Effectively the Belgian state and the US had contracted out the assassination of a democratically-elected and enormously popular leader — but had watched the Katangans closely, to make sure the job was done.

After the killings were revealed in mid-February 1961 many states — especially the Eastern Bloc — chose to recognise the nationalist Lumumba-aligned forces of Antoine Gizenga, Lumumba's deputy, based in Stanleyville. However, by January 1962 Gizenga was also under arrest.

The USSR had consistently opposed the UN's Congo policy. Although they objected to the trampling of Congo's democratic rights — hypocritically and for their own cynical reasons — they were not wrong that the UN policy had served Belgium and the US interests against Lumumba.

With Lumumba dead, the UN finally agreed to act to keep Congo united — a unified Congo was preferable, as long as it was led by a pro-Western "moderate". At the end of 1961 South Kasai's independence was ended. And by January 1963, Elizabethville, Katanga's centre, was under full UN control. Various rebellions followed, the most serious of which was a Chinese-backed uprising, the "Simba" rebellion, in 1964. Che Guevara even turned up for a while.

Belgian and US forces intervened systematically for a stable, pro-Western government, with US planes dropping Belgian paratroopers to put down the Simba insurgency. In the end, in 1965, Mobutu led a coup and instituted a US-backed, one-party, police state whose brutality was matched only by its spectacular, extravagant corruption.

In 2002 the Belgian government apologised, admitting to a "moral responsibility" and "an irrefutable portion of responsibility in the events that led to the death of Lumumba."

Stop the witch hunt against Liam Conway!

By Tommy Crown

On Monday 9 December, for the third time in 18 months, a false allegation of unprofessional conduct was made against National Union of Teachers (NUT) activist Liam Conway.

In the two previous cases Liam also faced false allegations of bullying. So far, no witnesses have been found to substantiate the case against Liam, whilst over 30 NUT and other trade union activists have submitted witnesses statements categorically stating that Liam has never bullied anyone. Indeed, the witnesses make clear that in his working and trade union life Liam has fought bullies wherever he has found them. Some of the witnesses have worked alongside Liam at his current school for more than 30 years.

The real story here is that

Liam Conway is a whistleblower who blew the whistle on what he saw as financial malpractice in the NUT branch of which he is joint secretary.

Liam was denied access to the accounting records of the branch and so strongly suspected misappropriation of members' subs and false accounting. The national NUT first refused to investigate these matters and then ran a wholly inadequate audit during which Liam and others were not even questioned about their concerns.

The NUT rules, and the law, say that a trade union member cannot be disciplined for raising matters of financial wrongdoing, or criticising the policy or running of their union. At union meetings, members consistently voted to support Liam's view of the financial malpractice.

According to his accusers, Liam was therefore guilty of what they termed "bul-

lying by proxy".

Instead of supporting the democratic decisions of the local NUT, the NUT bureaucracy chose to process each case against Liam and to string out the procedures for months on end. The consequence of this has been that Liam has now been inside the disciplinary procedure of the union for more than 17 months.

MACHINE

Liam Conway is not a bully. He is being remorselessly bullied by the NUT machine.

It is a witch hunt, pure and simple, designed to shut down and potentially drive out of the union a nationally-known oppositionist to the failed strategy for taking on Gove over pay, pensions, and conditions.

Activists in every trade union should demand that all the disciplinary charges against Liam are dropped immediately. It is no coinci-

dence that Liam is standing for the National Executive of the NUT at this time and is supported by both the local members' branches in his county division. If Liam is suspended or expelled from the NUT, he will not be able to stand for the NEC or for secretary of his local branch. This is an affront to democracy.

There is also a wider question of democratic control of unions at stake here. Should members have the right to question the financial accounts of their branch, to know the detail of how their money is spent? We should insist that they do have that right and that all expenditure of trade union branches should be open to scrutiny and democratic control and not left to a small cabal of officers to spend as they wish.

Open the books; drop the charges against Liam Conway!

Tube workers gear up for jobs fight

By Ira Berkovic

London Underground workers' ballot for strikes to stop job losses, ticket office closures, and attacks on terms and conditions will be returned on Friday 10 January.

The Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT) is holding a mass members' meeting at 4pm on Friday to announce the ballot result and discuss the campaign, with a public rally planned for Thursday 16 January, 6.30pm at Conway Hall.

Tube bosses want to close every ticket office on the entire network, as well as reducing station staffing levels by nearly 1,000 posts. Their plan also involves significant attacks on workers' terms and conditions.

The union's "Every Job Matters" campaign has held demonstrations outside stations, leafleting the public to raise awareness of the attacks and inform passengers of the detrimental effect they will have on safety and quality of service. Disability rights organisations have also taken direct action against the cuts, protesting outside City Hall.

The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA), which also has members on London Underground, may also move a strike ballot. Drivers' union ASLEF has yet to give any clear indication as to whether it might join the dispute.

For more, see the blog of the rank-and-file bulletin workersliberty.org/twblog

Amazon living wage petition launched

By Ollie Moore

Campaigners have launched a petition calling on online retail giant Amazon to pay its staff the Living Wage.

Numerous media exposés have found Amazon's warehouse staff are subject to hyper exploitation at work, which intensified over the Christmas period. As we reported in *Solidarity* 306 (4 December 2013), one worker compared the conditions to "a slave camp".

Staff are constantly monitored and face disciplinary sanction if their productivity levels drop, and their 15-minute breaks begin

wherever they are in the giant warehouse, meaning that their break could be over by the time they've made it to the toilet.

Staff are paid the minimum wage, or slightly above, and often work 10-hour days. It is not clear whether the originators of the petition are themselves Amazon workers, or have any links with staff in the warehouses.

The GMB union has previously said it has members organising in Amazon, but that the company is so anti-union they are forced to operate "underground".

• Sign the petition at bit.ly/amazon-lw



On Wednesday 8 January, the Bakers, Food, and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU) planned a launch meeting for a fast food workers' campaign, aiming to learn from the struggles of fast food workers in America (left). BFAWU general secretary Ian Hodson denounced the "shameful exploitation" of fast food multinationals.

• fastfoodrights.wordpress.com

University cleaners set for more strikes

By Ira Berkovic

Cleaners at the University of London's central Senate House facilities and centrally-administered halls of residence are due to strike in January, on 27, 28 and 29.

Their 27-28 November strikes won significant improvements in holiday pay and sick pay for outsourced staff. Their January strikes will demand full equality of sick pay, holiday pay, and pensions for outsourced workers, and guarantees from management that the closure of the Garden Halls will not lead to job losses.

The workers also want their employer, Balfour Beatty, and the University of London to recognise their union, the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB).

Cleaning workers at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London are also balloting for strikes to win an improved pay offer and better sick pay, after they rejected a deal from their employer, ISS, which they called insulting.

ISS and SOAS are engaging in the kind of buck-passing typical of outsourced working, with both claiming that it is the other's responsibility to guarantee decent terms and conditions for the employees.

The kind of exploitation to which outsourced cleaning workers are subject was highlighted over the Christmas period, with SOAS cleaners being forced to work in extremely cold temperatures as university bosses shut off the heating system.

Lenin Escudero, a cleaning worker activist and Unison rep, told ISS and SOAS managers that the situation was "demeaning" and "unacceptable". Even after Richard Poulson, Director of Estates and Facilities, and ISS managers were claiming the heating had been turned on, posts to the SOAS Justice 4 Cleaners Facebook page reported that it remained off.

Posts on 4 January stated that the heating was only being turned on from 8.30am, more than two hours after cleaners begin their shifts.

• bit.ly/soasj4c
• 3cosascampaign.wordpress.com



Turkish union militants' 3 Cosas solidarity

By Jonny West

The rank-and-file Association of International Workers' Solidarity (UIDER in Turkish) held a campaign conference on 15 December for its latest campaign, against workplace accidents and hazards and for greater health and safety.

Workers' Liberty mem-

bers sent solidarity messages. The conference thanked AWL for its messages, as well as returning a message of solidarity for the "3 Cosas" campaign of outsourced workers at the University of London, in which AWL members have been active.

To see the messages, and read reports from the conference, visit bit.ly/uider-conf



Syrian refugee crisis grows

By Stephen Wood

More than two million people have now fled to neighbouring countries to escape Syria's civil war.

Many are living in camps with little protection from the cold: temperatures in the Lebanese mountains fell well below freezing in the second half of December, though they have now risen a little.

Over one million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries are children, and more than 425,000 are under the age of five.

Within Syria, 6.5 million people are displaced.

Meanwhile, the killing in late December by a group linked to Al Qaeda of a Syrian rebel leader known as Abu Rayyan has triggered sharp conflict among different forces fighting the Assad regime.

Abu Rayyan was killed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, some-

times ISIS), the official Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria.

Many secular or softer-Islamist groups linked to the Free Syrian Army (which is supposed to be an umbrella organisation for the anti-Assad battle) have taken to the streets in protest against ISIL.

Protesters in Aleppo chanted: "Free Syrian Army forever! Crush ISIL and Assad".

Many people think that ISIL's attempts to impose ultra-strict Islamist codes only help Assad.

ISIL has attempted forced conversions to Islam amongst Christian Syrians and allegedly killed women for refusing to wear the veil. Many even among those who, longer-term, want an Islamist state in Syria, see such actions as compromising the fight against Assad, which they say is top priority.

ISIL has responded to the threats to expel them from parts of Northern Syria by threatening to leave them-



selves and thus hand control over to Syrian Government forces. They have also shot and arrested other rebels in tit for tat attacks.

The Al-Nusra Front, which was previously allied with ISIL and Al Qaeda but now forms part of the Islamic Front, has attempted to stay neutral.

The increasing sectarian conflict within the opposition has been used by the Syrian Government to excuse itself from its commitments on deadlines for

handing over its chemical weapons.

The Government's collaboration with the Lebanese Shia militants Hezbollah has increased, and Assad has been helped by the first official pronouncement from a senior Shia cleric which endorses fighting alongside Syrian Government forces.

Iranian cleric Grand Ayatollah Kazim Al-Haeri has said: "The battle in Syria... is a battle of infidels against Islam and Islam

should be defended. Fighting in Syria is legitimate and those who die are martyrs".

The largely Sunni opposition, even though many of them reckon themselves Islamists, are branded as "infidels against Islam".

The Iranian regime's Revolutionary Guards have increased their activity in training Syrian Government forces, and estimated 5000 Iraqi Shia volunteers are currently in Syria fighting for Assad.

On 17 December a British doctor, Abbas Khan, an orthopaedic surgeon from South London, was reported dead "by suicide" by the Syrian government, which was holding him in jail.

Dr Khan had been arrested by the Syrian Government within 48 hours of arriving in Aleppo in November 2012. He was accused in a Syrian court of "acts of terrorism" - that is, treating wounded civilians caught up in the conflict.

He had made claims he had been tortured whilst imprisoned, and he weighed 32kg earlier this year when his mother was able to visit him. But at the point he died, he was due to be released from prison within days.

As his sister Sara said to the BBC: "Why would he take his own life when he was so excited to be coming home?"

The British Government has said it believes the Syrian state has effectively murdered Dr Khan and at best his death was "extremely suspicious".

In early January five Médecins Sans Frontières staff were kidnapped. At this time it is not known whether rebels or the Syrian Government are responsible.

The left can back neither the rotten Assad Government and its Shia Islamist backers, nor the Sunni Islamists who dominate the current opposition.

Tories bet on youth apathy

By Rhodri Evans

The Tories' strategy is based on an assumption that young people are politically inactive, or do only sporadic actions, not week-in week-out, year-after-year organising.

The assumption seems odd. The cynical old saying goes: "Not to be a radical at twenty is proof of want of heart; to be one after thirty is proof of want of head".

Yet the Tories have noticeably left benefits for older people relatively intact, while slashing everything else.

At the start of January David Cameron promised to continue increasing the basic state pension by at least 2.5 per cent, and in line with the higher of inflation and earnings, each year until 2020.

Chancellor George Os-

borne claims the economy is recovering from depression, but said: "We've got to make more cuts - £17 billion this coming year, £20 billion next year, and over £25 billion further across the two years after. That's more than £60 billion in total".

Both wages and most benefits are already lagging behind inflation, so the state pension is almost the only income, other than the revenues of the rich, to increase these days.

In 2012 the *Financial Times* found that, even before reckoning housing costs, usually higher for the young, on average "disposable incomes of householders in their 60s [had] overtaken those of householders in their 20s for the first time since official household income data were collected 50 years ago".

Eight in 10 over-60s vote, compared with just four in 10 of 18-24s.

Across Europe, 36% of people aged 30 and over say they are "quite interested in politics", but only 26% of 16-24s.

Political parties, trade unions, and even many campaigns find their activists mostly among older people.

Struggles between the late 1960s and the early 1980s moved millions into long-term political activity. Only a minority have stuck to it, but that minority is larger than the percentage active among generations brought up in decades of defeat.

That is fact, but it is not law. The facts will change. The Tories are giving young people direct and immediate practical motives to change the facts.



Israel: African migrants strike against racism

Tens of thousands of African migrants have taken part in strikes and protests in Israel. The protesters rallied in Tel Aviv on the 5 January, demanding an end to harassment and deportation by the state, and for recognition of their status as refugees.

Thousands of people flee to Israel from countries such as Eritrea and Ethiopia in the hope of escaping poverty and conflict. However, many arrive only to face racism, precarious work, and the constant threat of detention and deportation.

Migrant workers have accompanied their demonstrations with strikes. Many shops and cafes rely on migrant staff, and the strike is designed to demonstrate the importance of African migrants to Israeli society.

The government of Benjamin Netanyahu has so far refused to yield, stating that it intends to continue deportations. On the morning of the 7 January, strikers gathered in Levinsky Square, Tel Aviv, to discuss the next steps for their campaign.